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How to silence a woman: Retrieving her voice

by Dr. Clarissa Pinkola Estés

El Rio Debajo del Rio

When someone says, "We're saying the same thing."

Say, "We are not saying the same thing."

When someone says, "Don't question, just have faith."

Say, "I am questioning, vato, and

I have supreme faith in what I think."

When someone says, "Don't defy my authority."

Say, "There is a higher authority that I follow."

--Cpe

In an article in *The Washington Post*, April 13, Daniel Burke, a national correspondent for Religion News Service, writes about how some imagine President George Bush is actually a secret Catholic "believer," and how he has met with and surrounded himself with Catholics during his administration, that his policies have directly grown out of Catholic social justice teachings and that Pope Benedict is coming to see the president and his Catholic appointees specially, as the pope is his ally -- even though the pope disagrees with President Bush's Iraq war and torture.

"Former Bush speechwriter Michael Gerson, another evangelical with an affinity for

Catholic teaching, says that the key to understanding Bush's domestic policy is to view it through the lens of Rome. Others go a step further.

"Paul Weyrich, an architect of the religious right, detects in Bush shades of former British prime minister Tony Blair, who converted to Catholicism last year. "I think he is a secret believer," Weyrich says of Bush. Similarly, John DiIulio, Bush's first director of faith-based initiatives, has called the president a 'closet Catholic.' And he was only half-kidding."

Mr Burke's article goes on to say,

"As the White House prepares to welcome Benedict on Tuesday, many in Bush's inner circle expect the pontiff to find a kindred spirit in the president ... this Protestant president has surrounded himself with Roman Catholic intellectuals, speechwriters, professors, priests, bishops and politicians. These Catholics -- and thus Catholic social teaching -- have for the past eight years been shaping Bush's speeches, policies and legacy to a degree perhaps unprecedented in U.S. history"

At a time when hardworking fathers and mothers are literally piling the children's toys and bunk beds at the curb, for they are losing their homes in the sub-prime mortgage bunco scheme promoted by the grotesquely avaricious ...

... at a time when 25 percent of older women only have a social security check to live on and nothing more ... and they have inherited nothing but a president who wishes to do away with social security ... and who admires those who call this hard-earned savings account belonging to individuals who worked all their lives long, "an entitlement" ...

... during a time when the last small farmers, ranchers, and overland independent truckers are being run out of business from sudden spikes in fuel and government's one-sided subsidies ... and our farmers, ranchers and trucker-heroes are becoming desperate for they not only take care of their own families, but have long taken care of us, their nation's families at a root level, delivering the food and necessities we need ...

... at a time when pharmaceutical companies produce much good, and have some charitable programs, yet still, at the back door, many also hold onto medicine patents that would have expired, thereby allowing the formulas into public domain and bringing down the costs of vital medicines for human beings in need but instead, some change the formula in slight and meaningless ways and thereby file to re-patent the medicine again, so they are its only producers, and prices remain high ... often out of reach of those in most dire straights ... and all this is OKed by our government ...

... at a time when U.S. policies continue to subsidize big business which specifically seeks uneducated and impoverished populations globally, especially those who will work at slave labor rates and with no medical or educational benefits and no fit place to work safely, free of fumes, mechanical and fabrication dust and chemical exposures ...

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... at a time when U.S. policy is to do nothing to speak up about nor intervene in sex trafficking

worldwide, meaning the stealing of young boys and girls from their villages and families in order to drug and beat them into submission so adult males can penetrate their small bodies with their evil predations ...

... in a time when veterans coming home from war are committing suicide at rates higher than post-Viet Nam war vets, for lack of proper and timely aftercare for their war trauma ... and the administration's policy is to ask for and engender deeper and deeper cuts to veterans' benefits ...

... at a time when 20,000 plus children here and countless in Iraq and Afghanistan were, from the onset, known to eventually be made motherless or fatherless -- in order that a president can carry on a war that is filled with immense graft by the very so-called government he is trying to stuff and prop up ...

... at a time when our governing administration recklessly borrows money that will surely if not checked immediately, bankrupt our nation ... for thus far the president has borrowed literally billions of dollars from Asia and Europe to run his war, tethering into unbearably heavy yokes of unjust taxes generations of men, women, old people and children of the United States for the next two millennia ...

... during a time when the death penalty and "sanction" to torture exceeds any human decency whatsoever, and is not de-escalated federally, not in any way mediated or spoken against by the president, but rather exalted with President Bush's personal signature as former governor of Texas on each and every death warrant of incarcerated doomed souls there, and without reprieve, for the last many years he held office there ...

... during a time when higher education costs, per student, are the price of an entire house in the Hamptons, and the president continues to say "no child will be left behind" ... and yet massive numbers of young people cannot bear the cost of higher education nor the cost of repaying massive student loans required to complete a degree ... the young are thus encumbered for literally decades after receiving a degree, beginning life in deep debt instead of free of debt ...

... during a time when administrators of corporations appear to run the country, rather than the people, and not a word is spoken by the president against this shameless vaunting of power *over* rather than *with* or *for* the people ...

... during a time when heads of corporations are paid annual salaries larger than the GNP of many small nations on earth ... and Detroit and other cities across the rust belt have been destroyed by sucking the work from their once mighty trade factories without ever retooling, rebuilding, retraining the populaces ...

... during a time when a major U.S. port city was destroyed by a hurricane, New Orleans, and the president promised the elderly there and the poor, that their most basic needs of shelter, rebuilding, schools and churches, would be met, and yet the president has not moved, month after month since, to personally give his bond to his solemn promise ...

... during a time when the halt and faithful attempt to breach past guns and guards and vigilantes at our borders in order to work and bring themselves and their families a life beyond abject poverty and early death in their home countries ... whether on foot, across water, floating old cars across, sailing a leaking boat ... and yet are turned back, and often hunted like animals ... and raided by men with rifles acting with such brio as though the raiders are doing God's work and capturing the last of the Nazis ... instead of, in actuality, traumatizing and tearing apart the terrified families of hard working and soulful people who are here without proper papers but with proper purpose in the soul's sight, and who make true contributions to us all ...

... during a time when the School of the Americas is still operative and gathers to its bosom only those

who sign on to learn war and torture so that those who are trained can go back to their home countries and prey on others with the U.S. seal of approval of our president ...

... during this time that those in power eat off golden-rimmed plates and drink from heavy lead crystal, whilst outside and merely across the street from the White House, the park is filled with men, women, veterans, and families who are homeless, on their last legs, addicted without aid, wandering half crazy, sick of heart and body, fed not by the president, but only through the grace of compassionate angels on earth ...

... during this time when our president believes it is not important to cleanse the air and earth of the poisons of a millennium of ill care, wherein he supports the desire by big agriculture and energy to make money only, wherein cleanliness of the earth and wise use is considered "too expensive" ...

... during a time when the lustre in a child's sweet and innocent eyes from having an actual childhood is relinquished for attacking the only airwave/image wave (PBS and NPR) that carry decent programming for a child's soul, and instead, allows "the free market" and media conglomerates to rule ... which reign by setting up a constant intra-venous line of deleterious and violent images straight into our tender children's arteries ...

When all these and so many more egregious "policies" and "legacies" of the current administration, which cause such misery and death to so many innocent souls, and that these assaults on the people are aided, engendered, held up as something laudatory ... how can it ever sit right with a true soul to imagine that the current administration is following Catholic Social Justice principles?

I work in the dregs of what is left when the unarmed and the innocent have been preyed upon; I work with the veterans who have no legs and no arms and are only torsos with heads ... who have seen such horror that your nervous system thuds nearly to a stop as you listen and your heart threatens to give out. I work with the persons who are victims of "gun" violence, whose children were just walking along from school or with friends, and all of a sudden, a man/boychild raised a piece of metal and made but a one inch long squeeze with their trigger finger, and a bullet penetrated and blew apart the precious thin envelope of the lung or the heart or an artery ... and the beloved soul was gone. Gone. Instantly gone.

Have you ever seen the dance of death? It is a hopping dance, a bending over low, chest-to-knees dance, a jumping into the air dance while screaming ... it is the dance of death that mothers and fathers and loved ones do when they receive word that their baby has died, or their loved one's been lost at war, or buried in a quake, or gunned down, or been killed in a terrorist act wherein the explosion left no remains but perhaps the engagement ring, or the name badge, or a piece of burnt rubber sole, and no more. I could go on. And on.

And so could you and your soul.

We are not removed, and the soul knows, from the dirt upward, what social justice principles are comprised of truly ... and the first and foremost Catholic social justice principle is to speak for the soul in all things ...

to speak truth to power; to speak for those run over by the pretending-to-be-beneficent-because-I-say-so; to pierce and expose the monstrous intentions of the unspeakably coddled and protected; to shine high noon on the deadly unconscious people who have no insight into the "unintended consequences" of their reckless acts ...

to speak truth to those who are out of touch with the reality of the suffering; to speak up to those who

resist being accountable; to reveal those who refuse to be transparent for they've a pile of unburied corpses behind their velvet curtains ...

to continue to insist on confidence with the poor and the downtrodden, the hurt and the maimed ... Mercy is not just "church" people's work, it is the work of anyone who has a soul.

And merciful care is the work by which a nation is judged as to whether it has a soul ... or whether it has lost its soul somewhere along the way and can no longer find it without help ... help from the people ... the people who speak, the people who will not cease speaking up ... and speaking out ... and speaking for.

Let us continue then and let it be said now, gently, in our own ways, and yet relentlessly in our own ways ... let it be said, and let us not back away

When someone says, "We're saying the same thing."

Say, "We are *not* saying the same thing."

When someone says, "Don't question, just have faith."

Say, "I am questioning, *vato*, and

I have supreme faith in what I think."

When someone says, "Don't defy my authority."

Say, "There is a higher authority that I follow."

When someone says, "Your ideas are seductive."

Say, "No, my ideas are not seductive,

they are substantial."

When someone says, "Your ideas are dangerous."

Say, "Yes, my ideas are dangerous, and why are you

so afraid *hombre o mujer?* "

When it is said, "It's just not done."

Say, "It will be done."

When it is said, "It is immature."

Say, "All life begins small and

must be allowed to grow."

When it is said, "It's not thought out."

Say, "It is *well* thought out."

When they say, "You're over-reacting."

Say, "You're under-reacting, *vato*."

When they say, "You're being emotional."

Say, "Of course I have well placed emotions,
and by the way, what happened to yours?"

When they say, "You're not making any sense."

Say, "I don't make sense, I am the sense."

When they say, "I can't understand you when you're crying."

Say, "Make no mistake, I can weep and be fierce
at the same time."

When they say, "I cant understand you when you're being so angry."

Say. "You couldn't hear me when I was being nice,
or sweet or silent, either."

When someone says, "You're missing the point."

Say, "I'm not missing the point, but you seem
to be missing *my* point --

What are you so afraid of?"

When someone says, "You are breaking the rules."

Say, "Yes, I am breaking the rules."

When someone says, "That's not practical."

Say, "It's *practically* a done deal, thank you very much."

When it is said, "No one will do it,
believe you, or follow it."

Say, "*I* will do it, *I* will believe in it, and in time,

the world may well follow it."

When it is said, "No one wants to listen to that."

Say, "I know *you* have a hard time listening to that."

When it is said, "It's a closed system,

you can't change it."

Say, "I'm going to knock twice

and if there is no answer,

then I am going to blow the doors off that system

and *it will change*."

When it is said, "They'll ignore you."

Say, "They won't ignore me and the hundreds of thousands who stand with me."

When they say, "It's already been done."

Say, "It's not been done well enough."

When they say, "It's not yet time."

Say, "It's way past time."

When they say, "It's not the right day,

right month, right year."

Tell them, "The right year was last year,

and the right month was last month,

and the right day was yesterday,

and you're running behind schedule, *vato*,

and what in the name of God and all that is holy

are you going to do about it?"

When they say, "Who do you think you are?" --

tell them ...

tell them who you are,

and don't hold back.

When they say, "I put up with it,

you'll have to put up with it too."

Say, "No, no, *no*, no."

When they say, "I've suffered a long time

and you'll have to suffer too."

Say, "No, no, *no*, no."

When they say, "You're an incorrigible, defiant,

hard to get along with,

unreasonable woman ... "

Say, "Yes, yes, *yes*, yes ...

and I have worse news for you yet --

we are teaching our daughters,

and our mothers,

and our sisters ...

we are teaching our sons,

and our fathers,

and our brothers,

to be

just

like

us."

This ending blessing, is a chant, a lyric form from my ethnic tradition. It is made to be spoken aloud, so

not just meanings, but its heartbeat, can be discerned; enjoined. Colloquially, in the family, we'd call it a song rather than a poem, in this case, a "song for straight vision and strength." The word *vato*, is a slang Spanish word, an informal way of addressing a man, such as in the street ... e.g., "Man, don't you realize?"

Over time, this prayer-poem has been put forth at the United Nations, and presented during a tribal women's coalition in South Africa, as well as carried into session at the parliament in the Netherlands, and given before U.S. Congressional hearings on welfare reform in the 1990s. Its original name is "How To Silence A Woman, Retrieving Her Voice," ©1980, 2008, C.P. Estés, All Rights Reserved. This article, by same name, as previous, ©2008. For permissions: projectscreener@aol.com

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