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Cutting out the tongues of the holy people

Dr. Clarissa Pinkola Estés | Jan. 7, 2009 El Rio Debajo del Rio

Small bright post-it notes flutter all around the monitor I use while transferring my handwritten work to computer. One of those paper ?sails? I call *el piloto*, the smallest guiding sail, the one built to cup the wind to try to hold to the course ... even when shivering on its mast in the midst of gale.

Thus, decades ago now, I wrote on this tiny yellow sail these words: *Be careful when thou art casting out demons, thou dost not allow the casting out of the best parts of thyself.*

Holding to one?s gifts against countervailing winds ...

In my life as a writer, I?ve striven to raise and re-raise and re-re-re-raise that one little sail and its message against every countervalent wind as best I can, trying to scoop up even ?a bad wind? and use it for navigating forward toward my callings, nonetheless.

You, as one of the old believers, know this sail by heart too ... for anyone visited by winds of Shekhinah, direct influences, senses, transmissions via *Cristo o los angelitos o los santitos* or other holy immaculata... all have to raise this sail with its legend writ large upon it...

for the sake of preventing the wrongful casting out of gifts that are soul?s blood in the giftee ... even if and when those gifts of sight, hearing and knowing beyond mundane realities, are seen as dangerous or threatening or insensible to various others.

The little sail has to be raised in order to protect the blessing vessel, in order to continue, even during swells, onward toward the destinations we promised to ?bring her around to? long ago...

no matter whatever pirate tries to waylay and board the ship and force it off its course... no matter who else says or does what. The inspired and sacred *promesas* between soul on deck, and Creator as primary cartographer, must prevail.

The wrongful silencing of holy people

And that I-Thou partnership is one of the central reasons why attempting to sunder or silence peoples? God-given gifts and inspirations will seldom find agreement with both the human heart and the immortal soul...

and this includes current silencing of holy people in our times... the ongoing severing of the voices of people of spirit, the cutting out the tongues of prophetic poets, those souls who have been granted visions to carry into this world, modern time caregivers of eternal love and kindness... those whose minds were not born into wombs of

prevailing prelates or directors, but into the Source without source.

In Church, the longer this rage to silence holy people goes on, the more it appears a non-supreme effort to literally attempt to force God into silence ... a sweaty grunting effort to force human souls to break their promesas to God that each will sing Creator?s song on earth as well and as beautifully as possible... a song given by God, a song far wider, far deeper, far more inspired than any narrow view carried those who attempt the actual silencing of others.

This week it was 72 year old Father Roger Haight, an elder in the Jesuit priesthood, accused of causing ?**grave harm to the faithful** [1],? for some words in his book, *Jesus: Symbol of God*, published ten years ago.

Last month it was a different priest. In the month before that it was a nun. In the months prior it was nun after nun, priest after priest, tellingly many of them professors and teachers ... as though the Vatican is attempting to un-professor universities of any and all brilliant lights, leaving only the burned-out ones ensconced.

Over the decades, has the Church seeded a lust for punishing the vulnerable within the Church, and thus sidestepped and failed to face off against the truly evil ones of the world?

- Hans Küng, voluptuous intellectual: silenced
- Matthew Fox, passionate fire for inclusion, and for the poor: silenced
- Fr. Anthony de Mello, a more gentle storyteller one could rarely meet: shunned, silenced after he was deceased by barring his work from being published by Catholic presses.

There are so many more. And, the list of the silenced in and by the Church has surged in Benedict?s time mimicking exactly the overly-punitive silencing and severings he enacted when he was Cardinal Ratzinger.

Has the Church for the last many decades created a lust for severing and silencing its own people?s gifts? How is it that Church begins looking more like an assassin excited by prospect of purposely severing gifts, taking far too much pride and pleasure in the killing of others? songs?

And what of this punishing of holy people whilst living in a world where thugs like Than Shwe (dictator and destroyer of Burma and the Burmese tribal groups) and Mugabe (dictator and destroyer of the people of Zimbabwe) -- who are real examples of ?harm to the faithful? -- are just allowed to squat and murder and maim without cease, and with only the briefest of breezy words from the Vatican?

How brave is it to persecute your own gifted people and allow the murder-masters of the world to not be daily held accountable? What kind of Church leadership is this when the pounding on the merest innocents inside the Church is incessant ... and the bearding of the actual cruel and evil monsters of the world is left with little comment and absolutely no action whatsoever? What kind of bold and brave Chair of Peter is that?

I may be wrong about many things, but I feel certain the ancient Italian fisherman with huge forearms from pulling through the riptides and out to sea, would never stand for such pusillanimous response to actual evil in the world. He wouldn?t be picking on the other fishermen who believe Creator is this way or that. He?d take the whole crew and row the boat out into the real killing storm. He?d take care of the business that Christ shed blood over.

Though I know some may not agree, the list of those silenced by the Church ought to include also great prophets and deep hearts who died because the Church has too often been on the wrong side of justice in Latin American countries and other countries as well, has attempted to ban liberation theology which traditionally sides utterly with the poor. The Church instead sided with the wealthy, the ingrown, the well armed.

Thus, the Church also left some of its greatest hearts to be slaughtered for lack of the Church?s pristine protection: Bishop Romero murdered at his altar while saying Mass. Dorothy Stang, a Sister of Notre Dame de Namur, murdered for protecting land rights from greedy Catholic developers who wanted los indios? land, but had to kill a holy woman to get it.

The list is long and the hand which has held the knife in the Church, attempting to cut hearts and tongues out of so many holy men and women, these gifted souls, has been the same man, the same one, no matter that his name has changed over centuries. The name of the tongue-cutter in Spanish, the name of one who attempts to sever others from their holy Source and from their holy work in this world, is called, Envidia. Deadly Envy.

Envidia. Envy, wanting to be ?the only one? who matters. Envy, wanting to dominate others. Envy, who as my father used to say about the Nazis who murdered at whim, who would often toy with their victims before they killed them. The Nazis spoke softly right before they killed, They did not yell or scream, but rather spoke horrifyingly ?softly, as a father would, to comfort a child.? This they did as they viciously stabbed a living, pleading human being to death. Soft and deadly. Reasonable tones, wheedling ones, whining ones. Envidia. Deadly dulcet.

Envidia cuts the song from others, cuts the tongue right out, and does not announce itself, but is rather, a sneak, coming in, as the poet Sandburg wrote about fog... coming in ?on little cat feet?... so quietly one may not realize that the mutilator is hovering with butcher knife poised....

as in this old tale told in our family about just such a murderous half-human who tries to kill anything others admire, who carries on about how ?it isn?t proper,? how ?it just isn?t done,? ... when in fact the half-human is eaten up with power, wanting ever more... using all punitive means to silence others so as to hold onto imagined authority, malignant and short-sighted, ever.

Envidia tries to be the executioner of true soul. But, in the end, the tables turn against Envidia, as they must to anything so ill-built on deluded ego.

Listen...

The Tongue-Cut Sparrow

There lived an old man with a great, good heart.

One morning as he set out to chop wood to fashion into beautiful and useful objects, there came flying a pitiful little sparrow attacked by a swooping hawk. Old man immediately tore off his woolly cape and ran snapping it fiercely at the hawk, driving it away.

The bedraggled sparrow, its tiny heart beating ever so fast, flew into old man?s hands, and the old man spoke to the creature in a soothing voice.

When the tiny soul was calmed, old man opened his hands, releasing it into the air. The sparrow flew up and sang and sang, just for sheer joy of having been sheltered, for now being free.

Thereafter, old man set out a little of his soft, crumbled breakfast bread, a little saucer of water for sparrow. Sure enough, every morning, as old man sat waiting at the open window, the little bird would come eat, drink, and afterward sing so sweetly.

But old man?s wife became jealous of the sparrow. She was resentful that sparrow gave old man so much happiness and peace of soul.

She thought to herself, ?I am going to catch that bird, do away with it. What a waste of time! Sitting around listening to a bird. Look at this place -- there?s always the right way to do things!?

When next her husband went to the forest, as soon as he was out of sight, old woman crossed the room, her eyes sizzling with mal-intent. Little sparrow was still happily singing at the window.

But when sparrow spied old woman coming and saw the look on her face, it cowered. Old woman reached through the open window, trying to seize the frightened bird. But it escaped by flying into cottage itself, right up to the highest rafter.

?Shut up! Shut-up! Stop singing! Come down from there you ugly bird.? The old woman flailed at the rafters with her broom trying to dust bird down. The sparrow flew to another rafter, then another. But, finally her broad broom struck sparrow, and it dropped to the floor with a small and terrible cheep.

Old woman grabbed the sparrow up in her fist. The little bird struggled, trying to beat its wings so hard, and for a moment, the old woman felt afraid. But, her cold rage and envy drove deep. She would have killed bird could she have concealed it. But she had a better idea. All its damnable singing. She would fix that right now.

And so, she forced open the bird?s tiny beak. She drove a sharp thorn right through the bird?s tongue.

Now it could no longer sing. Sparrow struggled in terror and pain. Finally, it escaped old woman?s grasp. In a panic it flew round and round the room. At last, under eaves, it found an opening to outdoors, and strained through. The wounded sparrow flew far into the deepest forest.

When old man returned home, his wicked spouse crowed about exactly what she had done. ?That bird was driving me crazy. It chattered like a squirrel. Hour after hour. It would not cease. No one could have a normal conversation. So I have silenced it forever.?

Tears sprang up in old man?s eyes. ?You! he said, ?you are the most evil heart I have ever known. How could you harm such an innocent creature who was only singing the song it came to sing??

Finally, with his old wife raining curses down upon him for not acquiescing to her, old man stumbled out into the forest vowing to seek the songbird or else die himself.

Near nightfall, he had to admit that although he had found his way into the deeper forest, he could not so easily find his way back out again. But then, ahead he saw a great jumble made of sticks, straws, roots, and ragged red ribbons. Thinking perhaps he could take rest at this strange but beautiful abode, he rapped upon its door.

A woman of indeterminate age answered. She had long silver hair and a beautiful gown made of soft gray and brown feathers.

?A drink of water for a weary traveler, please?? old man begged.

The beautiful woman nodded kindly, but it was apparent she could not speak. She indicated to him with her graceful gestures that he was welcome there. She brought him water, then, delicious bread. As she walked, her bare feet made little clicking sounds on floor. She gestured that he ought lie by the fire to be safe and warm till morning. This old man accepted with gratitude.

Just after dawn, the beautiful woman in her long feathered gown again gave old man water and bread. When he tried to thank her, she moved instead to a long table, showing him two trunks, one small, the other large. She smiled and gestured that old man ought choose one.

?Oh no, I have contributed nothing, I could not accept a gift from you,? said old man. But he could see her feelings were hurt. So he chose the smaller chest and put it under his thick woodsman?s cape. Outside, the beautiful woman set old man?s shoulders in the right direction, and he waved her good-bye as he set out toward home. He could not put words to it, but he felt strangely rested and heartened.

Yet, he dreaded returning to the old woman. Sure enough, once home, old woman?s tongue burnt holes in walls as she railed. ?He? had upset the order of things. ?He? had made her wait the pitiful evening meal. ?He? was an ingrate. ?He? hadn?t the faintest idea of what was of value and what was not.

Even when old man told her he had become lost but fortunately found safe shelter, she continued her harangue.

By then, old man had absentmindedly drawn the small chest out from under his cape. Suddenly, in syrup tones, his wife wanted to know what was in it. ?Well, I have not yet looked,? confessed old man.

?Well, let us see then, you fool,? said old woman. She poked at the clasp. She lifted the lid ever so slightly. A bright ray of light shot out. Old woman threw back the lid. Within, lo, were gemstones of every kind. ?Ah,? sighed old woman, her eyes glittering with greed. Her hands snaked over the stones, feeling them for their weight rather than admiring their beauty.

She piled the biggest ones on her side of the table and pressed old man to tell her how he had come upon such treasure. As he reluctantly revealed how his host had insisted he chose between two gifts, his eyes were opened even further to the blackness of the old woman?s heart.

?You idiot,? blared old woman. ?You were offered two caskets and you chose the smaller? I swear old man, you are only good for burying in the garden. A tongue in your head was wasted on you.? And, old woman forced him to tell her exactly the path he?d taken through the woods to find the hovel of the mysterious woman.

She set out that very night. ?I will get the big chest of jewels,? she muttered to herself as she stomped along. Sure enough, as old woman walked ever deeper into the forest, she eventually came to a place made of sticks, straws, roots, and tattered red ribbons.

?Hmmph, this must be the ugly place old man described!? She rapped hard upon the door. When it was answered by a lovely woman in a gray and brown feathered gown, old woman demanded, ?Give me bread and water.? The gentle woman proceeded to attend to her guest immediately.

Old woman gobbled up the bread, slurped down the water, then hastened to take her leave. ?I won?t be lying on your filthy floor by your fire for the night. I just came for one thing. Show me the gifts.?

Her hostess nodded and clicked across the floor. She brought out two chests, one large, one small. She indicated that old woman ought choose one.

?It?s about time,? snapped old woman, and dragged the largest chest toward herself. She hoisted it onto her back and struggled off into the night without even giving a good-bye or thank you.

As old woman lugged herself along, the chest became heavier and heavier. Soon, she was gasping, bent nearly double with her nose almost dragging on the ground. Thus, when she came to a rough crossroads, she set the chest down. There in the dark she tried to pry open the trunk?s clasp. But it would not give way. She took off her shoe and banged on the lock until it broke.

In triumph she threw back the lid. But instead of jewels, seventy-seven serpents sprung out of the chest,

wrapped themselves around old woman, squeezing her, and all the greed and envy in her, to death.

It is said the old man wept for losing his wife, for in his kindest heart he was able to see her good points.

But truth be told, it was sparrow whom he was entirely lonely for. Sometimes it is longing which makes the soul of another find its way to you, for one night, a short time later, as he lay in his bed near sleep, he thought he heard a little sound outside. He went out into the night in his big bare feet. But no, standing under stars, he could not trace the source of rustling.

Next night he again thought he heard a sound. It went on like this night after night.

Then, one morning as old man arose, he heard the first bright notes of the sweetest song, a calling song that sang of the tenderness of true love, the hardship of struggle, the sweetness of victory.

It was the songbird come back again! And the radiant soul sang so sweetly now. It sang in the mornings, and also near dusk. Each morning old man laid out little crumbles of bread and a saucer of water and sat with great joy at his window listening to the singing. Every evening he laid out more bread, more water, and in peace, sat again at the window, listening and listening to the sweetest song.

But, there was a difference now.

Not only were the bread and water never taken. The songbird who sang could be heard, but could not be seen.

Old man could hear her, clear as though she were inside himself. But, search the trees and leaves as he might, she was not to be found there.

Yet, for the rest of his long life, he would hear the voice dearest to him, the one which kept his wild woodsman?s heart completely whole.

There are many ways to understand this story which is normally told over five nights? time, with each part carefully parsed by the listeners. Objectively, one can see how a culture, any culture poisoned or led by a group or an individual consumed by envy and greed for being ?the only one,? ?the only voice allowed,? is like the old woman ... who can be understood symbolically as representing all that exactly. She seals her own demise by continuing to sever every source of joy in others while presenting herself over and over as the only acceptable alternative to true love ... but a dead and decaying alternative that no real soul can thrive in.

We can see too, once spirit sings, no matter what you do to it, silence it, split it?s tongue, cut its tongue out -- in reality, a favored maiming technique used on imagined apostates by medieval Church as well as by way too many modern day Catholic soldiers assaulting peasant-farmers in Latin America... the spirit, nonetheless, will continue to reflect that gemlike quality of soul in itself...and in others, somehow... It will continue to also reflect evil in those who are snake-hearted, meaning basely and instinctually intent on poisoning others.

Old woman in the tale is unable to comprehend that songbird cannot do anything but sing its most beautiful song; that song given to the little sparrow by Creator. The sparrow did no harm in any way, but rather delighted the soul so purely, and this alone, this purity, caused the one who was short on genuine soul to bloat with Envidia.

The antagonist in the story never develops ?the deeper vision,? that the old man carries... and thereby the antagonist does not become ?the bride of love,? but rather ?the butcher of those who truly love.?

The resolution or lysis offered by the tale in part, is to not give up seeking the song, to never give up seeking the

one who sings it.

May we pray hard then, even though we may have no idea where in the forest the most precious songbird sleeps now ... we know we saw her once at least, and even when we cannot see the source of the singing, we can hear it, drench ourselves in that holy sound, that sound that no matter what, cannot be silenced forever.

Isn?t that what we old believers have always followed?

The singing?

Even when we cannot with mundane eyes, see The Singer?

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