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Pius XII: Let us be The Blameworthy

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El Rio Debajo del Rio

"Water can wear through stone,"

good advice my grandmother said ...

but not if that prayer puts us to sleep

causing "sinful patience" or an aeternal "put-up-with,"

rather than rousing us to new ideas and actions.

Consider then, an additional path of heart ...

When the wound to a people or the soul is ancient

or ongoing, and hierarchies chronically

disturb the healings,

then, what say you my sister subversive soul,

what say you my brother co-conspirator,

let us rise up to heal the wounds,

bypassing the hierarchy completely ...

More ripping sutures off wounds between Jews and Christians? More enmity fanned between Jews and Catholics?

Again?

This week, The London Times online (www.timesonline.co.uk) reports that Riccardo Di Segni, Chief Rabbi of Rome, has accused Pope Benedict XVI and Benedict's close-in major-domos -- who also vociferously support beatification of Pope Pius XII -- of having "turned a blind eye" to the Nazi Holocaust ... this has aroused "indignation." Rabbi accuses Benedict of reversing Pope John Paul's apologies to the Jews.

Chief Rabbi, in an anguish -- one I think easily verified and shared by many Jews worldwide -- charged further that Pope Benedict had described Pope Pius XII "... as a gift from God." Rebbe Di Segni stated that Pius XII "certainly was not that for the Jewish people. There is no need," said Rabbi pointedly to Benedict, "... to take the name of God in vain."

And hopefully, the rest of the "dialogue" soon after won't sound like this from either side: Didn't. Did not. Did too. No way.

Again.

Wouldn't it be better to listen and ask how to mend even this newest contretemps? Couldn't how this current issue is treated now between Jews and Catholics be a beautiful harbinger of new and solid solidarity to come, instead of a repeat of the past manner of handling things? Can't there be a way to hold another's concern in mind and mercy, instead of opening old wounds by defensiveness?

But, perhaps healing of wounds, old and new, may never occur in a timely manner via popes and operatives. Yet, there is good news, I believe, still. We ourselves may be the most timely healing medicine for wounds of old and wounds of this moment.

Remember a guiding saint in our ethnic family whom I've written to you about, Szent Senki, Saint Nobody? Imagine the healing of lifelong culture-clash wounds through us, the old believers, the quintessential, non-robe-wearing (OK, OK, we do wear bathrobes) nobodies? Just that, no more, no less.

"... **Saint Nobody does not have worldly knowing**, no influential friends in high places, but has "other worldly" knowing, and friends in low places ... Saint Nobody has no wealth, but in spiritual capacity is a billionaire ... Most of all, Saint Nobody knows the power of the small. In Saint Nobody's far-reaching vision, every action, no matter how small, is considered most valuable ..." So see, we are well-equipped, born that way.

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Let us get down to it then, analyze the situation, put our best medicines in the worst of the wounds before we're forced to live like the figure in Ivan Albright's painting "That Which I Should Have Done I

Did Not Do." This is an oil painting of a human hand reaching to knock on a deeply carved Gothic door, above which hangs a gigantic, decaying funeral wreath.

Let us remember: Are we not the old believers who truly know the old ways? Good. Then, let us shrug out of our shy-cloaks and our hesitancy-hats, and tend to the living who still suffer, and remember in stories the dead who have suffered so.

There is a way to Bypass and Heal the wound of Jews by Catholics with far more precision and far less wavering about ... certainly without injuring whatever healing has already begun in earnest in the last decade.

Social justice begins not at the door of the Vatican, but at ours. My grandmother used to say (and I hope there's no such thing as post-death excommunication), "Sometimes the pope teaches the people; more often the people teach the pope."

We do have a clear path through, even as others may spend worthy or not-so-worthy inquiry about who acted and how, who could have, should have, who didn't, who tried, we ourselves can step outside the Nazis' poison that I sense has been implanted in us all: Choose one or other, never both, and certainly never all ... But we can overthrow that toxin in order to love and heal all within our reach, victims of the Holocaust, their kin, our kin, our people's human heart, our own hearts.

We can choose to protect, comfort, understand both and all. Let us be The Blameworthy.

My grandmother Katerin, an old woman from a small farm village of 45 families in Hungary, said that to become one of The Blameworthy meant to take up the practice of spiritual listening ...

a deeper kind of listening than secular listening that just took in facts or lobbied images alone ... but instead to listen to the cries of another's soul.

She knew about being one of The Blameworthy, for she had lived through the incessant redrawing of borders caused by wars from Austria, Romania and other countries, including fighting against, in my great-grandmother's time, the papal armies ...

Yet, she was, like a lot of us, an old believer. Thus, she outlined The Blameworthy as those who offer, without question, sincere understanding to a suffering soul. The Blameworthy, who are often blameless themselves, nonetheless take on the burden of apologizing in full heart for wrongs that have not yet been made better or right by "authoritative" apology from "higher-ups." Most of all, The Blameworthy listen to the entire story of the suffering in a sacred time and space, without turning away.

Grandmother Katerin said that whether it was headman of a farm village, traveling priest or former king of Hungary, our waiting for "the regalia-ed" to help heal wounds they themselves had inflicted was like waiting for ice to be carried down from the Carpathians by a team of unharnessed calico cats.

The Blameworthy are thereby the first-line helpers and healers of sudden or long-standing wounds. And, we could and can withstand others' sorrows; we can say, act, cleanse, bless in ways that those who progenerated the harms are too dense, too afraid, too protectionist, too fearful of losing face or power to do, or are tragically crippled, or too politically tangled and cannot, will not, be able to move in a timely manner to place the medicines most needed.

Just one tiny example: Practice of being Blameworthy

I've noticed for years that sometimes when I speak socially with friends who are Jewish, I sometimes sense "danger zones" in our conversations if we speak about causations underlying world events, present or past ... as though they are suddenly tense, want to say something, but don't want to offend.

It's those pauses in conversation that give the clue, and even more so their eyes. We're talking in the present about world affairs, but they suddenly look like their eyes might be filling with tears from a time far, far away.

If I can, and the space is a protected one for them, I often just mention they can say whatever they like to me, even if it's critical of my politics, my faith, or how hierarchy or how some Christians acted during a certain time. I say to them, in one way or another, that I am listening. I notice. I am not "just going on" as usual. That we have left social mode and now are in souls' viewpoint.

Listening. The first part of healing anything. Feelings first, facts later. That's the order in which healing goes best. Feelings. Then facts. Mother Church has too often made that exact error: Praising factoids, but quashing or trivializing or ignoring the feelings and cries of the sorely wounded. Especially when some of the popes, cardinals, bishops, priests, nuns, clergy, laypersons in cooperation, have been the very ones who accidentally, or egregiously, or defensively, wounded innocent others.

There's a saying that a heart, a mind, an organization is only as mature as its ability to feel sorrow for its ill deeds and to make amends in timely ways. That the hallmark of spiritual maturity is this: To have integrity, one has to question one's integrity.

I have tried to say my blameworthy part this way, just putting it here, in case a basic "how-to" might be useful to you. It is not fancy, and often I pause and sometimes stumble about a bit looking for the "rightest" words I can find for each person's inner sense of hearing ...

I say, I want you to know you are my brother, my sister, my father, my mother, my family. We as Catholics are first-century Jews who believe Christ was Messiah. As Jews and Catholics, we diverge from each other's beliefs in certain ways, but I believe we are blood relatives spiritually, as we are with all others. And this shall always be so.

I sometimes ask forgiveness for not speaking sooner, talking briefly about my own introversion and shyness. I move to say that I can verify that there are some powerful people amongst my tribe, Christians, who over centuries have done wrong by you, by your people you hold dear, your principles, your precious souls. For this, I am sorry. I would like to, if you would tell me, hear the story of your far-back people.

I often say something that is an odd truth: As long as you remain wounded and untended, so am I, so are all of us.

My words, their words, may tumble out not in the right order, or maybe we might both cry, but I try to apologize for any harm that has come to each person, to relate back to them the harms they have wept to me, especially about their farthest-back people, including their people being led to their deaths, the most irreversible of all crimes against the radiant soul.

I might continue ... Whichever Christians acted wrongly, spoke wrongly, did not act when they could, did not speak out when they could, or spoke condemnations, please accept that I and many others not only take notice, but are broken by the failure of some who claim the Christian title, yet have been inhumane. Please forgive me, please forgive us for any and all harms brought to your heart.

Most all the Jewish people I've spoken candidly with, invited to please tell me what they are carrying behind their eyes, in their hearts, have most often unleashed in a torrent so much about past and present anguish unhealed, yet not wanting to cause any kind of upsurge of anti-Semitism again via plaint, or trying not to live in the past. So hard to do when the ghosts are not laid properly.

Yet there is an overarching commonality to speaking this way together, that is startling and so cherished: For a people who have been so slaughtered, instead of being harsh and untrusting in the present when we speak together about these matters, Jews are most often exactly the opposite, tender and still standing with an unruined, though broken, heart. It is an amazing vulnerability, a holy one, that just remembering it now, touches me deeply, makes stars appear in my eyes as I write to you.

But too, some I speak to become angry. I listen. Some weep so hard only air and no sound comes out. I listen. Might touch if it seems all right. Some are in disbelief any Christian would reach out to say, Sorry, no excuses.

By trying to understand the exact work of Saint Nobody, I realized there is no such thing as Christian sorrow, Christian guilt, Jewish sorrow, Jewish guilt, Muslim, Buddhist anything. Just sorrow. Shared. For many reasons. Just regret of the ages. For many reasons.

I am not separate from Jews or your and my own Jewish heritage. The pope might see it differently than our hearts do. Jews, other Christians might see it differently. But, The Blameworthy, I think, may be perhaps genetically helpless to do otherwise; they want no one to suffer alone whilst waiting for "an apology from the Office."

In that sense, if we feel it, if we are called to it, if we want to engage in Tikkun olam, that is, help to mend up the raveled soul of the world, let us say we shall be The Blameworthy, praying for hard hearts to be softened, unaware hearts to be awakened, hearts concerned with personnel to be made more concerned with the personal, higher-ups to meet with the most shy of the lower-downs.

Let us make full apology in place of those who did these harms, but who have not yet and may never make the proper ablutions needed. And let us comfort what can be comforted, mend what can be mended, ask forgiveness for what can be forgiven, heal what can be healed, not choose for one side or the other to be cared for, but for all to be in our shelter ... insofar as we can, insofar as the wounded will allow us the honor of tending to them and all those they carry in blessed memory.

Aymen y Amen

Let us be a wild water

which knows the way,

which has always known the way;

smart, heartfelt water, flowing

and smacking

through piles of rubble,

boulder dams purposely laid

in order to obstruct this holy river --

our river by birthright of the landed soul.

It is not the obstructions

where we ought fasten our focus,

but rather on unleashing the flow ?

Water is spirit-subversive, and will

find its way around obstacles,

find its way under obstacles,

find its way over obstructions,

... for even concrete is porous

and water will find its way through,

even boulders tightly packed

show cracks of daylight at night,

and water will definitely

find its way through.

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