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Scar Clan: A Lost Story, Vatican II

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El Rio Debajo del Rio

Tears are a river that take you somewhere.

Weeping creates a river around the little boat

carrying your soul-life.

Tears can lift that little boat off rocks,

off dry ground, carrying it downriver

to someplace new, someplace better.

tttt--cpe

Members of the Scar Clan

A river of tears is one of the strongest evidences of a "crash and burn" initiation into the Scar Clan.

Scar Clan is part of an ageless tribe of human beings, not defined by geography, racial color, national affiliation, nor language.

-- Scar Clan membership comes from having lived through a great something, which, in some way, has forced, cajoled, seduced one into believing a promise of a nourishing and honorable thing, but then those were denied, souls misled instead, bled-out spiritually.

-- Scar Clan is made of tribal members who have been spiritually assaulted, insulted, imprisoned, long embattled in some unjust way. Scar clan is made of those who cry out, but no one hears; those who are heard, but not listened to; not responded to in effective healing ways.

-- Scar Clan includes those who have suffered being in the midst, unrelievedly so, of others' ongoing sufferings, yet have somehow managed to maintain sanity and deep heart, despite lack of both sanity and heart "by others for others."

-- Scar Clan membership comes to those whose hearts have been carved deeper by registering fully, instead of turning away, who have been in the line of fire instead of protected, thereby being charged ever after to follow both a burdened and compassionate pathway for life.

-- Scar Clan members bear pain in seeing how some fight to maintain the ruins of power rather than using bare hands to rescue the brilliant lights lying buried under the rubble.

-- Scar Clan is a gigantic group of souls who are in the midst of healing self and others, who at least halfway have reset their own bones, who still move with standing-room-only heart, despite certain fragilities that come from scar tissue aching at unpredictable times, many years after wounding.

-- Scar Clan in this tribe, despite stuns and harms to spirit, despite white bandages still trailing, despite shards in the heart, still stands. Still rise. Still carries warmth. Still will not be stilled.

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Thus, when the great "they" question why such upheaval was brought to the church in 1962, asking why did the pope convene a Vatican Council instead of just more letters to cardinals and bishops with only local effect...

tell them: Pope John XXIII was a member of the Scar Clan.

Unlike Pius XII, before him, Il Papa XXIII, (Angel John, as some called Pope John XXIII in our rural backwoods,) was not from aristocracy or bureaucrat class, as most popes are.

He was born Giuseppe Angelo Roncalli. He was from the dirt, remaining rooted there his entire life. His parents were sharecroppers, raising 14 children. Angel John was their firstborn.

Even though Giuseppe Angelo at age 11 was sent away from the comfort of his mother and sisters ... to study in Rome, even though he was thereby exposed to the clangs of religious politics amongst prelates there, he kept to his radical...

that is, the earthy values of village people from Sotto il Monte, who daily did not try to fasten dancing angels on heads of pins,

but rather a people, bent in hard labor, standing at day's end with hands at waists watching the arc of sun and the color of sky to see what weather tomorrow would bring... a people who prayed for just the right amount of rain, a people who feared frost... for their lives were devoted to their living crops... and the bodies and souls those crops would feed.

This way of scrying the future, caring for the living, was strong inside John XXIII. A sharecropper farmer does not over-glorify formula, but rather moves with what crops need in each season. Farmers do not sanctify dead forms; rather, they nourish and sanctify the living.

Pope John, thereby, knew the difference between what can live and what cannot live, not only because his early life taught him so, but also because he had, as a very young man, descended into burning hell in "the land of the dead"... not as a tourist, not as a "visitor," not for a day, but for an entire year. Not the cleaned up "land of the dead" where dignitaries make ceremonial visits, vapid pronouncements, then return to their luxuries...

Rather, this young soul who would be pope was immersed in an unrelieved horror up close: what, because of the immense loss of lives, was once called the war to end all wars: WWI.

Seasons in hell, not at a distance, but cheek to cheek.

Imagine in our time 10 new weapons for killing human beings, horrifying in their scope, deadly accurate

in their maiming, murdering. In WWI, the newest weapons were steel and iron tanks chassis over engines, flying zeppelins dropping bombs from the sky, poison gas sprayed from the air in a modern invention: airplanes. All these were put into use as Kaiser Wilhelm of Germany, allied with Austria, invaded France, Great Britain, Russia and Italy.

Hundreds of thousands of young men would not dance at their own weddings. They would instead lie unmarried, unwived, unchildreaned, in graves all across Europe.

As German-Austrian invasions raged across small farm villages in northern Italy, young Roncalli in 1915 was conscripted to be a nurse to the wounded. But that is not enough to say. Wounds made by cannon, by armory, by acid, by bombs, do not make tidy entry wounds.

They are instead gut wounds, exposing shattered white bone with pink fascia hanging; gaping black holes gushing water, blood, offal; burnt lungs suffocating; peeled back skin displaying the pulse in the meat of what is left of leg or face, blackened skin past 3rd degree burn into what amounts to a charred human being screaming alive, but begging to die.

All these souls Roncalli ministered to. Day after day, month after month. Then came the huge defeat of young Italian boys at Caporetto. There were so many thousands of wounded and dying boys, they were brought in litters made of wedding shawls, horse blankets, and boards from bombed out buildings, into the churches across Italy. There the young blood was laid out in naves, aisles, and on altars.

With no medicines to help the pain, imagine churches ringing not with bells, but with days and days of groaning, crying out, dementia, death, mothers in babushkas, fathers in rough straw farmer hats weeping to heavens, and the gravediggers, traditionally men, were now young village girls in torn dresses who sobbed as they dug...

Roncalli walked in this land of the dead non-stop. To the dying he gave all he could; touch, prayer, hands, warmth, promises to speak to their parents, their girlfriends, their consiglieres, to carry the stories. Roncalli was often the last face the dying boys saw, his tender voice, the last words heard. Roncalli prayed and blessed as many souls as possible into heaven.

And thus, Roncalli was, early in life, deeply affected by men's cruelty to the young, to the holy, to families, to innocent people. He'd not be "told about the war." He would instead, personally enter hell where murderous intent by power-mad leaders, had gone on and on undeterred.

He saw that to allow power-slugged leaders to continue in their exiling of this group as unworthy, that group as not pure enough, this other group as needing re-education in order to be found acceptable... that

if men with minds like that were not stopped, they would go on as dictators hiding under the guise of "for the good of the people, the race, the country, the religion," until they had devastated or murdered every last innocent.

We know it is naive think to when war and trauma are over, all is well again. Not so. Marked. Marked by a million shatters to the heart, up close. This was Roncalli, the man who, forty-six years later, would call forth the Second Vatican Council. A man who had been passed through fire.

A small x-ray of the bones of Vatican II

In x-raying Vatican II through the historic plates of John XXIII's early life, we might see many things, including his foibles, but one set of bones glowing there, come from Roncalli's reaction as soul witness to the destruction of those never allowed to truly live. It makes a certain sense that Vatican II was his post-trauma effort to sharply move away from an institutionally accepted but deadly notion -- one that desired to make the living into obedient corpses by fiat, corpses who walk but do not think or speak; alive, yet dead. He was holding out for the holy corporeal in ways that new life could flow through the ancient conduits in modern ways, what he understood as a set of life-giving ideals.

When some of the "they" ask why "that meddling, busy-body, crazy pope" did such a thing to turn the church toward living instead of continuing not only to die but to cause many others to die spiritually from lack of sustenance fit for them -- in the same sense it is futile to try to feed eagles the food that nourishes mice -- and expect the eagles to flourish ... when "the great they" say things like that, tell them the lost story of Roncalli's time in hell.

Ask, have they earned their way through hell on earth too? Or in times of insane war and black blood carnage, were they sequestered away instead, listening to watered down war stories with the images turned off.

Or did they walk in some way as Roncalli walked day after day, leaning over to comfort the loneliest, seeing, smelling the most wounded, the dying... so much so that the front of Roncalli's uniform literally was constantly stained red with the blood of the lambs.

To those who challenge Roncalli's bringing Vatican II to the fore, and with all fire from the Holy Spirit personified, just say his are the highest credentials: Scar Clan. Veritas, Emeritus.

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