

Daily Meditation 11/19/2021

Bonhoeffer & Aquinas: How Silence Feeds Evil & Becomes Evil

Good morning.

Today we have a very timely, I think, meditation on sins of omission and silence.

Timely because just yesterday, the Congress of the United States voted to censure one of its members who actually put out a video about murdering one of his coworkers. And it is astounding that only two Republicans went along with this censure. And the others were, I guess, seeing no evil, hearing no evil, and speaking no evil.

But I invoke Dietrich Bonhoeffer who of course, was a full-fledged martyr in the Second World War, who stood up to Hitler -- he was a German theologian -- and he was killed for it. And from his cell, he wrote this:

"We have learned a bit too late in the day, that actions springs not from thought, but from a readiness for responsibility."...a readiness for responsibility.

But I think that line, "we have learned a bit too late in the day," is especially poignant, and scary, given the realities of politics, not only in America today, but in many countries around the world, where authoritarianism is making a great effort to replace democracy.

Readiness for responsibility. Are we ready for that?

It would seem not: we have seen that many are not ready. They cannot even say no to a colleague who threatens to kill women in their workplace. And I stress the killing of women, because misogyny is baked into the power grab, that many men find so appealing and are unwilling to let go of. The fear that they lose their next election or be primary seems to be more important than any virtues or values they might be carrying around inside of them.

So as I say, it seems that cowardice in the face of responsibility is more prevalent today than a readiness for responsibility.

And Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who was a great moral theologian, says that silence in the face of evil is itself evil; not to speak, is to speak; not to act is to act.

In other words, everyone who did not vote to censure this individual Congress person who threatened death to a woman in his workplace, everyone who did not speak against that is speaking in favor of it: not to act is to act; not to speak is to speak.

And this happened all over in Germany, under Hitler, and helped to embolden Hitler. There would have been no Hitler, if people had spoken out early and acted when they were seeing the need to act. But again, it was cowardice that dictated the history that followed, that we all know far too well.

But I also invoke my brother, Thomas Aquinas, because he too, is explicit about this very issue. Though he lived 700 years before speaker McCarthy and before this vote in Congress, Aquinas said non-action is a kind of action and that omission, sins of omission, are always opposed to justice.

In other words, a sin of omission and a sin of being silent when we should be speaking out, is always an acceptance of injustice.

It is as Aquinas says, opposed to justice. So, speaking out, acting out, is part of what prophets do: prophets speak out. That's the very meaning of the word prophet: *prophēto* means to speak out, to bring board your fifth chakra and to tell truth, truth to power and truth to injustice and truth to those who would like to kill women in their workplaces.

And it's so interesting that so many of these congresspeople claim to be Christians. But as Aquinas says, it is clear that not only those who do evil are cut off from Christ, but also those who neglect to do good....neglect to do good.

Thank you. We'll see you tomorrow.