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# The Cross is in the World

## Black Pain

An elder in Eastern Christian tradition says you cannot pray for people unless you hurt for them.

“Prayer, which is not from the heart, but is made only by the mind, does not go any farther. To pray with the heart, we must hurt. Just as when we hit our hand or some other part of our body our *nous* is gathered to the point where we are hurting, so also for the *nous* to gather in the heart, the heart must hurt. We should make the other's pain our own. We must love the other, must hurt for him, so that we can pray for him. We must come out, little by little, from our own self and begin to love, to hurt for other people.”

This is clear-cut: to love people, we must make their pain our own. It is not just that we should ‘feel’ their hurt, empathically, because that could come and go; what is stated here is stronger than that. To love people is to hurt for them, because it is to join them where they hurt.

The hurt in all people is deep, nothing can assuage it. The heart is troubled, and the heart is broken, at depth. There is a hole in the heart that cannot be filled. In the heart's depth, there is an abyss filled with what Federico García LORCA called ‘black pain’.

In some individual persons, and in some whole peoples, this pain is extreme. Their lives have revealed to them the deep pain in everyone else, the pain paved over, blanked out, stifled, strangled. In some manner, these persons or these peoples carry the pain for others, because in others the pain is disavowed.

I have my own hurt, like everyone else, but I also carry a fathomless pain that strikes me at times strangely, and digs in so deep, I know I will die of it. I finally realised why this relentless pain is in me. It is not what my mother did to me. It is not what my father did to me. It is not about what happened to me. It is about what happened to them. It is my love for the Red Indian peoples that has brought me to another pain, a pain bottomless, inexplicable, terrible. At times, this pain of the other whom I love screams. At other times it is mute. It is always inarticulate. It does not know what to say. There are no words. Its terrible question cannot be voiced. I will voice it.

Did I count for so little that you stood back and let me be thrown away?

The Red Indian peoples suffered the greatest genocide in the history of the world. It took longer than the Jewish Shoa, and it was far bigger and far more comprehensive. It took three centuries to kill off one hundred fifty million people in the Americas. Imagine all those souls, children, grandmothers and grandfathers, women and men in

the torrent of life, all suddenly ripped out, cut off, thrown away. Can you imagine all those souls, as they were uprooted and thrown on the rubbish dump, crying in protest, crying in incomprehension? A whole people. A whole way of living. A good way of living, an ancient way of living, a spiritual way of living immersed in the strangeness and beauty of the Earth. The genocide was physical and the genocide was cultural. Every trace of these people, every trace of their way of life, must be extinguished. Greed is better, Anglo-Saxon capitalism is better, to live by reason abstracted from the body is better, to have no soul and to have no heart is better. Progress is better. Mammon is better. Mammon is the god in whom we trust.

In the pain in my heart there is grief and anger without any bottom, without any relief. I know this pain. It is inarticulate but it tells me things. I know the disappearance of these peoples of the sacred beginning, these peoples of the dream time who came forth from the caves in the Earth, is a cataclysm beyond imagining, for all of humanity, as well as for them. This cataclysm is so vast it cannot be measured. It is on a scale off any scale. It is as monumental, and as horrendous, as if we were to lose a third of the Earth and had to go on with what remained. This cannot be allowed to happen. If it happens, it will affect us all, as well as them. It will affect the very Earth. Maka already mourns her lost children in America; she is not friendly to the interlopers, which is why they build their machines and defences all over Maka's body: they fear her. None of the spirits of the land welcomes the newcomers. They sing in the night, and in the loneliest winds in the day. Their no words songs say, every tread on this ground is on graves, you tread on the dead, you tread on souls. Jesus Christ may have died for you. He described you accurately when he said to the unknown God, they do not know what they do. You still do not know what you are doing. Is it an excuse? Or is it your innocence, the unparalleled naïveté that shelters your rabid selfishness and ravening covetousness that is most horrendous of all your evils?

Yes, you, Christians, I am talking to you.

Jesus Christ died for you too, but whom have you ever died for? You call yourselves Christians, but that claim stinks in my nostrils. It sickens me with its hypocrisy. When are you going to die for anyone? You did not die for the people of the beginning, the people of the garden. You made them die for you. Your advantage was your sister's and brother's disadvantage; you bought your gain at the cost of her and his loss. Do not talk to me about your Christianity. I spit on it.

Yes, you, Christians, I am talking to you, keeper of the best for yourself, even when it costs the worst for your sister and brother.

You do not know what you are doing, but to get out of your heart's deep pain, you are ready, willing, and perfectly happy, to push your sister and brother deeper into her and his hearts' deep pain. You have endless rationalisations; hypocrisy is something you are good at.

## Dark Place

The black pain inside us, deep in the heart, is connected with something outside us, deep in the world. The heart hurts in each of us, because the world that is the 'common destiny' for all of us is almost lost. There is a deadness and hell and void in the depth

of every heart, but this is not an isolated and personal problem; it exists because that deadness, hell and void is in the depth of the world, and is increasing its hold upon the world.

This is why Jesus Christ's Cross is placed in the world. For the world is where the heart acts or funks acting, where the heart gives or withholds, where the heart brings Heaven to Earth through the abyss, or condemns the world to hell. The heart is staked to the world. The heart is make or break for the world, but even more importantly, the world is make or break for the heart. The world is the heart's fate. This fate is a burden, this fate is a wound, because it opens out the heart and binds it to the fate of the world. If the world is lost, the heart goes down with it. This fate is terrible, because it brings the heart to the place that is terrible in the world.

The Cross is that place in the world which is called in Latin *terribilis est locus iste*: 'this place is terrible.' This is the place of the existential edge and the existential gap and the existential crossing of the roads. Black Elk said of this place that it is where the good red road of spiritual growth and understanding is crossed by the bad black road of wordly difficulties and war; he said as well, it is the Great Mystery who has made these roads to Cross, and where they Cross is holy. A friend once said it is here the road of Heaven and the road of the world Cross, and we must choose; but this is not right, because it is at this intersection that we can go no farther, for it is in this place Heaven is staked to the ground of the Earth, here Heaven is vowed to suffer for the world, and this is make or break for whether the world will be saved from the abyss beneath its feet; or, should this fail, whether the world will fall all the way into the abyss of ruin and end in dereliction.

Another friend said to me, 'I am called to a dark place.' We all are. We all are, because that is where the Cross is. We are called to the world's most terrible place, because only in that place is the Cross. Only the Cross can redeem the world, but to do that, it must join the world's pain and embrace the worst place in the world. This place is lonely. It is ugly. It is windswept by a hollow wind. I have repeatedly called it 'heart ground': the heart ground is the killing ground. It is the place where it is all lost. Only in the place where it is all really lost, and we are all in the black inexplicable pain that knows that loss, can it all be regained.

The Cross is in the worst place in the world. But this terrible place is also great. This is the deep where God suffers the pain in the human heart that is the pain about the world; this is the deep where God toils in the abysmal; and this is the hour. Cometh the hour, cometh the man. This is the time of decision, the place of leverage. Here we encounter the paradox of the heart's truest passion at its most profound: here we come to defeat and here it turns around. Here we can do nothing and here we can do the only thing that matters.

Where else could the Cross be, except in the most terrible place of the world? Where else is God, except in the place where it goes over the edge, is stuck in the gap, and crucified at the crossing of roads?

Is God in the Church? Only temporarily, only episodically, only now and then. Like us, God turns up and goes away again. God's permanent residence is in the world. The place from which God does not flinch is in the world, at its terrible place, which is also its great place, the place of the turning.

The place where it is all over, and the place where, suddenly, it is all to play for.

## **Deep Hell**

The Cross is not fully embraced in the ascetic desert, where the lesser heart is burnt out of us, to restore the greater heart.

The Cross is not fully embraced in the sacred temple, where the people gather round to enter into sacramental communion with it, by drinking its cup of blood.

These are fine, as far as they go, but they do not go far enough.

The Cross is in the world.

You, Christians, who colluded in the biggest genocide and the largest cataclysm in the history of the Earth, if you want to stop dishonouring your Master, then go where he went, and do what he did.

Stop thinking the Church is 'prior' to the world: if your heart is repaired, then you will give it to the world. That is no good. You have it reversed. Jesus Christ died on the Cross, for the world, then descended into the deep heart of death and Hell of each of us.

When our heart is given to the deep Hell in the world outside us, then God will be given to the deep hell in the heart inside us.

Even you, Christians, will not escape the common destiny. One day you must make peace with it, because until you do, it remains at war with you.

Hetchetu yelo.