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O, ANTIGONE! YOUR SILENCE IS MY JUDGE

Antigone gazes upon us once more and asks: "O Europe, what are you really saying when you speak? You no longer even know how to tell where evil lies, or even that evil is evil. You, the homeland of human rights, prefer to speak of 'interruption of pregnancy' so as not to call things by their real names: the murder of the innocent."

Antigone: I wanted to tell you this morning. . . [about the] little boy that we might have had

Haemon: Yes.

Antigone: You know I would have defended him against the whole world. Jean Anouilh, Antigone (Paris, 1946, p. 40).

But Jesus spoke nothing (Mt 26:63)

There is still one virgin whom Europe recognizes and who is at the same time a witness to life. Her name is Antigone. She is a model for us. Mother of our Europe, sister of us all, her fate was tragic because in the face of the written law of Thebes ruled by Creon she persevered unto death for the law of conscience. Forced to choose between obedience to the civil law and the respect for the dead which religion required that she, a woman in a city-state ruled by men, showed that conscience does not command what the state says. It is conscience, and not judges, who place us before the ultimate law even when the city-state, in betraying the Good, issues judgments that lead to death.

In rejecting the prohibition against burial of a rebel brother in the city and in showing us that, for a loving sister he was no evil brother, Antigone teaches us a lesson about how to look upon man, everyman: as a brother. The eloquence of her deed and of her death shows us that equality, if it is not to be an empty word, demands from me equal respect for all.

"Europe, my daughter, I accuse you," Antigone might have said. "I accuse you because, with your adult eyes you do not recognize those who stand at the two opposite poles of life. Because they do not look like you, you deny them life. You betray both the light of intelligence (which reaches beyond mere phenomena to the essential) as well as your vocation to recog-

nize the brother in everyman, in those human beings in the shadows of the boundaries of human life.”

Conscience – Antigone’s and our’s – ought to judge according to what is right, any written laws notwithstanding. For us today Antigone is that love which hastens to the aid of the man betrayed by human laws. Brother and sister, Antigone and Polyneices, each in his own way reveals the shape of the tragedy Europe is experiencing today.

Just as the life and death of Polyneices threatened the ancient city-state so today there are many children denied the light of life and excluded from our cities. Just as a long ago time and a far away place Antigone was denied the light of life, closing off her way to the gods, so today children killed because of despair, or even just thoughtlessness, must go to the grave deprived even of a decent burial.

Being a model for Europe, Antigone could also be Europe’s anti-type. That beloved fiancée allowed herself to be laid in the grave, giving up motherhood. In that way she bore witness that love is greater than life, that even death can be fruitful. Our Europe, on the other hand, is going to the grave giving up motherhood while being ruled by the absurdity of sterile life.

Antigone reveals the whole depth of the contemporary tragedy, casting suspicion upon our words and our silence. She gazes upon us once more and asks:

O Europe, what are you really saying when you speak? You no longer even know how to tell where evil lies, or even that evil is evil. You, the homeland of human rights, prefer to speak of “interruption of pregnancy” so as not to call things by their real names: the murder of the innocent. O, how can you, daughter of the word (*logos*) call abortion illegal but not criminal (*rechtswidrig aber straffrei*)?

Yes, our words are empty and our silence heavy, because our society denies life so as to hide in the face of death. Because it blinds itself so that, unlike Rachel, it will not have to weep over children that are no more. Because it organizes amusements so it will not have to help women tempted by abortion.

And the man, the father: he is frequently the great absent one as a heavy silence settles over his no-longer-living child and its ruined mother.

Translated by Dr. John M. Grondelski