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Speaking of Silence

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Abstract In a previous article (Capps 2011) I discussed a short story and essay I wrote in high school and showed that themes that had figured prominently in my later writings were prefigured in these earlier writings. Invoking John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1957) I concluded that the high school boy who lives inside of me has been my faithful companion throughout the years. In this article I focus on a sermon I preached in my senior year of high school and on several poems I wrote that year. The sermon and poems reflect my interest at the time in the harmful effects of silence on human relationships. An article that focused on the son of Saint Augustine (Capps 1990b) signaled my return to the issue of silence after a thirty-year hiatus. My subsequent reading of Alice Miller's *Breaking Down the Wall of Silence* (1991) and *The Truth Shall Set You Free* (2001) helped me to understand why silence had been a personal issue for me. It also encouraged me to listen to the fledgling poet who lives within me and to appreciate his insights concerning silence and love.

Keywords Silence · Silencing · Miscommunication · Shaming · Speaking · Truth · Love · Belief · Augustine · Adeodatus · Alice Miller · William James

> Silence: refraining from speech; omission of mention; failure to communicate; oblivion or obscurity; to put down or repress; absence of sound or noise

In a previous article (Capps 2011) I discussed a short story and essay I wrote in high school and showed that themes that had figured prominently in my later writings were prefigured in these earlier writings. Invoking John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1957) I concluded that the high school boy who lives inside of me has been my faithful companion throughout the years. In this article I focus on a sermon I preached in my senior year of high school and on several poems I wrote that year, and show how the theme they address—that of silence and silencing—reappears in later writings. I will begin with the sermon.

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The sermon

I preached a sermon on Youth Sunday March 3, 1957 when I was a senior in high school. According to the church bulletin, the title of my sermon was "Know, Live, Share Christ," which was the theme chosen for the year by the national church body for youth groups in all of the churches of my denomination. The church was being served at the time by a vice-pastor, whose official capacity was that of chaplain of the hospital that was owned and operated by the denomination. I had spent a great deal of time at the hospital, first as a newspaper boy delivering papers to patients, then as a custodian, then working in the kitchen and delivering meals to patients, and eventually as a member of the pharmacy staff. So I was acquainted with the vice-pastor but our conversations had been limited to casual pleasantries.

The church bulletin notes that Sunday evening the youth group was sponsoring a family night pot luck at which the city's Assistant Chief of Police, who was a member of the congregation, would be speaking on "The Responsibility of the Christian Teenager in His Community." His daughter was a member of our youth group.

The sermon was based on the text: "For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of love and self-control" (2 Tim. 1:7 RSV). It began this way:

> Just a word about the phrase "self-control" in our text. To us self-control means the ability to keep from getting emotionally upset. To the writer of our text it means more than this. It means keeping our *mind* as well as our *emotions* under control.

In support of this point, he notes that the J. B. Phillips translation uses the phrase "a sound mind" instead of "self-control." (So, in fact, does the King James Version.) He goes on to note that others have translated the word as "sanity," then says,

> We want to keep in mind when we use the word "self-control" in this context that it means more than just controlling ourselves so we don't fly off the handle. Rather, it means a whole attitude, a sane outlook toward life which enables us to act intelligently in our world.

With this clarification, the preacher introduces the topic of science:

> Most of us are aware that our twentieth century is an age of science. If an advertiser on TV begins his claim with the words "Science says . . ." he has spoken the magic words, and implies that anyone would be stupid not to believe what *science* has to say about this brand of tooth-paste or after-shave lotion.

By implying that toothpaste and after-shave lotion advertisements make a rather trivial use of the word "science," the preacher signals that he has a more august understanding of science in mind. He points out:

> Alfred North Whitehead was one of our greatest scientists, even though he didn't work with toothpaste or after-shave lotion. Instead, as a mathematician, he was responsible for much of the advance which has taken place in modern physics. In his later years Whitehead was also one of the most beloved and respected professors at Harvard University. Whitehead's father was a minister, and it appeared that Alfred was destined to become a minister also. In college, however, his curiosity led him to the study of mathematics and history. As a result of his learning, he became greatly troubled by the fact that many of our greatest scientists were forced to keep their new ideas and discoveries secret *because they feared the opposition of the established church.* Whitehead learned that many scientists were persecuted because they dared

to tell the facts. Many were burned at the stake because they refused to deny what their microscopes and telescopes told them about the world around them.

The preacher goes on to note that Whitehead "no longer thought about entering the ministry. In fact, for all practical purposes, he abandoned Christianity as well. Sometime later he wrote, '*No scientist ever burned a churchman at the stake.*'"[1]

After repeating this quotation for emphasis he adds, "*As church people, these words should convict each one of us"*:

For the shameful story does not only take place when scientists are burned at the stake by church-people, or when the so-called witches are burned in our own country: In fact, the shameful story does not only take place when our Lord is nailed to the cross by church-people. The shameful story occurs whenever you and I, as church-people, use the *power* which God has given us without the *direction of love and self-control.* The shameful story becomes the story of our own lives when you and I use our power of speech, the power of our minds, the power of our hands and feet *without direction, without the direction of love and of self-control.*

In the tradition of preaching in the Lutheran faith to which the preacher had been introduced as a boy, the foregoing would have been viewed as "the law," and the congregants would have expected that the sermon would start out this way. However, he would also have known that the congregants would expect the sermon to shift at some point into "the gospel," and this is how he begins the shift:

But if, on the other hand, we perform our daily tasks directed by the *spirit of love,* the shameful story is at once transformed into the greatest story ever told. And if we view the world in which we live with the *self-control* of a mind that knows, though worlds may crumble, that the *Word of God in Jesus Christ* rises above the mushroom-shaped clouds of time, then we have helped to write the greatest story man has ever experienced.

The "mushroom-shaped clouds of time" is a reference to the clouds that rise after an atom-bomb has been dropped, as occurred when the United States dropped atom-bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945 and at bomb-testing sites in the desert areas of southwest United States.

Having made this shift from "law" to "gospel," using the verse in the second letter to Timothy to make this shift, the preacher began to focus on the meaning of this adoption of a spirit of love and of self-control for the individual:

For some of us, this means that we must completely change our course because it may not be possible to act in the *spirit of love* and of *self-control* in our present circumstances. But for most of us, it means simply that the old channels, the same job we've held for thirty years, the same house we've lived in for fifteen years, and the same customs and habits we've formed since childhood—all these will remain the same. But we will see them in a new light, for the *spirit of love* and *self-control* transforms the world for us.

To illustrate how we will begin to see our present circumstances in a new light, the preacher cites Jesus' disciples who were changed by their encounter with Jesus:

The disciples, after they met Jesus, continued to walk the very same paths they had walked in their youth, and they talked to the very same people: Peter still visited his mother-in-law,

[1] I have tried to track down this quotation without any luck. However, in his chapter on "Religion and Science" in *Science and the Modern World* Whitehead (1926) emphasizes that we should not despair or remain passive when clashes between religion and science occur, but search for "the wider truths and finer perspectives within which a reconciliation of a deeper religion and a more subtle science will be found" (p. 185).

and James and John continued to help their father in his fishing industry. *But there was a difference*: They saw their everyday world and the everyday people in a new way.

Even the common ordinary objects of their everyday life looked differently now:

When Jesus picked up a mustard seed along the road, and told them the Kingdom of God is like a mustard seed none of them laughed and said, "What's so religious about a common old mustard seed?" And when they stopped before the tradesman's stall, and stared in amazement at the precious stones imported from the east, and when Jesus said, "The kingdom of God is like a pearl of great price," none of them said, "I can't think of anything less religious than the pearl of an oyster."

Events in their lives also took on a new meaning and heightened significance:

And when these rather rustic men were reluctantly putting on their best clothes to attend a wedding, and Jesus said to them, "The Kingdom of God is like a wedding feast," none of them laughed and said, "What's a feast got to do with religion?"

Everything now looked and felt differently to them:

To the disciples, fig trees, mustard seeds, pearls, and friendly get-togethers had everything to do with religion, for Jesus had ushered the disciples into a new way of looking at things, a new attitude toward the world around them, an attitude that could honestly say, "*Behold, he makes all things new.*"

The preacher relates the disciples' experience to the lives of Jesus' followers today, to himself and to his listeners:

And so with us: For we, today and every day, when our hands are immersed in the dishwater, when we are working with a T square on a drawing board, or when we are engaged in a telephone conversation, we, too, can honestly say, "*Behold, he makes all these things new.*" There's nothing so very religious about a dishpan, a drawing-board, a telephone. Yet when they are used in the *spirit of love* and *self-control*, they take on a religious—a sacramental—significance. Even as the mustard seed, the pearl, and the wedding feast became symbols for the Kingdom of God, so, too, our dishpan, our drawing board, our telephone, can become symbols *for us*: symbols that unlock the door to a new way of life, a new attitude, a *new conception of our everyday world:* "*Behold, he makes all things new."* This is the transforming power of the *love* and the *self-control* that God has entrusted to us.

With this allusion to the transforming power of the love and self-control that God has entrusted to us, the preacher invites his hearers to think about its life-changing implications:

If common, everyday *objects* can be used to unlock the door to a new way of life, just think what the living, active people we meet can become, think of the spiritual significance that everyday people can have, when we treat them in the *spirit of love* and *self-control.*

The preacher notes:

Our twentieth century has been called the *age of the lonely crowd*, of people who seem to be in the swing of things, and yet no one really understands them; people who never seem to get beyond a superficial chat about the weather. It is in the *spirit of love* that we must draw them out, and in drawing them out, gain a better understanding of ourselves, *and a deeper awareness of the ever-present spirit of God in Jesus Christ.*

He goes on to say that Albert Schweitzer has caught the significance of our text *for us* when he writes, and quotes Schweitzer as follows:

> From a feeling of embarrassment, we hesitate to approach a stranger. The feeling of being repulsed is the cause of a great deal of coldness in the world; when we seem indifferent we are often merely timid. The adventurous soul must break the barrier, resolving in advance not to mind a rebuff. If we dare with wisdom, always maintaining a certain reserve in our approach, we find that *when we open ourselves we open doors in others.*[2]

A notation to pause at this point in the sermon appears in the written text, and then the preacher repeats the text—"God has not given us a spirit of fear, but a spirit of power and love and self-control." He concludes,

> Our twentieth century "age of the lonely crowd" has taught us one painful lesson: we need no longer resort to burnings at the stake to destroy our fellow man, for we are learning that our *silence also kills.*

With this challenging note the sermon ends.

My interest here is not in evaluating this sermon as a piece of writing, much less the question whether or not it was an effective act of the proclamation of the Gospel or in how it might be improved. After all, I do not (thank God!) teach preaching. My concern is simply with what the sermon adds to our understanding of the high school boy who wrote it.

First of all, I'm struck by the fact that the Biblical text on which the sermon was based (2 Timothy) was from a letter ostensibly written by Paul to a younger colleague. I would have assumed at the time that Paul was the writer of this epistle. I can well imagine that I saw myself in the position of Timothy, Paul's young protégé, and that I would have thought of this epistle as having been written, as it were, for me.

I also find it interesting that the sermon focuses at the outset on "self-control," that there is an effort to move away from the emotive to an attitudinal understanding of "self-control," and that this attitude is presented as "an outlook toward life which enables us to act intelligently in our world." Thus, a text that may have led other preachers—youthful or otherwise—to talk about controlling our emotions lends itself to *this* preacher's desire to focus on the mind, especially as it perceives the world. It seems significant that he took advantage of this occasion not to preach about emotions and/or emotional issues. In fact, he chose a text that enabled him to make a point of the fact that emotions would *not* be under discussion. Instead, what interested the preacher was the concern of the author of the epistle that his young protégé would develop a "sound mind." His suggestion that the word translated "self-control" might also be translated "sanity" reinforces this emphasis on the mind, not the emotions.

Another observation that seems worth making is that the preacher exhibits a very positive view of modern science, and that the sermon is very strongly in favor of empiricism and equally critical of dogmatism. This is especially reflected in his quotation from Whitehead: "No scientist ever burned a churchman at the stake." However, this does not mean that he is content simply to view the world from a neutral, purely empiricist point

[2] I have not been able to find the source of this quotation, but in his *Memoirs of Childhood and Youth* Schweitzer (1997) notes that his natural shyness as a youth "prevented me from showing people as much service and help as I felt impelled to," but as time went on, he "dared emancipate myself from the rules of reserve and good breeding" and came to realize "how many good things we miss when we allow ourselves to be slavishly locked into the reserve which common politeness imposes on us." He adds, "There is much coldness among people because we don't dare show ourselves as warm-hearted as we really are" (pp. 86–88).

of view. The biblical text's reference to "the spirit of love" suggests that the "sound mind" with which one views the world is not an indifferent or aloof mind, but one that is formed—and transformed—by the spirit of love. With this spirit of love, the world itself takes on a new aura, is seen with new eyes.

As I read this section of the sermon, I thought of the fact that, some thirty years later, I had written a book on *reframing* (Capps 1990a) and that it begins with a story that I had heard in the sermon preached by the pastor of the church our family was attending at the time. Also, the various references to the disciples and their understanding that, when viewed from the joint perspective of the spirit of love and of self-control, the ordinary world has an extraordinary quality about it impressed me as a valuable way of thinking about the spiritual dimension of our lives. Significantly, the preacher had originally written that when a dishpan, drawing-board, and telephone are used in the spirit of love and self-control, "they take on a religious significance." The phrase "a sacramental" between the words "religious" and "significance" was penciled in later.

On the other hand, I'm also struck by the fact that the preacher kept using the word "religious" to convey the idea that the empirical world is transformed by the coupling of the spirit of love with the spirit of self-control. The word "religious" has a positive connotation for him and there is no suggestion here that "religion" should be contrasted with "faith," as if the latter is a condition that develops when an individual's "religious state" proves insufficient. As an older man looking back on my decision to become a psychologist of religion in the tradition of William James, I feel that I have the high school boy's respect for religion to credit for steering me in this vocational direction.

It was also interesting to me that the preacher shifted from "objects" to "people" at this point, noting that "if common, everyday *objects* can be used to unlock the door to a new way of life, just think what the living, active *people* we meet can become." Also, he says that what living, active people can become is of "spiritual significance," a claim that follows from the fact that they are being treated in the spirit of love and self-control. Thus, in the concluding paragraphs, there is a perceptible shift from the empiricism of the natural sciences to the empiricism of the human sciences. This is reflected in the preacher's reference to the idea that ours is "the *age of the lonely crowd,"* an allusion to the title of the book by David Riesman and colleagues (1950).

The preacher takes this to mean that many individuals feel isolated and alone despite the fact that they are living in and among other persons. He may appear to suggest that "we" are the ones who need to draw "them" out, as though we are not among the lonely and the isolated, but his suggestion that in drawing others out we will "gain a better understanding of ourselves" seems to challenge this "us" and "them" distinction, and implies that no one is exempt from the age of the lonely crowd. Moreover, he affirms that in this encounter between persons we will gain "*a deeper awareness of the ever-present spirit of God in Jesus Christ.*"

As a boy who grew up in the Lutheran tradition, he was very much aware of the fact that the "law" was understood in terms of guilt. Yet, the paragraphs of the sermon that were designed to present the "law" are mostly about shame and not guilt. The preacher knows that it was wrong for the church to burn scientists and so-called witches at the stake, but he wants to emphasize that these were shameful acts (he uses the words "shameful story" four times in this paragraph), for in acting in this way, the church was not being faithful to itself. The more immediate application of the same idea applies, however, to "you and I, as church-people," when we "use the *power* which God has given us without the *direction of love and self-control.*" When this happens, we are not true to ourselves.

The preacher does not use the words "shame" or "shameful" again in the text, but the quotation from Schweitzer uses the word "embarrassment," a word often associated with "shame," and suggests that "timidity" and not "indifference" is responsible for much of the coldness that prevails in our human world today. It is not that we are indifferent. It is that we are hesitant, lack self-confidence, shy. "Timidity," too, has close associations with the word "shame." This emphasis on shame is intriguing to me because it suggests that the *seeds* of a long-standing conviction of mine were sown in my high school years, this conviction being that the church in which I was raised placed so much emphasis on guilt that it never got around to what was causing many of us to feel "bad" or "wrong" about ourselves, namely, the shame that we were experiencing in our relations with others. Until I reread this sermon, I was unaware of the fact that my adult view (Capps 1983, 1993, 1995, 2001) that the church, in placing so much emphasis on guilt, often neglects the topic of shame was already stirring in the mind of the high school boy who preached the sermon.

As for the concluding sentence, I have a distinct recollection of the preacher's sense that the sermon had to return to the burnings of scientists and others at the stake and how affected he was—emotionally—by the concluding phrase: *our silence also kills.* On the back side of the last page of the sermon several scripture texts are in handwriting, and all of them relate to the issue of the problematic nature of silence in one way or another. For example, there is a reference to Isaiah 49:2—"He made my mouth like a shard sword"—but also a reference to Isaiah 42:2—"He will not cry or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street." Perhaps the most significant of these passages, however, is Isaiah 50:4: "The Lord God has given me the tongue of those who are taught, that I may know how to sustain with a word him that is weary."

As noted earlier, the sermon was intentionally and self-consciously oriented toward the mind and not the emotions, but this final phrase was the preacher's own way of opening himself emotionally to the other, in this case, the hearer of the sermon, and especially those hearers who were also members of the youth group. It was his way of saying that he, too, is a member of the lonely crowd,[3] and that he struggles with the problem of silence—his own difficulties in speaking freely and easily with others and his sense that he is certainly not alone in this regard. Also, like most other high school students, he was sensitive of the fact that classmates would form cliques of one form or another and ignore the presence of others, especially those who, like himself, led a rather marginal existence at school.

The poems

The sermon was preached on March 3, 1957. I graduated from high school on June 10, and began taking summer college courses a week or two later. In my senior year of high school I began writing sonnets. I recall liking the fixed structure of the sonnet, which appealed to the value I placed on order and discipline. At the same time, I felt that the very orderliness of the sonnet encouraged considerable freedom of thought. I am not exactly sure when the following sonnets were written (as they are undated) but probably in my senior year of high school. Not all of them focused on the problem of silence, but a central theme was the failure or absence of communication, whether it took the form of not hearing what was

[3] In light of the fact that the adolescent boy who preached this sermon became a minister, it is noteworthy that Henri Nouwen suggested in *The Wounded Healer* (Nouwen 1972) that the deepest wound that ministers carry is that of loneliness. He adds: "It is this wound that [the minister] is called to bind with more care and attention than others usually do. For a deep understanding of his own pain makes it possible for him to convert his weakness into a strength and to offer his own experience as a source of healing" (p. 87: see also Capps 2008).

being said, of unclear messages, of the failure to speak up so that others will hear what one has to say, and so forth. One that picks up on the concluding words of the sermon—"our silence also kills"—is the following:

Tragedy

When lights and music leave the Stage, and act-
ions cease, we wait here in the dead
stillness of night, uncertain, till we read
reviews in morning papers what in fact
has taken place. We stand before the Stage
and fumbling with half-formed words of dread
our whispers and ovations left unsaid,
attempt to ask the questions of the age:
Was there a Word, waiting behind the leth-
al scenes to give the voice of tragedy
coherence? It was not said. May we
then ascend the Stage and grasp the straw
of speech ourselves, lest the tragic flaw
should be for us a silence unto death.

I am not concerned here with evaluating this and the following poem from a literary point of view. (No doubt, hyphenating a word at the end of a line to achieve a rhyme is a somewhat dubious procedure.) However, it seems that the poet has been learning about tragedy in his English classes, and is aware of the fact that the hero of a tragedy normally possesses a tragic flaw that leads eventually to his undoing. Here, though, the poem focuses on members of the audience and on the fact that they are left with a sense of dread after the play is over but do not know how to articulate it. The poet believes that what was missing was a Word that would give the voice of tragedy coherence, but given that it was not said, he suggests that those remaining after the actors have left the stage might take their places on stage and say something, whatever it might be, lest their own tragic flaw should be "a silence unto death."

In the following poem, the critical Word was spoken but it passed by unheeded, at least initially, because the poet and the one with whom he was conversing did not recognize it:

Roads to Emmaus

There are means of bringing back to life besides
squeezing reluctant breath from aged hearts,
other ways than dreams, rehearsing parts
of yesterday less vigor, than tides
circling earth at intervals—perhaps they
but reverse intention. No, we desire
birth not wholly new lest critics say
we despise order. Yet the times require
more than repetition: the sudden burst
of tears when it occurs to us the Word
we sought went past when we conversed
tonight. The terror of it all
that resurrection waited our recall,
the wonder not the life but that we heard.

Here, the poet identifies with one of the travelers on the road to Emmaus who was engaging in conversation with his companion about what had recently taken place in Jerusalem. He reflects on the fact that the stranger who joined them reminded them of what the prophets had said and that the resurrection depended on their recall. He contrasts the terror of this thought—what if there had been no stranger-assisted recall?—with the wonder of the fact that they were able to hear the Word as he spoke with them. As Luke 24:32 puts it, "They said to each other, 'Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the scriptures?" The poet, however, suggests that there may well have been another emotional response besides that of burning hearts: "The sudden burst / of tears when it occurs to us the Word / we sought went past when we conversed / tonight." Then he adds that there is something terrifying about the very fact "that resurrection waited our recall, / the wonder not the life but that we heard."

As I recently read this poem I wondered whether the plural *roads* was the poet's way of trying to reassure himself that whatever vocational direction he took, it would lead to the same destination. However, I also thought of the two of us—the older man and the adolescent boy—as the two travelers on the road to Emmaus, speaking to one another but also listening together to the Stranger who joins us from time to time and provides clarity as to what is becoming of us as we continue our journey together.

These two poems reflect on the fact that the Word must somehow be communicated: there must be speakers and there must also be hearers. However, their general tone is one of uncertainty and tenuousness, of the ambiguities involved in speaking and not speaking and hearing and not hearing. In another poem which I will not cite here in full, our youthful poet comments on the fact that "nothing is a dead loss" and there "is always something to gain from any past," yet is it not strange "that this residue should be the source of all the pain, as if love needs a further hurt?" He goes on to say that it is as if "a shell held to our ears was all the ocean's roar we knew," and relates this image of the shell held to one's ears to the experience of holding a telephone receiver in one's hands and sensing that what is being said and heard are somehow wrong, and that, in any event, "the success of love is more than good connections." No doubt, there's a double meaning here to the phrase "good connections," for the poet was rather preoccupied at the time with issues of social class and envious of other students who, in fact, had "good connections."

The silent treatment and the hurts of love

In a sense, there is nothing very remarkable about a high school student writing poems about problems in communication, in speaking, hearing, and understanding what is being said and not said. After all, such problems in communication are commonly discussed and lamented during one's adolescent years. These problems may center around one or the other parent, a sibling, a friend, a teacher, a work associate, and so forth. Nor is it uncommon for those who are struggling with such issues to write about them in poems, in diary entries, in internet chat rooms, blogs, etc. What seems more remarkable to me is that I set aside this issue of problems in communication, particularly the observation that "our silence also kills," for thirty-five years when, rather unexpectedly, it resurfaced.

To the best of my recollection, it resurfaced as a result of a newly discovered interest of mine, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, in the issue of child abuse. I chose the topic of child abuse for my presidential address at the 1992 annual meeting of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion (Capps 1992). At the time, there was considerable interest among psychologists and sociologists of religion in the question whether Christian parents are especially prone to abuse

their children physically. As there were many research studies on the subject of the relationship between religion and physical abuse of children, I felt it would be useful to focus, instead, on the mental and emotional abuse to which children are subjected by the promulgation of religious doctrines and concepts that make them anxious or cause them to worry about the future. I thought specifically of one of my church school teachers who informed our class one Sunday that the world was going to end that very year. This was a very disturbing idea for us children, yet, as I recall, it was also an exciting idea because it meant that I would soon meet my Lord and Savior face-to-face. So when our teacher informed us that he had miscalculated the date, I experienced a mixture of relief and regret. Even so, the idea that the world was about to end was disorienting, as it stood in opposition to the atmosphere that prevailed in school, where teachers were emphasizing the importance of preparing ourselves for the future.

As I was regularly teaching a course on shame in the late 1980s and early 1990s, it was natural for me to refer students to an article I had written several years earlier on Augustine's *Confessions* in which I noted that shame was a prevalent theme in the autobiography (Capps 1983). But because I was now getting into the issue of child abuse, I began to point out the emotional connection between Augustine's preoccupation with shame issues and the fact that he was the victim of child abuse. Not only did his teachers beat him when he was young but when he complained to his parents about the treatment he was receiving from his teachers they merely laughed, despite their wish that "no harm would befall me"; and when the beatings prompted him to break "the knots that tied my tongue" and pray to God, God "did not hear me" (Augustine 1960, pp. 51–52).

I was also interested in the fact that parents who were abused as children inflict similar abuse on their own children, often on the basis of the claim that the harsh discipline they received toughened them up and made them better persons as a result. So I wrote a new article in which I focused on the relationship between Augustine and his son Adeodatus (Capps 1990b, pp. 69–92). The very fact that Augustine had a son was a matter of shame for him, for Adeodatus was the product of an illicit sexual relationship. He says that Adeodatus "was born of me in the flesh out of my sin" and notes that as his son got older, "In that boy I owned nothing but the sin" (p. 214). While this was his way of saying that he could not take credit for the way Adeodatus had matured, he implies that he was unable to view the boy as his very own son.

Although the first half of the article was concerned with Augustine's own experiences of shame and his tendency to subject them to self-reproach, the second half focused on the death of his mother Monica and on the fact that Augustine and his friends silenced his son Adeodatus when the boy began to wail in lamentation over the bier of his dead grandmother. Augustine's friend Evodius successfully drowned out his wailing by leading the assembled group in the singing of a psalm. Augustine admitted to feelings similar to those of his son and confesses that although he was able to control his desire to burst out in lamentation he did succumb to the flow of tears for a small part of an hour. But he views this as an emotional weakness for which his readers would undoubtedly want to upbraid him (p. 226).

I was concerned in the article with the fact that Adeodatus was not allowed to express his emotions. Noting that the silencing of Adeodatus is the final episode in the narrative, I suggested that the tragedy of human life is captured in this scene: "As the cries of Adeodatus are muffled, and the voice of Evodius gains strength and resonance, surely one feels that something is terribly wrong with this world, that this scene no doubt discloses some deep flaw in the universe itself. . . Yes, the dying of Monica was sad and worthy of grief, but tragic was the rebuke and silencing of Adeodatus" (p. 86).

The article goes on to discuss "the textual silencing of Adeodatus" who, after Monica's death, accompanied his father to his father's boyhood home in Thagaste in Northern Africa and died three years later, at the age of sixteen, of unknown causes. I noted that Augustine

was under no obligation to include the death of Adeodatus in his account of his spiritual journey, but its omission suggests that the shame Augustine felt for having fathered an illegitimate son "produces an unbridgeable chasm between author and reader, and the author remains isolated from others—sympathetic readers—who want to draw close to him and share the pain they suspect he feels, somewhere deep in the storehouse of his memory" (p. 92). I concluded the article with this ironic observation:

> The story that began with the cries of a young boy in pain—from being beaten by teachers—ends with the cries of another boy who was experiencing another kind of pain, grief over the loss of his grandmother. In both instances, the adults turned a deaf ear, and refused to hear their cries. Ironically, the first boy is numbered, at the end, among the adults who will not hear, apparently because he has learned to muffle the cries of the child within himself. As he heard the cries of his own son, "something childish in me … was slipping forth in tears" but "it was checked by a youthful voice, my heart's own voice … and it grew silent" (p. 92).

Themes that were present in the sermon and poems presented above reappear here—of silence and silencing, of tragedy and the flaw that it both reveals and embodies, and the miscommunication between persons who are important to one another.

But the full force of the issue of silence and silencing, and why it evoked the indictment that "silence also kills" in the sermon, occurred when I began to read Alice Miller's *Breaking Down the Wall of Silence* (Miller 1991) and encountered her account of her own experience of "the wall of silence" when she was a child. In chapter 2, "Out of the Prison of Confusion," she tells how her mother would refuse to speak with her for days at a time, that this was her mother's way of punishing her: "As far as she was concerned, her behavior was justifiable punishment for my wrongdoing. She was, as they say, 'teaching me a lesson'" (p. 19). When Alice asked for some explanation which might then lead to an apology and reconciliation, her mother refused to be drawn into such a conversation. The implicit message was that if she did not know why she was being punished, this meant that her conscience was defective because it should tell her that she has done something wrong and deserves to be punished. To protect her love for her mother, she fell in with this way of thinking and accepted the idea that "it had to be my wickedness that was to blame when mother didn't speak to me, when she refused to answer my questions and ignored my pleas for clarification, when she avoided the slightest eye contact with me and returned my love with coldness" (p. 20).

Miller adds that the memory of the isolation of those times, the loneliness of that child as it desperately searched for explanations of the punishment that was being meted out to it, remained completely repressed in her for almost sixty years. As a result, "I betrayed that little girl, who wanted above all to comprehend her mother's irrationality in order to finally be able to alter her fate by bringing her mother, the mother she needed, to speak" (p. 20). Thus, her book was written to show why the truth about our childhood is something we should not forego, either as individuals or as a society. This child, she writes, "waits for us to summon the courage to hear its voice. It wants to be protected and understood, and it wants us to free it from its isolation, loneliness, and speechlessness" (p. 3). She adds, however, that this child who has waited so long for our attention not only has needs to be fulfilled but also "has a gift for us, a gift that we desperately need if we truly want to live, a gift that cannot be purchased and that the child in us alone can bestow." This "is the gift of truth, which can free us from the prison of destructive opinions and conventional lies" (p. 3).

Reading Miller's account of her mother's silence put me in touch with my own experiences of my mother's use of the silent treatment as a way of communicating her displeasure over things I had said and done. But there was also a difference: Miller emphasizes the fact that for

many years she had no brothers and sisters and that her father was rarely at home and when he was, he never offered his protection. Thus, her mother's refusal to talk with her meant that there was an ominous silence throughout the house for several days.

My situation was different: I grew up with three brothers, and my father came home from work every evening. So I was not as utterly alone in the sense that Alice Miller was. But there is also a sense in which one's loneliness can be exacerbated when one's mother has friendly words for the others but refuses to speak to oneself. No wonder I found myself embracing David Riesman's image of "the lonely crowd" in the sermon that ended with the declaration that "our silence also kills." Miller helped me to own my experience of being the object of the silent treatment of the person I loved, but she also helped me to see that being silenced—of being reluctant or unable to speak to anyone when one is not being spoken to by someone—is a predictable effect of being the subject of the silent treatment. In other words, the silence of one begets the silence of the other.

But this is not all that Alice Miller did for me: Ten years later I discovered her book *The Truth Will Set You Free* (Miller 2001) in a local bookstore and as I read through the table of contents I came upon the chapter titled "The Silence of the Church." I turned to the chapter and read of her attempts to interest the Roman Catholic hierarchy in the problem of the abuse of children at the hands of Christian parents, teachers, and clergy. She notes, however, that her efforts evoked only "evasive silence" (p. 91). But then, in the concluding paragraphs of the chapter, she referred to me and, more specifically, to my reflections on St. Augustine's "destructive attitude toward his son," reflections that, in her view, "show that one can remain a person of the church and still overcome emotional blindness" (p. 92).[4] I appreciated the fact that her kind words occurred in a chapter on silence. But more important for me was her emphasis on the liberating power of truth, especially the truth that only the child within us can bestow: The poet who wrote the sonnets presented here was no longer a child, but he was trying to live in the spirit of love (as the preacher put it) while also coming to terms with its capacity to hurt. And one thing he knew to be true is the fact that "the success of love is more than good connections."[5]

The will to believe and the looking forward to tomorrow

A decade or so before the sermon was delivered and the poems were written, this same boy had this to say about a season that others have tended to disparage:

Winter

Winter is a joyful season.
It is joyful—there's a reason.
Ice and snow and outdoor fun
Cozy nights when play is done.
Each day more fun than all the rest.
I know—for this day is the best.
But Mother now has called us in.
I wish tomorrow would begin.

[4] Miller is referring here to chapter 2 of my *The Child's Song* (Capps 1995), "Augustine: The Vicious Cycle of Child Abuse," which is a revised version of Capps (1990b).

[5] I learned later that I was writing these paragraphs on Alice Miller four or five days before her death on April 14, 2010 (Grimes 2010).

In this much younger boy's poetic world, Mother calls to him and he responds. No ambiguities, no miscommunication. Moreover, each succeeding day is better than the day before.

It would easy for us to say that he is in for a rude awakening, that there will come a day when the anticipated tomorrow is worse—much worse—than today, which is already bad enough. But why should we assume that he is utterly naïve when, more likely, he is a boy with an irrepressible will to believe? (James 1956). In this regard, it seems that he has been the older boy's mentor, especially in the general tone of the Youth Sunday sermon, and he teaches me now with his simple desire for tomorrow to begin. So perhaps the three of us—all together now—may be forgiven for our need to ascend the stage and grasp the straw of speech ourselves, lest the tragic flaw should be for us a silence unto death.

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