



# Bonaventure's Blind Spot

*What some Poor Clare sisters taught me about silence*

**William Crozier**

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## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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1. How does silence manifest in your life, and is it governed by love or fear, or another emotion?

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2. Bonaventure relies on heavily gendered assumptions in his writing. When reading the spiritual masters and early writings of the Church, how might contemporary Catholics grapple with this blatant sexism? How should we engage critically with the spiritual authority of these texts?

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3. Some might argue that strict silence was historically imposed upon men in early monastic movements as well. In what ways does this defense fail to account for the systemic, marginalized position women have historically occupied within the Church? How should we respond to similar arguments of "fairness"?

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4. Bonaventure's attitude echoes 1 Timothy 2:11-12: "Let a woman learn in silence with all submissiveness. I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over men; she is to keep silent." This passage has long served as a scriptural basis for limiting women's speech in the Church. How do you interpret this teaching today, and how can it be contextualized or challenged by other scriptural passages?

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5. As a corrective to Bonaventure's rigid rules, the Poor Clares propose that silence should be governed by properly ordered love: "Love—and love alone—knows when to be silent and when to speak." Can you recall a moment in your own life or community when love demanded speaking up or when love required silence?

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6. One sister observes, "Silence is the one thing common to all the various scandals that have shaken the Church recently.... Silence can and does destroy lives." How can we distinguish between holy, contemplative silence and the toxic silence of complicity? How do these silences appear, in the past or present, in your faith community?

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7. The article notes that Poor Clares have "long struggled to get access to the same level of formation and education as their friar counterparts." Moving beyond simply listening to women, what concrete, structural steps could the Church take to ensure women are recognized and utilized as authoritative teachers and formators, rather than mere subjects of instruction? How has this work progressed, or not, since the Synod on Synodality?

## SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING:

"Debating Women's Ordination," March 19, 2026: <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/baumann-women-ordination-responses-letters-deacons-justice>  
Claudia Avila Cosnahan, "Authority, Participation, and Women," April 3, 2022: <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/authority-participation-and-women>  
Joseph Phillip Amar, "Women Are Proclaiming the Word," September 2020: <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/women-are-proclaiming-word>  
Mary Daly, "After the Death of God the Father," March 12, 1971: <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/after-death-god-father>