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What Canst Thou Say?

Friends • Mystical Experience • Contemplative Practice

*You will say, Christ saith this, and the apostles say this: but what canst thou say?
Art thou a child of Light and hast thou walked in the Light, and what thou speakest,
is it inwardly from God? —George Fox*

Evil

A Painfully Honest Subconscious

Lillian Heldreth

Something happened last week that seems to fit with the ideas of evil and of divine intervention, although you could also perceive it as the activity of a painfully honest subconscious.

I was much disturbed by the shooting in Charleston, South Carolina—that 21-year-old kid who gunned down nine people, including their pastor, during prayer meeting—after they'd welcomed him and he'd sat with them for an hour. He murdered them while spewing out horrible racial hatred.

"That's truly evil!" I said. "That's evil if ever I saw it!"

I went out and prayed for the survivors and the families of those murdered people. I've prayed for them almost every day since.

And then I learned a day or so later that the relatives of the martyred nine had, in court, forgiven the killer and prayed for his repentance.

How could they ever do that? I wondered. I was hoping for the existence of hell, so he could go there, although I thought death was too light a penalty. He should instead do long, long incarceration in a not-so-nice facility. Trouble is, he'd probably spread his poison there.

Forgive him? His sin, in my opinion, was unforgivable. (And it may be, according to scripture, if blaspheming the Holy Spirit is indeed the "unforgivable sin.") Gunning down those people in the middle of Prayer Meeting would certainly be blaspheming the Holy Spirit, for they indeed had the Spirit.

This was still troubling my mind when I went to bed on Friday night. Saturday morning was our Summer Ceremonies, so I had to get up and go. And indeed, I got up and went.

Now and then someone, usually one of the men, gets up and speaks early in the ceremonies, before pipes are smoked, but after the water prayer. The young woman who usually prays for the water that's passed around to open ceremonies wasn't there, so I was asked to do it.

I stood, spoke about the sacredness of water, and made the simple Ojibwe prayer to the four directions, sun, Earth our Mother, and Most Kind Great Spirit. My heart lifted with the words honoring all creation. Then I carried the water around the circle.

When that was over, and people were chatting before whatever came next, I spoke, as is an elder's privilege. I told of my worried thoughts since learning of Wednesday's tragedy, and I took some tobacco in my hand.

"Here is *asemaa*," I said, "for what I am about to say."

"Some dreams are meant to be told." (There's a proscription against telling dreams, as that gives away their power. But the power in this dream was meant to be given.)

"This morning, just before I awoke, I had a dream, a dream that told me about myself. Remember that I thought

From the Editors:

In his writing, George Fox referred to evil as a power of the devil, as a description of human choices, and as a form of possession that was healed by the Lord. Evil seems to be the craving for power above all else. At its core is a fear of helplessness and a lack of trust in the goodwill of others, including God. This creates a need to be one's own god. It is a deep severance of the one embracing evil from true relationship—even from their own self, their inner Light.

Our authors speak to these conditions. Additional offerings are on the web at <whatcanstthousay.org>.

— Jan Mullen and Michael Resman

What Canst Thou Say? (WCTS) is an independent publication cooperatively produced by Friends with an interest in mystical experience and contemplative practice. It is published in August, November, February, and May. The editorial and production team is Muriel Dimock, Lissa Field, Mariellen Gilpin, Judy Lumb, Grayce Mesner, Rhonda Pfaltzgraff-Carlson, Mike Resman, Earl Smith, and Eleanor Warnock.

Tell us your stories! **WCTS** is a worship-sharing group in print. We hope to help Friends be tender and open to the Spirit. Articles that best communicate to our readers focus on specific events and are written in the first person. We welcome submissions of articles less than 1500 words and artwork suitable for black and white reproduction.

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Listening at St. Julian's Window

Maurine Pyle

*Lately all I do all day long is pray.
I don't mean to, but that is what I do.
A task is begun and then set aside
when God comes over me like a silken mantle saying,
"Come away with me for a while."
My prayers can be intentional when a friend drops by
or calls to ask me to pray or a family member is in
trouble and needs attention.
But mostly, like St. Julian, I sit at my window alone
and wait for a call to pray.*

Maurine Pyle is known as the Quaker Hobo, as she does not own a car and accepts rides from friends and strangers alike, listening to their stories along the way. Her home is in Southern Illinois, and she often roams around the world of Friends answering that of God in everyone.

This poem is offered as an antidote to the theme of evil. It is lovely and speaks so well to our condition that it couldn't be ignored. —Editors

I could under no circumstances forgive the man who killed those nine people, even though their loved ones could do it.

"In my dream, someone very wealthy had moved into a place below our home on the mountain in West Virginia. And they had bulldozed themselves a nice little outlook place, totally covering and blocking our road to our house. In my dream, we didn't have guaranteed access, although in reality, it's a county road.

"I went to this rich person's place, which must have been a sort of camp, for no one was there. As I looked around, I became totally furious with him. I screamed and cursed him. I shouted that I hated him, and I threw

a large rock through his window, as I declared that I wanted nothing so much as to kill him, to see him dead.

"I must have been thrashing and crying out in my sleep, because my husband woke me up at that point. I got up, got my coffee, and went out to make my prayers. And it came to me as I prayed, that I had been shown that I, too, was capable of murderous anger, without mercy.

And then I saw that I, too, could forgive that young man."

Lillian Heldreth is a former member of Urbana-Champaign Friends Meeting, but now worships after the manner of the Anishinaabe (Ojibwe). She would rather plant flowers or hike with the kids than houseclean.

The Shadow in Action

Susan C. Hefte

*My reptilian brain **leaps** into action:
quick as a frog's darting tongue
as a lizard's leap
as the uncoiling of a snake.*

*It lies in wait for the insult, the offense:
then **flashes**
like lightning, the crack of a whip,
bringing a sharp intake of breath.*

*It **reacts** without thinking or labor,
without consideration of consequence;
protective at its core,
it takes flight and nails its prey.*

*I step back, aghast at my unconscious attack,
no pity, no shame, no analysis.
Just instant reflex:
the knee-jerk response leaping into action
as my cerebral cortex
slowly catches up, embarrassed
and filled with remorse.*

*While my reptilian brain is incorrigible,
my heart-mind ponders interventions.*

The Shadow Knows

Susan C. Hefte

I have been blessed to be involved in pro-active ways with many fine people for most of my adult life, friendships continuing to be strong today that began almost fifty years ago—surely they don't just put up with me...but...I know about my sins of commission and omission. I know what a cynic I have become as I have witnessed so much that is corrupt and shameful in our political, corporate, and social bodies. I know how I can swing from certain clarity that we are One With the Divine (How could it be other than that?) to a bleak questioning of all that I have realized through my own “experimental” development. Perhaps it is that questioning that demands a reaffirmation of my core beliefs, that calls me to go deeper into them.

I know about my reptilian brain's willingness to hold forth in ways quite uncomely. I know what happens when my primitive self screams for survival. The fight, flight, or freeze impulses from the reptile that lives at the base of my skull is poised and ready when I am overwhelmed. I can be loud, demanding, and insensitive. My refusal to give up my position, or when I behave poorly, can make no sense to me in retrospect. I can say things that are mean or have a tone that pushes others away. Most dismaying is when I have been inappropriate with my family, when I have allowed my fear to override my love. I ask forgiveness, when my frontal cortex finally gets back into some semblance of control...but...once said, once done...it is hard for me to forgive myself for the pain I may have caused.

Susan C. Hefte is a convinced Quaker, member of the St. Petersburg Friends Meeting, and believer that our human shadows remind us of what we are here to learn as spiritual beings.

A Contemporary Mysticism

Michael Resman

I know nothing of the Devil. In my spiritual travels, I have encountered only good. There is no need for a devil. The vagaries of the natural world and human being's potential for evil are adequate to account for bad things happening.

The God I know is all powerful. Nothing can happen without God's knowledge or against God's will. To believe that there is some force causing things to happen that God can't control is to believe in a small God. One who is not all powerful. One who could not have created the universe, and couldn't possibly reach into the lives of an individual.

I reject those notions. God is all powerful, all knowing, present everywhere and always. Nothing happens that God does not know about and allows to happen.

To believe in the Devil is to believe in a schizophrenic God who allows a subordinate to do bad things. God is either in charge, or he/she isn't. You have to make up your mind.

What a magnificent world we live in. The life cycle of a carrot is a miracle. How can such a tiny seed send its roots and stem in the right directions? And turn into food, so many times larger? A hillside painted with fall leaves can leave us breathless with its beauty. Babies' peaceful sleep shows hints of an angelic presence.

What an awful world God made. The natural world drowns, burns, crushes the innocent. People add their measures of evil and indifference and horror ensues.

I frequently say a prayer of thanks for the opportunity to live in such a magnificent, awful world. I see this as the celestial bargain. I'm given my freedom to live as I wish on this earth. In return, my life is subject to the natural law. I can choose to grab all I can, or live as God wishes—in service to others.

Michael Resman is Clerk of Rochester, Minnesota, Friends Meeting. This is an excerpt of his book, A Contemporary Mysticism. RochesterMN:Zumbro River Press LLC (available on Amazon.com).

POWER

Anne Madora Scherer

Want more! Want more! Give it to me! I said give it to me! Give all of you to me.

I will hunt you down; stalk you by day as a shadow, and by night in your dreams.

*You can't FIGHT me...you will be defeated.
(Hah)*

Want more! Want more! Give it to me! Oh my, look, look at those pretty things on your shelf.

*May I, could I have them for myself?
To add to my wealth of possessions!*

And you, hah! You are dispensable, quite laughable, really. They laugh at you.

*But, see how they look at me higher and mightier...
Stronger than you will ever be,
you pathetic cripple!
(Hah)*

*Oh, how nice it would be to have this, that, to have just another delectable taste, another, another, oh please.
Mmmmm...*

Want more! Want more! Give it to me! I said give it to me!

*The Gargoyle of Power, swathed in a trench coat, saunters about like a stalker coveting all zones of safety
secrecies
sanctity
and has a rapacious desire to destroy sanity.*

*Strutting his excesses proudly and foaming at the mouth profusely spewing,
Want more! Want more! Give it to me! I said Give it to me!*

Anne Scherer is a poet, artist and writer who is a friend of Rochester Friends Meeting, Minnesota. She writes for the *Rochester Women* magazine.

A Surplus of Malevolence?

Marcia Z. Nelson

In a theology class I recently took at the Earlham School of Religion, a Quaker seminary, we studied how the great theologians within Christianity have thought about evil. We had our class discussion one day after the 70th anniversary of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima, which killed 80,000 people immediately and ultimately perhaps twice as many. The observation plane that took pictures of the devastation was later called Necessary Evil.

The nuclear clouds that arose over Hiroshima and Nagasaki shadowed much more than those two destroyed cities. They were a specter—a demon?—that fueled the Cold War of four subsequent decades. Today the nuclear nightmare helps drive discussions about signing an arms treaty with Iran, the country that has called America “the Great Satan.” Satan is the traditional religious name for the incarnation of evil. In our more secular contemporary American culture, we appear to live in a Satan-free zone.

Or do we? The evening of our class discussion I was inexplicably drawn to the live streaming on the Internet of the sentencing of James Holmes, who shot 12 people to death and injured 70 others during a midnight screening of a Batman movie in Aurora, Colorado, in summer 2012. Hands in his pockets, Holmes, who is 27, stood as a judge read a jury’s decision: 24 sentences of life imprisonment without parole for 12 murders after deliberation and with extreme indifference. When he committed the murders, Holmes had his hair dyed a garish red to resemble the Joker, Batman’s evil nemesis.

Watching this courtroom scene unfold brought me back to times I’ve been in courtrooms as a journalist

writing about murder trials. I have also been at crime scenes. I saw the aftermath of a fatal shooting. A man was killed by his schizophrenic son; the victim’s body lay in a driveway as the younger man barricaded himself in a home before he was ultimately apprehended.

Witness has legal meaning and it has moral meaning. Have I witnessed evil? Is the devil incarnate in some way today, whispering tempting suggestions to those somehow inclined, or selected, to hear?

I’d love a guide like Dante’s Virgil, showing me who did what and how they got to which circle of hell, especially when I can think of a few contemporary candidates for some of the deeper circles of torment. Having been raised Catholic, I did learn about the devil in stories I heard in girlhood. Now in late adulthood, I’m wrestling with the great question of theodicy: does God permit evil? If not, what accounts for lethal bombs, mass murders with extreme indifference, and fresh daily instances of enormity that assault bodies, sensibilities, and shared planetary space?

My reference to Dante’s *Inferno* is deliberate. In some sense, I have indeed come to believe in the devil again. Not literally, but figuratively: the devil is a metaphor for what my theology textbook calls “a malevolent surplus of experience.” To me that phrase recaptures the strict meaning of the word enormity: the extreme scale or seriousness of something morally wrong. Some cultures mean that and simply use the term “devil” to express the sense and fear that evil is really big and really bad, much more than a willed bad choice to pull a trigger in a theater or fly an airplane into a building. A capacious, resonant, and symbolic term like “devil” or “darkness” can point to the entire context

in which a terrible individual choice is made. “The devil” becomes my shorthand for a corrupted, fallen system that contains a lot of interdependent and moving parts.

As I studied what the great Christian thinkers said about evil, I found myself wanting more from the early Quakers (or any Quakers, for that matter). At the next meeting for worship I was given a recollection of the famous passage from Fox’s Journal: “I saw, also, that there was an ocean of darkness and death; but an infinite ocean of light and love, which flowed over the ocean of darkness. In that also I saw the infinite love of God, and I had great openings.”

This ocean of light and love is somehow bigger than the enormity that it does not deny, but does cover. The ocean of darkness and death can feel cold and endless when one bobs in it, contemplating genocide, structural evil, or profound individual wrong. That ocean is big enough to drown in, but Fox makes clear that there is an even greater one. I picture not an ocean but light, and am again reminded of Dante, but this time the poet is in Paradise, seeing in his final vision “the Love that moves the sun and the other stars.”

I’m not much of a mystic, and I’m a Midwesterner to boot, so I don’t have very many mental snapshots of the ocean in the photo album of my mind’s eye. But I happened to see the Atlantic Ocean twice this year, once in warm Puerto Rico and again more recently in Maine. Rocky shores edged blue blue water, deep and visually endless. I felt small in space and time, thinking about people before me looking out. If evil is that vast, no wonder it has claimed so many victims. If love is so boundless, it will carry us beyond imagining.

Marcia Z. Nelson is a member of Downers Grove (Illinois) Monthly Meeting.

WHY?

Robinson Lapp

On a very cold, icy March morning during World War II, there occurred a terrible tragedy at a busy intersection near Buffalo, NY. A police-commissioned crossing guard allowed three kids to start across the intersection in front of an out of control, skidding gasoline truck whose driver had been going too fast when approaching a stale green light. Two of the children were critically injured. The third was squashed beyond recognition. The dead boy was my brother, with whom I had been talking seconds before.

Both the Town-paid crossing guard and the Richfield truck driver had been negligent. Even in those days, this was a lawsuit waiting to happen. But the gravity of what occurred next did not really sink into my soul for decades. A church member asked my father whether we would be suing the two parties and their employers. My father answered in such a low key fashion that I really thought nothing of it. In fact, it made sense to an almost-ten-year-old. My father said, “No, that truck driver has a family for which he is the breadwinner, and he already feels terrible. And, the crossing guard was an older man, actually deaf, who was the only one the Town could hire, given the war effort. No, we don’t need to hurt them more than they already are. A law suit will not bring Stuart back.”

Now fast forward to one Sunday morning in October, not long after 9/11, 2001, a second day that would live in infamy. I awoke bleeding anally for the second time in less than six months. I groaned in denial, made Jan an omelet, and reluctantly headed for the hospital. Upon being admitted to St. Joseph I learned that my choices were to allow removal of my entire colon or to die. Easy choice...I thought.

I chose the surgery, and almost died anyway. The surgery wasn’t until Wednesday. It took several hours. On Friday the surgeon left town for four days. But by the following Monday it was clear something was terribly wrong. There was a blockage. I was barely conscious by day’s end. Medical Residents who had been attending during my surgeon’s absence couldn’t figure it out, so did nothing.

On Tuesday the surgeon returned, poked around, and said he’d re-operate the next morning. Somehow the first surgery had been a major botch by either the surgeon or a resident. There was an internal disconnect in the plumbing that led, among other things, to an abdominal infection. I nearly died. When I finally regained consciousness, my first sensation was that I was alive! I would make it.

I very deliberately and self-consciously made a walk with God my highest life priority no matter how it required me to fly in the face of custom and culture. I felt dedicated to seeking what is right, what God wants, no matter the cost.

While I was still in that hospital bed a friend asked whether I would sue the surgeon. That seemed a very foreign thought. Making no connection at all to my father’s response the day after my brother had been killed, I said, “All I want to do is live. If I do, the surgery will have been a success and I will be grateful for the skill of my surgeon. If I die, my family will have to figure out what they think is the right thing to do.” The surgeon was in pain over the mishap and his skill had given him the ability to correct the problem. I had no desire to seek to diminish him.

The curious circumstantial similarity between my father’s and my

responses to human failure has given rise to my pondering the question of right and wrong. Do we do what is culturally acceptable, or is there an absolute divine imperative that transcends human perspective? Actually, I think the answer is “Both.” But why did my father buck the tide and do the merciful thing? Why did I?

I don’t know why my father did what he did, but I think I know why I did what I did. I acted out of a sense of commitment that began with my call, at 16, to ministry and continued in my ordination. When I was 24, on a hot June Sunday in a crowded Methodist Church in Western New York, I knelt in front of a Bishop, and was ordained a Traveling Elder, the most sacred Methodist ministerial commission. Holding an RSV Bible I still have, my right hand gingerly touched Isaiah’s words, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Here I am! Send me.” This verse still articulates my burning sense that I very deliberately and self-consciously made a walk with God my highest life priority no matter how it required me to fly in the face of custom and culture. I felt dedicated to seeking what is right, what God wants, no matter the cost.

And how does one know what God wants? While we have the sacrificial life of Jesus as a formidable indicator, there is a brief passage in Deuteronomy that may say it for all people of the earth. “...I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse; therefore choose life, that you and your descendants may live, loving the Lord your God...” I was in my early 50’s when I preached a sermon inspired by this snippet. It has ever since illuminated my sense of God’s call for justice and mercy in all of one’s decisions. What gives life is right. What takes life away is wrong. Parenthetically, the naturalness of physical death is the key to human finitude.

So, with an ordained sense that flying in the face of God is not an option, and a moral sense that we are called to embrace life for all of God's people, I did what I did.

As I said, I do not know why my father behaved as he did. But realizing that he did something unusual and brave has given me a fresh appreciation of the father who often seemed to live in a world that was foreign to me, and to whom, therefore, I did not always feel close. I was uncomfortable with his theology, which I thought to be simplistic and self-serving. I didn't enjoy fishing or his other recreational pursuits, in which he often insisted that I participate. I didn't choose the career path that he dreamed for me. I was 26 when he died at 51, meaning that we did not have much of each other's adulthoods in which to come to respectful terms.

But recently when I made the connection between his very brave and loving stand in face of his second son's death, and my decision about the destiny of a surgeon's life, I was astounded. My father was, in his core, a good and admirable guy. This insight has led to an affirming review of the many decisions he had to make in a very difficult time in American history, a window punctuated by two World Wars and the Great Depression. He, too, was vigilant in his distinguishing between right and wrong.

Must be he heard a still, small voice, far, far away.

Robinson Lapp is an ordained United Church of Christ Minister. His ministry has been in new community development, racial integration in housing, and in development of low income housing, recently for Hispanic and African immigrants.

Immersed in Prayer ***The Next WCTS Book***

Are you living a life of prayer?

Help support others' lives of prayer.

What Canst Thou Say is gathering stories from prayer lives around the world for a book entitled "Immersed in Prayer." We hope to enrich the lives of others who are reaching to God through prayer. Submissions are invited focusing on one of the following queries. Multiple submissions are welcome.

If you practice perpetual prayer, how did you learn it and what do you do?

What prompted you to decide to undertake a life of prayer?

What happens when you pray?

Whom or what do you encounter when you pray? What is their essence?

How would you describe the relationship you have with the one you encounter?

To what extent is it you or God that controls what happens while you pray?

Do you have nicknames for yourself or the Other?

How have your prayers changed over time?

What changes has prayer produced in you?

What part does prayer play in your life? What has it led you to do?

What does your prayer do for the world—physically, emotionally, or spiritually?

What are some of the signs of growth you notice in your prayer life?

What has helped grow your prayer life?

What impediments to prayer have you experienced?

What ways did you find to work-around your impediments to prayer?

What suggestions do you have for those seeking to live a life of prayer?

Submissions should be under 1,000 words of personal experience. Additional author guidelines can be found on the WCTS website at <whatcanstthousay.org>. Submissions will be accepted through March of 2016. This is an international invitation. Given the editor's limitations, translations into English are encouraged, but not required. Send submissions or requests for information to Michael Resman <resmanmh@aol.com>.

Brushes with Evil

Anonymous

I feel an inner turmoil when contemplating sharing my brushes with evil.

George Fox, in Epistle 131, warns to “take heed of printing anything more, than ye are required of the Lord God... there is danger of getting into careless words, out of seriousness, weightiness and savouriness.”

That Friend’s words speak to my condition. I feel there is a danger of some fascination with this dark energy, all the more need to listen to the Light and discern what is rightly to be said. I also feel what I believe is a natural aversion to giving any thought to evil, just as one would hold your breath when there are noxious fumes, or recoil at the thought of eating spoiled food. It feels unhealthy. I’m also aware that speaking about evil is considered anything from quaintly old-fashioned to courting danger. Yet we certainly live with evil of all sorts. Hopefully my experiences may be of use.

As a child, I had experience of this dark energy in the form of my grandmother, who lived with our family. She was mentally ill, and it manifested in many damaging ways, one of which was to molest me. I was very young, so my impressions are hazy, yet I feel there was something not-human about those encounters. Something impersonal and without emotion. I have a gut feeling about what it is like to be with someone “possessed.” I avoided her and, when she died, I struggled to put on the appropriate appearance of mourning, making myself shed tears, but I was deeply relieved.

Later I worked in a mid-sized city at a mental health facility. The administrator showed no capacity for compassion for his staff or patients. He seemed to be motivated purely by the gaining of power. He tried to pump me for information about a facility I had

visited. I later found out that he was on the board of a competing facility. I had been around many administrators, but this man gave me the distinct feeling of a dangerous impersonality and lack of feeling and created in me a deep apprehension that made me avoid him.

Once I attended a speech by a woman whose son had died in the Iraq war, and who was protesting against war. The local politician, who was pro-war, had gathered a cadre of young people to counter-protest. They hooted and harassed the speaker, so that she couldn’t be heard. I went to one young woman and stood in front of her silently. She stared back at me with a look that was cold, hateful and sneering. It felt soulless and chilling.

I have had several encounters which have stood out as different than all others, and distinctly about evil as a particular kind of dark energy. They have made a deep impression on me, opening my mind to accepting that evil is very real.

Over the course of decades of working at different facilities, with children and adults, I have had several encounters which have stood out as different than all others, and distinctly about evil as a particular kind of dark energy. They have made a deep impression on me, opening my mind to accepting that evil is very real. There is a quality that is different than a person choosing to do wrong; it is a real spiritual malevolence.

In each instance a person, in exploring a terrifying trauma, has become aware of a presence of a dark energy. There seems to be a point of terror and powerlessness, a trauma, which had provided an opening for such an energy to attach itself, as if to offer a powerful ally. Holding myself and my client in the Light, I have

guided my clients to have an internal dialog, and prompted the client to ask this entity, “What is it you want for me?” The answers have been stunningly similar: “I want you to die and go to hell.” My initial reactions have been wariness, then a determination to fight this creature, saying, “No way will you harm this person!” But I have quickly realized that one doesn’t tangle with this energy on your own. The resolution has been the same for each person: when the person tells it that it is not wanted, and sends it to the Light, or God, or the Source, depending on their personal belief system, the malevolent energy leaves, and the person feels immense relief. Such experiences have occurred with people who are of many different beliefs as well as atheist, of different ages and lifestyles.

I am clear that this dark energy is not a real power. Its only hold on the person is through perpetuating fear. This personal kind of evil seems to be opportunistic. It takes advantage of those who feel powerless and terrified.

My experiences have led me to certain beliefs about the nature of evil. I sense that evil is real, that it can be a conscious force; that it is, at times at least, sentient and always looking for ways to cause pain, fear and chaos; to separate people from God, and from their own inner Light. Some people align with it and commit horrendous acts of cruelty and violence. Others hold to their inner Light, even though the dark energy causes them unrest. One can detach from its grip through healing of trauma and restoration of that inner peace which comes from a restored relationship with God. I believe it is dangerous to try to combat evil on one’s own, but in giving it over to God, one may become free. I feel that these are modern, psychological experiences which reflect the truths written two millennia ago in the Bible about the nature of evil.

Here are some queries that I use to discern my own condition:

When confronted with pain, threat, attack, do I see myself as needing to be 'strong' and fight it on my own? Or do I ask for God's help to give me strength and discern how to respond?

When working for a better world, do I shoulder the ills of the world as a burden, feeling I am "fighting" for justice alone, or trust that I am one of many, in unity with God's design, and that I only need to do my part?

Do I live each day aware and grateful for the Inner Light which keeps me connected to God and to all others?

Education: the path from cocky ignorance to miserable uncertainty. —Mark Twain (Contributed by Brittany Koresch)

Book Review: Lydia: Child of Westphalia

Lydia: Child of Westphalia by Cherie Hopkins Dupuis. CreateSpace/Independent Publishing Platform. North Charleston, South Carolina, 2014. Reading level: ages 10-12. Reviewed by Mariellen Gilpin.

Lydia is eleven years old and lives in Westphalia, Missouri, in 1905. She is the granddaughter of German settlers, who came from a society that was orderly, clean, intelligent, frugal, and cultured. But they had little freedom of choice. In the New World they had to think for themselves, form a working community, and still hold onto the best values of their old society. Lydia wants to be a doctor, but girls don't grow up to be doctors. She has few friends at school because she always seems to know better than they do what they want and need. Dr. Bowles tells her she can learn a lot about doctoring by knowing how to look and listen. But Lydia often gets caught up in the fun of her own

cleverness. She has just killed a nest of baby rabbits she was trying to nurse—she gave them what she wanted them to have, not what they really needed. Grieving, Lydia prays for God's help to become who God intends her to be.

She has much to learn. Her teacher, Mr. Bode, starts a school newspaper. Lydia searches all over Westphalia for good stories, ironically passing by many fascinating people while complaining there isn't any news. She learns to look and listen when lightning strikes their farmhouse and her big brother is injured. The house must be rebuilt; her grandparents take the whole family into their home. Her whole family is in shock. But Lydia learns that Grandma thinks for herself; Grandma thinks women can do men's work and men can't do women's work. Grandma thinks bossiness can be good or bad: someone who wants everything her way and doesn't listen to others is the bad kind of bossy, and someone who is not afraid to lead in a crisis is the good kind. Lydia mostly doesn't know when she's the bad kind, and Grandma tells her when people don't think that being with Lydia is fun she probably is being the bad kind. "You can't choose being right over being kind," Grandma says.

We learn along with Lydia what it means to be kind instead of right, as she practices kindness on each family member in turn during Advent. She focuses on overlooking their warts and appreciating their strengths. She also has a chance to practice the good kind of bossiness, as she leads her classmates in providing first aid when a classmate has an accident. We celebrate with Lydia as she realizes her prayer is being answered—she is becoming who God intends her to be.

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February 2016

Vibes

Editor: Judy Lumb and Earl Smith

Nathanael asked him, "How do you come to know me?" Jesus replied, "I saw you under the fig tree." (John 1:48). When have you had the sense that a stranger on the bus could hear your pain, help you out of an inner quagmire? Or, are you the stranger who seems to attract Seekers to your side? Have you ever walked into a house and known joy lived there? Share your story about good vibes. What have you learned about them, and from them? What helps them grow within you?

Deadline: November 15, 2015

May 2016

The Gift of Rest

Editor: Earl Smith and Judy Lumb

See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. (Matthew 6:28). How do you find the right balance between work and rest, action and contemplation? What happened when you reduced your external commitments and spent more time in retirement? How have limits or limitations helped you to realize God's goodness? Tell us stories of balance and rest in your life.

Deadline: February 15, 2016

August 2016

Messages

Editor: Mariellen Gilpin

"When you get the same message from three different people, you might finally realize it's for you." Share your stories of receiving messages from the Divine. How did the message happen? What made you decide it was a message for you? What has seemed to be the purpose of such messages, in your experience? What made you decide to follow the guidance given? Did it change your life, temporarily, or permanently, or both? What was the nature of the change, or changes?

Deadline: May 15, 2016

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