

In the Shadows

On my early Monday morning bike ride, I was guided by the lights along the beach in place of the absence of the moon. As I rode along to the sounds of the waves crashing against the shore, there was no one or no traffic to interrupt my thoughts.

Along the way, I had one lone companion. He ran in front of me at times, beside me at other times and behind me at other times. My shadow side was my companion.

Noticing him keeping step with me, I began to think of a very interesting book I read recently titled, "Facing the Dragon: Confronting Personal and Spiritual Grandiosity" by Robert Moore. Robert Moore is professor of psychoanalysis, culture and spirituality at Chicago Theological Seminary.

He begins the preface by saying that "on September 11th, an ancient scourge of the human species came out of hiding once gain. The power of radical evil broke through our denial just as it did on December 7th, 1941." He goes on to indicate that the "increasing anxiety and chaos of our time has been fed by an arrogant and malignant secularist narcissism and nihilism that increasingly fosters arrogant fundamentalism in response. At this time in history, it is imperative that we realize that both kinds of arrogance are being fueled by compulsive intrusions of archetypal energy tantamount to possession states."

Later on, he indicates that "existential denial of the divine presence creates a demoniac alchemy that hijacks the sacred energies of the soul and twists them into destructive powers of hideous strength, powers of sexism, homophobia, all forms of political oppression, ritual violence and war, and the ecological destruction of our planet. These same grandiose energies fuel both corporate greed and religious fundamentalism. "

What is the antidote to this demoniac alchemy? He indicates that we must increase our spiritual and psychological awareness of the dragon and its implications in our lives and world.

In order to confront the dynamics of this human and pervasive evil, we must avoid certain traps. First of all, we must not be swayed by the New Age Movement which denies the reality and power of evil. Secondly, we must avoid the human tendency to find a human "other" to be used as a scapegoat to explain away the impact of evil in our lives. Thirdly, we must avoid sexism as a scapegoat as well. We must stop blaming our different genders for such dragons.

We must recognize the dynamics of evil. First of all, evil is real. Secondly, evil is felt most acutely in the power of denial in individual, family, and culture. Thirdly evil is deceptive in that it presents us with a false representation of reality. Fourthly, it disguises itself in forms that are innocent, good and often justifiable. Fifthly, because of the way it presents itself, we lose our ability to really discern on a deeper level and be more vigilant. Sixthly, evil begins to erode every thing it touches, becoming a form of idolatry in itself. Finally, it multiplies itself, generating hatred, sadism, oppression and destruction.

Decades ago, I remember reading Scott Peck's book, "People of the Lie." In it, he shows how scapegoating behavior can be very subtle and destructive. He also points out that intolerance to criticism can be excessive as well as projecting a public image of respectability and a stable lifestyle can camouflage hateful feelings and vengeful motives.

Maybe there is some truth in what C.S. Lewis says in "The Screwtape Letters." We all have a demon assigned to us to disrupt us and an angel to foil the attempts of the demon. We might joke about the concept but truth may prevail.

So, tomorrow morning when I get for my usual bike ride, I will spend a little more time thinking about my shadow and its impact on my life. And maybe, in my next column, I might seek more enlightenment from Robert Moore on how to face the dragon.