

Donna. Jas

Donna, you have made an exciting entry into the subject of evil, raised very provocative issues, caused a whole flood of responses in me. The subject of human evil is precisely fascinating because we do not really deal with it explicitly in our world anymore and yet it permeates our world - the violence, the racism and sexism, oppressions, abuse, war. I think the movie "Platoon" echoes your point that we have "separated ourselves from evil" when the narrator says, after the horror, the nightmare that was the subject of the film, that "the real enemy we fought was within us" (not an exact quote). It is the way of life in our culture to toss those parts of ourselves we fear and can't bear to face off onto some "other", then to differentiate ourselves from, distance ourselves from, and, finally, make war on, those others, all the while being completely unconscious of what we are doing. If Oliver Stone was saying we will never live in peace until we confront that enemy within, that is, until we accomplish a spiritual transformation, I completely agree. Sam Keen, in his book Faces of the Enemy, makes the same point. He details the process of enemy-making, from paranoia (or basic mistrust of the world) through projection to propaganda, the means by which we concretize the dehumanized image of the enemy. Sam says the heroes of the new age will be those men and women willing to enter the darkness of their own interiors, to meet what they most fear.

an artistic
attempt
to understand
the U.S.
role in Vietnam

This enemy-making process was beautifully exemplified in my area last fall by the huge furor over the local showing of the film "Hail, Mary", a film considered blasphemous by the pope and by many catholics in the Utica area. I was interested in the
(without, of course, seeing the movie)

editorials in our local "news"paper - they continued for weeks and one day a whole page was devoted to them, letters for and against. Here are statements from 2 of them. (Read 2 brief statements). On one side, the cool, rational voice of the educated, liberal, middle class man. On the other, the devout outrage of the nun for whom the Mother of us all had been insulted. Was there no healing possible here? No common ground whatsoever? What good was it doing anybody to be "right"? I came to see this fight as the fight of all the wounded brothers and sisters, sons and daughters, taking a pitiful satisfaction in the other person's badness - ignorance or blasphemy - not even testing the waters to see if reconciliation is possible.

that certainty against

defending which side you're on

of their assumptions

You are so right, Donna, about tolerance - that it requires an openness and a willingness to live with ambiguity that are very hard for us to manage - in fact they go against the whole way of life of control and denial and deception that characterize the system we live in, our rational enlightened system that replaced, (to our betterment?) that more imaginative world of bell processions, saints and dragons, holy grails, heaven and hell, angels and devils, when evil was at least real for people.

He compared our country to an alcoholic family

Robert Bly, the poet, points out that just a few years ago we elected a president we knew would lie to us, and no one is outraged, no massive protests, as one lie after another is uttered, no pointing out that the emperor has no clothes. Evil is institutionalized, it is banal, as Hannah Arendt observed; while we repress it, or knowledge of it, in ourselves, it more and more is embodied in our society - in the homelessness, joblessness, teen-age pregnancy and crime, homophobia, dysfunctional

he compared our country to an alcoholic family, the elephant in the living room, living denial

The elephant in the living room, living denial.

families, etc. And its as though we don't see it! (^{the connection} ^{yourself})

In the movie "Broadcast News" the character Aaron, in love with Jane who in turn has fallen for the William Hurt character, tries to get her to see that Hurt is a deceiver, a rotten apple. He says to her, (approximately) "Do you think the devil is going to have horns and a pointed tail?" (No, is the implication, he will be as charming and winsome ^{as x/y} as William Hurt!)

Which goes for evil within, too. The evil within is not easily recognizable, either, especially if we refuse to see it. I read a wonderful Jungian analysis of the Dracula legend recently - a ^{very} old legend that's a product of a similar mind as ^{W. H.} the bell procession springs from --but Dracula, who lives off of human vitality or blood, exists because no one believes he can be real - denial is the very source of his power. Dracula, too, is a potent image of evil for our time.

There is one point on which I would disagree with you, Donna, however. Carl Jung, you mention, worked to reintegrate the feminine, the earth and evil into human consciousness. You suggest that we have made some progress with reintegrating the feminine and with becoming more earth-centered, leaving us with the "harder to tackle" problem of evil. But, in fact, the monstrous evils we so deplore, of war and violence and oppression, and our own shortcomings as lovers, are due to our fear of the feminine and of nature. Evil is the separation ^{of nature from} of masculine from feminine, spirit from body, culture from nature, the "split condition" that Jung referred to. If we had even begun to come to grips with how greatly we fear the feminine and nature, including our own natural, instinctual, wanting, desiring selves, we'd be

making real progress against evil.

as I'm coming to understand it

The feminine is that very openness and ability to live with ambiguity that you rightly suggest is true tolerance. The feminine is that balancing of life and death, cyclicalality, changing, waxing and waning, spirit of eros that teaches us to let go of our obsession with achievement and certainty. Until we can reintegrate the feminine, within ourselves and within our society, our values and our institutions, we will never really "allow evil within our own souls". Evil will always be out there, away from us, and we will be having to make ourselves vulnerable against it.

I think your challenge to us to come to see evil as the "equal and opposite partner of good" is nothing less than a call to do some courageous loving, that is, to go within and become acquainted with our own shadows - that unruly chaos.

Your image of that solemn bell procession, undulating out of a dim and ancient past is a wonderful image for descending into our own darkness, like the descent of the goddess Ishtar, to consider not how we grow, but "how we rot ". Because we're not used to taking that darkness seriously, we like to live in the daylight of the rational 20th century mind.

And so the last thing I have to say is really an emphasis coming out of my own true response to your words. I agree passionately that we need to become acquainted with the evil within. It is the only way to love and to wisdom and to peace. But are we U-U's capable of such a solemn bell procession into our own experience, our own interiors, - a far cry from a discussion or a workshop on dealing with evil, or from a GA "name" speaker on spirituality. ^(more typical UU treatment of a serious topic) Do we have a role as clergy in getting it started and how do we do so?

It seems to me such a process - in partial answer to my own question - such a process would need three parts to it. One, is individuals taking on a commitment to the psychotherapeutic process as spiritual discipline, which would initiate us into our nether regions, our common pain, our oneness with the world. Two, we would need to heighten our awareness of patriarchy, how deeply enmeshed in its addictive system we are. We would need to consciously resist it in all its forms from the war machine, to our hierarchical institutions, to our sado-masochistic relationships, to the voice of the self-hater firmly ensconced ^{in his mind} in our own consciousnesses. Three, would be to gather in groups explicitly to build community, risking trust and vulnerability together in a way that is discouraged in the paranoid wider culture. It would be nice if such groups could be co-terminous with our churches and so be places where ^{we} could reflect on tradition in the light of our own experience, and to reclaim myth and ritual collectively. (Something like the base communities of latin america.)

See? I told you your discourse caused a flood of responses in me. Thank you for bringing these powerful and important ideas into our common conversation.