

Daily Meditation 04-28-25

Denouncing Evil As Prophetic Action

Good morning.

I'd like to bring to your attention this morning, an article I came across this week, which I think is important, and especially applied to my concern. I think a lot of our concern, to the subject of evil. This article is entitled, "Trump Alarmists Were Right. We Should Say So." And I found it in a web page called Liberal Currents. It's written by Toby Buckle.

And he says that "there was a smug condescension about those who were warning that Trump and MAGA represented a really dangerous movement." And of course, from my point of view, that parallels my talking about Trump and the MAGA movement as Antichrist. Because I've been very surprised, really, really surprised, if not shocked, by how little the religious press has responded to this archetype of the Antichrist — which I lay out, I think, in a very succinct and small but substantive book. A lot of individuals have written me about it, but the press strikes me as being smugly condescending. This person says,

"Smug condescension became the order of the day. Yes, Trump is bad, but Dear me, those liberals are being hysterical. As late as the last election, they were writing pieces with titles like, "A Trump dictatorship won't happen," or "No, Trump won't destroy our democracy." Even after the election, as the scale of incoming lawlessness became clear, we were dismissed. "Trump is testing our constitutional system. It's working fine."

He calls these people the anti-alarmists, from the past decade. And he thinks maybe they should be concerned about how wrong they were and about how stupid, he says they look. So I recommend this article. I think it's very interesting, and he apologizes for saying "I told you so." And I'm tempted to say the same thing.

I very, very rarely want to say "I told you so," but I think that calling Christ, and the MAGA movement the Antichrist, is very, very, very much in our tradition. The book of Revelations, the book of Apocalypse, is trying to come up with language to awaken people to alarm, to spread the alarm, about what the Roman Empire is doing to the world, to humanity, unleashing beasts and, of course, to the early Christians. And then that itself, the apocalyptic literature in the Book of Revelations or the Book of Apocalypse — choose your title, the names are the same in Greek — of course, derives from the prophets of Israel as well, who are also trying to shout the alarm.

Hildegard of Bingen, whose paintings I reproduce in part, just one or two of her paintings in that book about the Antichrist, she is very severe and very alarmist about the presence of the Antichrist in the church. She says that the Antichrist is bleeding the church. And the church in the twelve century was the heart of the entire culture. It included education and agriculture and economics, therefore, and science, and so much more.

And then I reproduced the amazing fresco from 1501 by Luca Signorelli, hanging in a basilica in Orvieto, Italy. And its title is "The deeds and preaching of the Antichrist." And this is what really struck

me so deeply when I saw it last summer: that without even reading the title. I did not read the title, I just looked at the fresco, and I said out loud, “it feels like Donald Trump.” Then I read the title.

And then I realized, oh, this too is part of the tradition of naming evil, and this is part of religion’s task, to name evil, just as it is part of religion’s task to name the sacred, which is the opposite of evil. But you can’t name one without the other. They’re operating in parallel universes. There’s a spiritual dimension. And that’s what it means to talk about devils, or to paint them, and so forth, is to indicate that the negative powers that can take over humanity are spirits. That’s what it means to talk about devils or demons. Therefore spirituality must address these things.

So I’d like to share with you a few insights about evil that are laid out in the first part of my book, *Sins of the Spirit, Blessings of the Flesh: Transforming Evil in Soul and Society*, as this was my first serious study, and it’s a lengthy one, on evil. My book on the Antichrist, which is very recent, is my third book on evil. But there’s a lot here that I think deserves our attention today. And let me begin with a statement from Thich Nhat Hanh, that is found on page nine in the introduction to the book.

He talks about the seeds of violence and the seeds of divine peace. He says, “There are seeds of violence in every human, and seeds of divine peace in every human.” And that we need to call attention, and we need, of course, as with any seeds, to feed, to nurture, seeds of inner peace, lest the seeds of violence take over.

This teaching from the Buddhist monk, Thich Nhat Hanh, is very parallel to what Martin Buber, coming out of the Jewish tradition, says about good and evil. He says that “Humans have two urges, and we must harness both urges together in the service of God.” Harness both urges together. “Our task is not to extirpate the evil urge, but to reunite it with the good.” To reunite the evil urge with the good.

We cannot stamp out evil. That’s the point. Evil is a spirit in that sense. It’s not to be stamped out. It will continue after we’re gone. And that’s why it comes up with every generation. Every generation has to face the dynamics and the forces of evil.

And psychologist Erich Fromm writes, “The life-affirming syndromes that we carry — love, solidarity, justice — and how they are in conflict with the life-thwarting syndromes.” Life-affirming, life-thwarting. He names the life-thwarting as sadomasochism, destructiveness, greed, narcissism, and incestuousness.

So these are efforts to name the reality of evil, what we’re up against. What we’re up against when we’re talking about evil. We are up against forces, powerful forces. And Erich Fromm warns us: he says,

As long as one believes that the evil man wears horns, one will not discover an evil man. The naive assumption that an evil man is easily recognized, results in a great danger. One fails to recognize evil men before they have begun their work of destruction. You only recognize it after the destruction is ablaze, often too late.

This may be one reason, I think, why very often evil is seen in our psyches as faceless. It is often depicted in stories as faceless. Why? Because it’s every face. It’s every face. You don’t want to focus

too much on just one face. And that's why one reason I talk about not just Trump. The movement that is upholding him, and that, in fact is represented, overly represented, in Congress. One whole party is in denial about climate change. I guess that's why they don't talk about it, because their leader does not consider it worth talking about. And their leader is committed, as we see every day, to bringing coal back, to dismantling the EPA, to firing thousands of workers and scientists whose job it is to make sure our food chain is healthy, and our water is clean and our air is clean, and so forth. A study just came out that found that 47% of Americans are breathing unhealthy air every day. That's almost half of us. And we're firing the scientists who can tell us not only what's happening and where it's happening, but what the remedies are.

So there's just so much deconstructing, unraveling, which is what Hildegard painted when she painted the Antichrist: the unraveling of the ropes that keep society together. This is what justice is. It is the forums that keep us together. That's what community means. It's what solidarity means. And all these are being challenged, to say nothing of the courts, and refusal to obey the courts. And setting up alternative diatribes against judges and judicial decisions and so forth.

So we are living in this time of the unleashing of evil, and it needs to be named. And one of the names, traditionally in the West, has been that of the Antichrist. And I do not think religion should continue to hide its head in the sand, and pretend that serious things are not afoot.

Thank you. See you next week.