

January 2021

2021-1

DIAGNOSIS *and* TREATMENT (*Discernment and Empowerment*)

In light of the COVID pandemic and the recent tragic events erupting in Washington DC, the Abbots have decided to send you a special edition of SOLICITUDE from a different Abbot each week before the Annual Gathering. I write you this first offering with a deep sense of urgency, even alarm. It is clear from what we are witnessing all around us that the turmoil and chaos has intensified. The recent events around the siege of the Capitol building make it abundantly clear that American society is in a precarious place, if not in peril, and we on the edge of a precipice.

Although Biden has been duly elected and will assume the presidency, we are not out of the proverbial woods in any sense. In fact we may be moving ever more deeply into them. We cannot see clearly what lies ahead, but we must be prepared now to support strong positive change and defend ourselves against the viral menace of lies and conspiracies that fuel the fires of hatred and chaos all around us.

We have two tasks in the environment of this deepening crisis:

1. To discern and diagnose the conditions as best we can—to diagnose the disease that has overtaken the body politic, and to begin to cleanse and treat the wounds from which we are suffering.
2. To respond at this moment of suffering as healers, warriors, teachers and visionaries with our own unique insights from the traditions of Oriental Christianity and Perennial Wisdom.

This is not now an easy task. Also it is likely we each feel more and more imperiled, as monks of old did. As I ponder our predicament, here is what I clearly see that we need to consider and reflect upon as we prepare to gather for our annual meeting.

DISCERNMENT and DIAGNOSIS

The early diagnosis of the human condition found in the Gospel of Philip speaks powerfully to the need for discernment and action:

If, for example, the roots of evil are hidden they remain strong, but as soon as they are recognized openly for what they are, they perish. It is because of this that the Logos says, "The axe has already been applied to the root of the tree." It will not merely feel the tree, however, for a tree chopped down will sprout from its roots again. Rather the axe bites down deep into the roots until they are exposed, and so Yeshua uproots them from their place, which has only been done in part by others. Let us delve deeply into our own hearts to the root of evil and tear it out. If it is recognized for what it is, it will be uprooted. Yet, if we are unconscious of it and do not recognize it, indeed it takes root within the heart and produces its own fruits there. It masters us and we are made its slaves. It captures us causing us to do things we would not do otherwise, and keeps us from doing what we truly desire. It's potency remains as long as we do not recognize it. Hidden and unconscious it coerces us.

—Analogue 68

So what are at the roots of the condition we find ourselves in today? The answer is that it is complex and not simple, but in America we have lived with and become used to a particular form of structural evil and systemic distortion that has festered for centuries and has now flared into a full-blown disease. It is clear that virulent forms of racial animosity and white supremacy fuel the fires and are now being fed by conspiracies of all sorts. The fever is high in the body-politic (as is the rhetoric being used to describe it), the information field through which we communicate with each other has been seriously contaminated by bogus claims of election fraud (just to begin to name the lies contaminating it), our civil balances and norms have been breached and overrun (literally), the dynamic equilibrium has been disrupted (we are a nation at war with ourselves), and the patient is in peril and grave danger (in particular, that unique form of American democracy which has guided us for 250 years).

Unfortunately, unique forms of American religion (in particular, Christian fundamentalism) are deeply involved and contributing to the dis-ease of our current condition. Fundamentalism and white supremacy have joined themselves to each other and are now a consequential contributing factor to the deepening the crisis. We need to understand this conjunction and something of its specific cause (etiology). As keepers of wisdom and as theologians in our own right, we must hold our own and not let that sacred space be captured and dominated by a malignant distortion of spiritual truth. *(Remember this is not theoretical for me. I grew up a fundamentalist in a fundamentalist world and I know personally how toxic this form of Christianity actually is and how it operates insidiously.)*

Here is a clear analysis of this strange mutation of an old virus that is deeply affecting our society at this moment. Please read and absorb it. It is about an even darker movement within traditional fundamentalist and evangelical circles (taking them over) called **Dominionism**, which may be new to you. Its purpose is totally malign and intent on subverting American democracy and taking over the nation if it can, replacing it with a form of theocracy that is not unlike the radical Jihadists (ISIS) who have tried to subvert and take over Islam and the Islamic world and replace it with a caliphate. It was in the shadows for decades, but the Trumpian political world (with its cult-like behavior) has given it full freedom to spread almost sight-unseen until it now menaces our whole nation and society. We ignore it to our peril, for this worldview has direct ties and links to earlier versions of its kind in Nazi Germany. In new guises, these are now being

promoted by ever-metastasizing forms of conspiracy theory spread by the misinformation and propaganda of groups like QAnon.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/11/opinion/josh-hawley-religion-democracy.html?referringSource=articleShare>

For followers of Yeshua, here is a must read article that frames the divides within the Christian community that are essential for us all to understand: <https://link.medium.com/fwY7d0Yh4cb>

(Here, in addition, is a highly important analysis of the new, virulent form of American fascism with its militias and storm troopers that has rapidly grown up in the era of Trump and his Republican Party and spread by his fellow conspiracists. I consider this essential for a sapiential diagnosis of our current state of affairs: <https://link.medium.com/D8wCIQ100cb>)

EMPOWERMENT

It is easy to feel overwhelmed by the force and energy of the current “fever” as its effects wash over you. It is difficult to feel empowered when sickness prevails, and we are feeling the full effects of a deep spiritual illness. But we are not without our resources.

The first responsibility is to stay awake to the immediate Presence within and to the contours of our own hearts. We need vertical downloads from the light and wisdom from Above. We need inward stability (*stabilitas*). The ancient text of Ya’akov (Yeshua’s brother, James) speaks powerfully to this need:

My brothers and sisters, count it a great joy when trials and tribulations befall you and you must bear up under the suffering. Know this, that these trials are tests of your faithfulness. They produce the capacity for perseverance and patient endurance in you, and when these have been perfected, you will be a whole and complete being, lacking in nothing. But if any of you are lacking wisdom, then ask God and it will be granted you, for God is generous and self-giving, and imparts to all ungrudgingly and without reserve. But ask trustingly, without hesitation or doubt, for those who are doubtful are like ocean waves driven and tossed about by the winds. Do not imagine that they are capable of receiving anything, for an individual with a divided heart is inherently unstable.

So brothers and sisters, do not live in error, God only gifts us with the Good, and each divine gift is a perfection that falls from above, coming down from the changeless Source (the Father of Lights), in whom there is no alteration, nor play of passing shadows. The whole purpose is to bring us into being by Truth spoken, in order that we might become a kind of “first-fruit” brought forth from out of the whole creation.

—Ya’akov (James) 1:2-8, 1:15-18

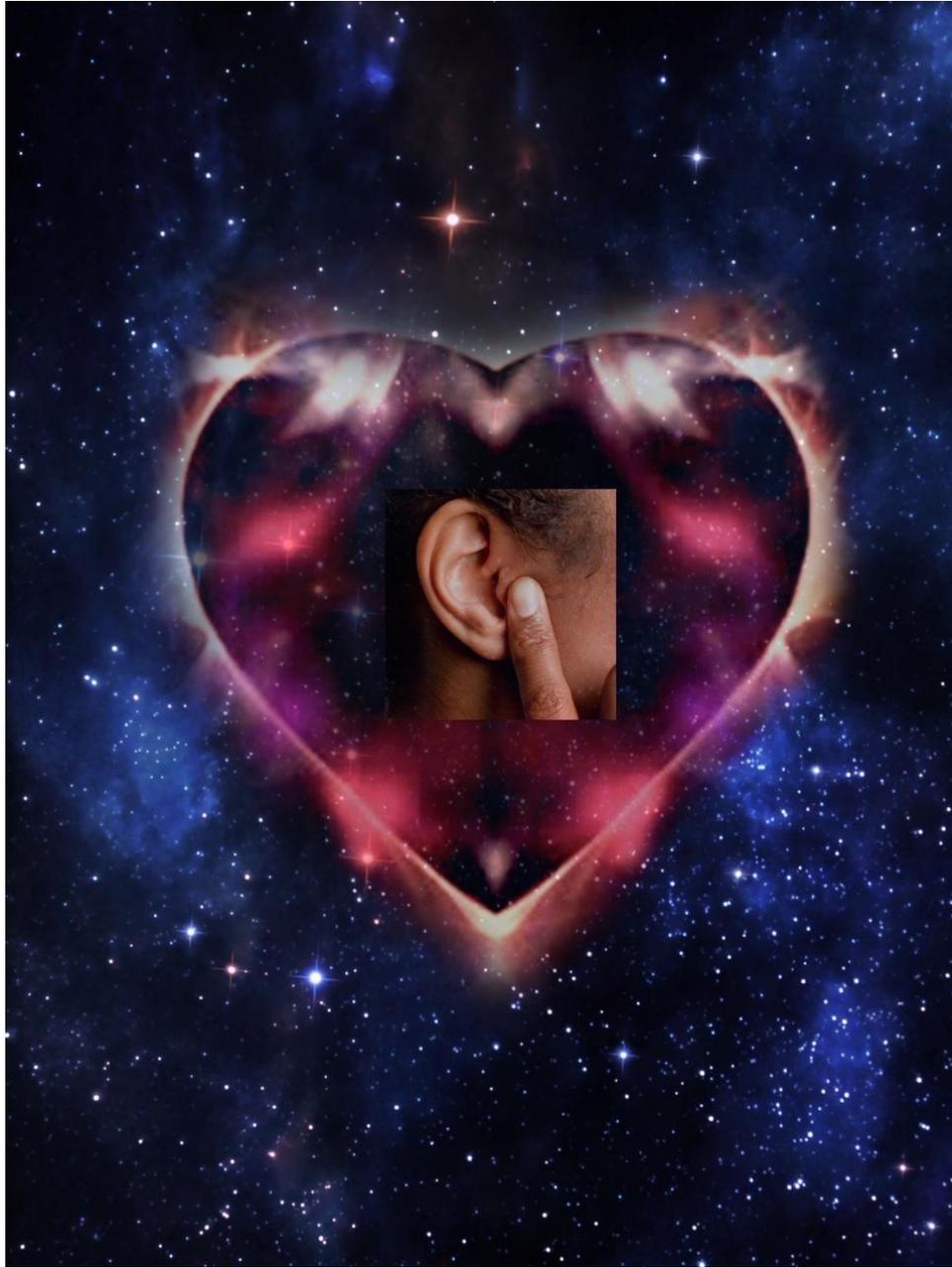
We need wisdom (and inner resilience) that comes to us from the vertical axis, not from the distortion fields all around us (contaminated by lies and conspiracies). We need ever-refreshed forms of insight and vision that can address the dis-ease with a practical response that we might understand to be “tough love.” Nazism was not a fantasy to be treated lightly. It was a deadly

and death-producing force and ideology, and our new particular virulent form of it on American soil (exhibited by the recent MAGA Mobs) will require an equal inner toughness and forceful resistance to it that may feel odd to us. This is not a time for playing around or magical thinking. This is a time to listen deeply, to discern truly, and to respond with clarity.

So what is the “medicine” and necessary treatment? We must each begin a process of personal discernment to understand what our own special work and unique vocation is at this critical moment in human history. As an Order and community we shall continue to come together in increasing forms of collective intelligence (each of us contributing to the whole through both our understanding and our practice and response), to create a visionary telling of the truly Good News of human destiny. In this light I specifically propose the following:

1. Practice a strong fidelity to Truth and Truth-telling (in a land swirling with lies) in order to help cleanse the wounds that this era is causing human beings. Truth-telling is a standard and a means of discernment. For example, Trump began his political career knowingly telling lies about a Kenyan-born-Obama. That in itself is a litmus test of discernment about his credibility and the whole worldview he promotes.
2. Create and maintain sanctuary spaces of rest where folk may come and contemplatively receive the treatment of Light and Wisdom from above. These contemplative spaces act as oases in a desert, shelters in the storm, and hospitals for the healing of those wounded.
3. Offer companionship, friendship, support, spiritual direction, and the special guidance of the Sapiential Tarot. We have powerful skills starting with friendship itself and increasing to extraordinary guidance from the Angel.
4. Listen deeply at the level of the heart to understand the “medicine of meaning” that is encoded in the Perennial Wisdom that has been entrusted uniquely to us. Learn to dispense this medicine to the world around in the best way you know how. Perhaps that means all you can do is to act silently as witness in the world around you for the good of all.
5. Choose one or more personal projects to help others around you and in the larger world that will begin to alleviate its pain and need. These are what have been given us to do because they are at hand, but they may extend out to touch the whole world in new ways if possible.
6. Pray fervently for the world, love it, hold it in your heart continually as you yourself are held and prayed-into-being by the divine Presence who is within and all around you. As monks, prayer is a special, secret, divine energy that we understand and wield like an instrument (sword?) of light. (I have actually been pondering the use of the word sword...so militant, and then I remember Yeshua said, *I have not come to bring peace, but a sword*, while both he and his brother Ya’akov said, paradoxically, *Blessed are the peacemakers*.)

This is certainly not the end of what we can and are called to do. Perhaps it is only a beginning (and not that we have not already begun our work—we are deep into it), but these are a reminder and a shared center point, working together now collectively and with intention as monks of the Order. At the center of everything is our own deep praxis of *kardial* listening (already cited above), remembering:



*Make everything in you an ear,
each atom of your being,
and you will hear at every moment
what the Source is whispering to you,
just to you and for you,
without any need for my words or anyone else's.
Jalaluddin Rumi*

~~Abbot Lynn