
Advent Shadow Work

A sermon by the Rev. Theophus "Thee" Smith, Priest Associate

In the name of God, our Maker, Defender, Redeemer, and Friend! Amen.

I can't believe I wrote that whole thing.

I can't believe I *read* that whole thing.

And I can't believe I *preached* that whole thing!

Now, in a few moments I'll tell you why all that. But first:

"I can't believe I *ate* that whole thing!"

Maybe you remember that popular expression from years ago. But do you remember the original source? It's from a 1970s TV commercial, and you may recognize it from the following description.

The advertisement opens on a middle-aged couple's bedroom scene: the wife is under the covers with her back to the camera. The husband is sitting in his pajamas on the edge of the bed. He's a little slumped over, and he starts moaning the following phrase:

"I can't believe I ate that whole thing."

Immediately, without bothering to turn in the bed, his wife remarks with a slight tone of contempt, "You *ate* it, Ralph."

"I can't believe I ate that whole thing," he repeats.

"No, Ralph; *I* ate it," she says sarcastically.

"I can't believe I ate that whole thing," he says one more time.

Finally his wife relents and offers some *helpful* advice,

"Take two Alka-Seltzer,"

as if to say, "'Just take your medicine and you'll feel better.'

That's when a male "'ad' voice comes on the commercial. As the voice-over proceeds to tell us the virtues of the antacid product, the camera shifts from the bedroom and we see two Alka-Seltzer tablets plopping down into a glass of water and start to fizz; you know, the familiar Alka-Seltzer fizz.

After that we return to the bedroom scene. Now the woman, with a tone of wifely compassion, asks the husband:

"Did you drink your Alka-Seltzer?"

This time he replies with a big, goofy grin on his face,

"The *whole* thing."

[See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VFKifpMtINs> Cf. Wikipedia article <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alka-Seltzer>]

Now that was a great ad, wasn't it! It actually won a 1972 CLIO award as a Hall of Fame commercial. In fact it was so popular that the Alka-Seltzer company retrofitted it in 2005 for its 75th anniversary. Now you can compare both commercials on YouTube.

[See the note above for a YouTube clip of the original commercial, and this website for the 2005 remake: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=endscreen&v=EiGYMe1d7No&NR=1> Cf. NY Times article: www.nytimes.com/2006/06/19/business/media/19adco.html?ei=5088&en=547d07b6d0bf4e89&ex=1308369600&adxnnl=1&partner=rssnyt&emc=rss&adxnnlx=1323514188-kAnk1sxq1AEVpH4qUsQbrQ]

Interestingly, Alka-Seltzer revived the ad in *December* of 2005. That was precisely the right month, don't you think? And why? Because December is the month when we all experience what the ad is all about. It starts with Thanksgiving as we know, and pretty soon, party after party, we're *all* moaning and groaning, "I can't believe I ate the whole thing!"

Well, last week I had occasion to say the following variations on that theme:

I can't believe I wrote that whole thing.

I can't believe I *read* that whole thing.

And I can't believe I *preached* that whole thing!

So here's what happened. Normally I don't read random religion comments on the internet. You're likely to come across any number of bizarre or ill-informed points of view. But last week my eye caught something on Amazon.com, in one of their blogs they call a "'religion forum.' The caption read as follows: "'Could Christ and Lucifer be

the same person, figure, or entity?' [www.amazon.com/forum/religion/ref=cm_cd_pg_newest?encoding=UTF8&cdForum=Fx417AUXOWKSRN&cdPage=1&cdSort=oldest&cdThread=TxLUZMQAUMLSZ

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Gradually I found myself reading response after response to that question. The blog listed more than two hundred comments. And now, looking back, "I can't believe I read that *whole* thing!" or at least most of it; as much as I could stand.

But suddenly, just like Isaiah prophesies in today's Old Testament reading,

The spirit of the Lord GOD [came] upon me, because the LORD has anointed me . . . has sent me to bring good news . . . to bind up the brokenhearted . . . to proclaim liberty . . . and release . . . (Isaiah 61.1)

Unexpectedly I found myself writing the following response and posting it to the blog alongside the other postings. "Come on, folks!" I wrote.

Let's get a bit more sophisticated here: we can stretch to be both faithful to tradition, and critically aware. I remind us of the psychologist Karl Jung, and his theories that combine the light and the shadow side of opposite archetypes. Remember his claim that we all have a shadow side in addition to the parts of ourselves that are clear or illuminated for us . . .

Then I recalled other thinkers who take us beyond 'either/or' thinking to 'both/and' thinking" beyond dualism or polarizing or making binary oppositions between things.

For example I referred them to our visiting theologian at the Cathedral a year or so ago: the Catholic theologian Richard Rohr. Fr. Rohr will be returning to visit us again this coming January, but last time he treated us to insights from his recent book, *The Naked Now*. If you recall his talk at our spirituality conference here a couple of years ago, he encouraged us to go beyond dualistic thinking" the kind of either/or thinking where we can only see things from one point of view. Following that direction I encouraged my fellow bloggers to entertain the possibility of a both/and response to the forum question.

I wrote:

My point in responding to the original enquiry, "Could Christ and Lucifer be the same person, figure, entity?" is not simply answer, 'yes' or 'no,' but to shift the discussion to our own issues by connecting themes between theology and psychology. What if regard "Christ' and "Lucifer,' as Jung would say, as psychological types or spiritual archetypes? Then we might be able to related

them the way as opposing principles in our own experience; the principle of light or enlightenment on the one hand, the principle of darkness or shadow on the other.

Remember the name, "Lucifer," actually means "'light bearer,' and that in our tradition he is the "'prince of darkness' who masquerades as an "'angel of light.' Now I don't mean to reduce Christ or Lucifer to only metaphors. However the themes they represent can be useful to expose our own issues of light and darkness, whether spiritual or psychological, moral or political, economic or ecological, etc.

Now after I got that far I began to reflect on my involvement in this internet religion forum. Internally I found myself going from exclaiming, "'I can't believe I read that whole thing,' to exclaiming, "'I can't believe I wrote that whole thing.' Several minutes later, however, I was exclaiming, "'I can't believe I preached that whole thing.' Here's what happened.

Because I was also preparing to preach today's scriptures appointed for this third week of Advent, I wrote as follows.

Finally, it is instructive in this Advent season of the Christian year to compare the Christ-Lucifer dualism to the dualism of Jesus on the one hand and John the Baptist on the other. The contrast is illuminating because John the Baptist is distinguished in our tradition for *not* competing with Jesus to be Messiah in the way that Lucifer or Satan is depicted in scripture as competing with God to be the creator. The rivalry between Lucifer and God is notably expressed in Milton's epic, "Paradise Lost," where Lucifer declares famously, or infamously: "'Better to rule in hell than serve in heaven.'

That original "'bad attitude,' I went on to preach, contrasts vividly with John the Baptist's declaration later in the gospel of John that follows our scripture reading appointed for today: "This my joy is fulfilled: he must increase; I must decrease" (John 3.29-30). Thus John subordinates himself to Jesus as the true Messiah. Similarly throughout the gospels Jesus submits himself to the will of his heavenly Father.

In this way Christ and Lucifer are both same and different. In Judeo-Christian tradition Lucifer the archangel was the "'bright and morning star,' the highest of God's creatures before he fell to become the chief rival in God's creation. Like Christ he shared the possibility of submitting to God's sovereignty and fulfilling the divine will in creation, but chose otherwise. Hence he also differs radically from Christ precisely where he was most potentially available to become a type of Christ. But isn't that true of us also?

We too are invited in our tradition to become types of Christ""to be Christ-like, which is what the name, "Christian," means: a ""little Christ.' But like the Christ-Lucifer duo or dyad, we have our shadow side that contrasts with our typological calling or destiny to become types of Christ. And here, in my posting to that internet religion forum, I referred my readers to two related resources for doing their own shadow work as a kind of Advent discipline or practice.

First I recommended Debby Ford's book with the interesting title, *The Dark Side of the Light Chasers*. There she describes the ways that we all have ideal selves to which we aspire, but then hide other parts of ourselves from ourselves as our ""dark side' or shadow side. And then I invited my fellow bloggers to ""google' a therapist's internet site, Connie Zweig's website who coined the term "shadow-work." Like Debbie Ford and Karl Jung before them, she encourages us to do our own shadow-work of integrating our ideal selves with our shadow selves rather than always opposing the two and simply rejecting the one without reference to the other.

And so I commend to you today: Do your Advent shadow work. I too discovered one of my shadow sides this past week as I prepared for today's service. I had not noticed that I was hiding in the shadows from going public with my preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ on the internet. So last week I came out of the shadow of my fear of being publically exposed or criticized or ridiculed for my beliefs. Now I'm really out there, where ""I can't believe I preached the whole thing!' [See:

www.amazon.com/forum/religion/ref=cm_cd_pg_newest?_encoding=UTF8&cdForum=Fx417AUXOWKSRN&cdPage=1&cdSort=oldest&cdThread=TxLUZMQAUMLSZ
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So how about you? Where are you being challenged this Advent season to do your own shadow-work? Where is the Holy Spirit calling you to come out of the shadows and stop hiding or denying those aspects of yourself that contrast with your ideal self? Now in that spirit we pray that we may also join in the prophetic ministry of John the Baptist, to be heralds of the advent of Jesus into our dark nights. He comes to us as the light-bearer in the midst of our darkness, and we are honored to prepare the way for him as forerunners in the tradition of John the Baptist. So ""prepare the way,' all you who hear this summons!

May you be valorous in that mission, and may the Lord find you faithful in his service at his coming this Advent!

In the name of God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, Amen.

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