

Learning to Move WITH the Dark

by Rev. Dr. Robin Hawley Gorsline

I appreciate Taylor's book, *Learning to Walk in the Dark*, even though like every book it is far from perfect, as she shares personal stories of her own walk.

I want to share a personal story about my walk, too. In 1999, my doctoral dissertation in theology, "Bearing Witness to the Dark: Anti-White-Supremacist, Pro-Same-Sexes, Pro-Feminist Theologizing in Queer Modes," was approved at Union Theological Seminary. That project grew out of some years of speaking up for civil rights, but one particular moment gave me the focus.

I took a course in Gay Men's Fiction at the City University of New York. We read many iconic texts, enjoying the exploration of our chosen community's literature—except for the week we discussed *Giovanni's Room* by James Baldwin.



Unlike the other sessions, there was unrelenting criticism of this book. As I sat there, listening to the harsh judgments of both the book and Baldwin himself, I felt I was sitting in the midst of a White mob engaging in a literary lynching. I spoke up, saying how angry I was that the one author of color on the syllabus was being treated with such ugliness by a group of White men. I told them I loved not only this novel, but all his writing. The professor tried, but not very strongly, to push back on their comments, not supporting my view at all.

On the subway ride back to Union I knew what I had to do. I called my advisor the next day and told him I was going to focus my doctoral research on racism, and I wanted to do so drawing on the works of Baldwin. He encouraged me, and later another scholar suggested I include the works of Audre Lorde—because Baldwin was, in his writing, not very oriented toward women and feminism.

So out of that grew my project and as I look back on it now, in the context of our current series, *Learning to Move in the Dark*, I realize that what I was beginning to do was not only moving IN the dark, but I was beginning to learn how to move WITH the dark.

What I mean by that is captured by the title, "Bearing Witness to the Dark," which makes clear my view that, unlike so much of our Christian inheritance, I value the dark as much as the light.

So today, I continue my walk/movement with the dark, because it is not only everywhere, including in me, but also because I am keeping my commitment to bear witness to the dark in all the ways it manifests in our world (even as we deny its power, beauty, and wisdom).

Darkness and I are becoming soul mates, in the sense that I am continually changed by it, growing into more the person God yearns for me to be.