

Column

Acts of violence such as the recent school shooting in Colorado prompts questions concerning the nature and reality of evil. The question I wish address in this column is how Christians should view evil.

Before tackling this question head on, it is necessary to clear some brush in road leading to it. There are, in fact, two options not open to Christians. The first is denial. There are people of faith – no doubt very sincere and good ones – who say that evil is an illusion. As a result, if these people get a pain in the big toe (or elsewhere), instead of going to a doctor, they deal with it by using a mind-over-matter technique. Because the mind is a very powerful thing, apparently this technique at times works, but tragically not always.

In actuality, I don't think we have this option. The crime of the cross, 9-11, the bombing of churches this past Easter Day in Sri Lanka and numerous school shootings around the nation render it untenable. No, evil for the Christian is very much a reality. It is not something to be

denied but something to be defeated, and this is exactly what Christians believe happened on the cross.

Expanding on this last thought, one European theologian of the mid-20th century likened Good Friday to D-Day during the Second World War. In a real sense, the decisive battle was won, yet hostilities continued right up to V-E Day. This seems to be the period you and I are in. Skirmishes continue, many very fierce, right up to the time our Lord's return.

But there is a second option that is likewise not open to a Christian: the option of dualism. Dualism is making evil equal to good in terms of power. In this philosophical system, an eternal tug-of-war is going on between two equals.

Some Christians have come very close to adopting such a system. Once I picked up a book on a used sales table with the provocative title: "Dealing with the Devil." In it, the author went so far as to paraphrase the American Gospel song "He lives" to refer to Satan in terms of power and omnipresence.

No, this option won't do any more than the first – denial. According to traditional biblical thought, the devil is a created being, one created good but one who misused his freewill and became bad. As such he does not have the same immensity, power and eternity as the Creator God.

If these options – denial and dualism -- are not open to us, how then should we view evil?

To begin with, I think we would have to say evil is not just something we find in the devil – the great tempter of men. Rather, it might be thought of as a dark power that happens when God's image-bearing creatures (Genesis 1:26) – human beings – give themselves over and worship that which is not God (Romans 1:21-32).

When this happens, the divine image is defaced, and all sorts of distortions and disfigurements of mind and body take place. The state I have just described has consequences in individuals, but also in societies.

America, indeed the West, needs an army of soldiers – not to wage a military campaign – but a spiritual one to rescue this country from the yoke

of the devil; to bring back Christian teaching and practices into family life; to bring back faith and loyalty into married life; to bring back integrity, honest and craftsmanship to industrial and commercial life; to bring back the Christian faith and Christian values into our national life.

Will you be one of those soldiers?

O God, merciful and compassionate, who art ever ready to hear the prayers of those who put their trust in thee: Gracious hearken to us who call upon thee, and grant us thy help in this our need; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

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