

Column

School shootings have become so common place that it is hard to be shocked when they are reported. The latest occurred June 7 following a graduation ceremony in Richmond, Va., with two people killed and five wounded.

Regardless of whether we are shocked or not, such incidences (along with a host of other atrocities reported daily in the news) call for hard thinking about evil. My focus in this column will be a Christian's response to evil.

Before tackling this question head on, it is necessary to clear some brush in the road. 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 they 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 light of the Richmond graduation shooting and all that we see going on in the world around us, such a view – at least in my mind – does not appear tenable. Rather, scripture seems to get right at the heart of the matter when it says: “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?” (Jeremiah 17:9).

No, for the Christian, or any thinking person for that matter, evil cannot be brushed away so lightly. It is not something to be denied but something to be defeated, and that 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 of our Lord's return.

But there is a second option that is likewise not open to a Christian. That is the option of dualism. Dualism makes 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 for individuals, but also for 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, honesty 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 LORD, who never failest to help and govern those whom thou dost bring up in thy stedfast fear and love; Keep us, we beseech thee, under the protection of thy good providence, and make us to have a perpetual fear and love of thy holy Name; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (Collect for the Second Sunday after Trinity).

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