

On The Recovery Of Powerful Words
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ISIS beheadings, Paris magazine massacres, crystal meth corroding people's souls and their teeth and filling our local jails. Our world looks like a war zone because it is, and one of the distinct contributions of the church is to name such actions as *evil* and to point beyond discrete actions to the one who delights in them all, namely *the Evil One*, who in Scripture is known by several other titles: the devil, Satan, the tempter, the ruler of this world. In a world of hyper-tolerance and interminable political correctness, a faithful church does not hesitate to use strong biblical language to name things accurately, because what you cannot name you cannot resist. It is time for the loaded word *evil* to re-enter public and private discourse.

I am frankly tired of things being labeled *inappropriate* or *misguided* or discussed only in sociological or psychological terms because they are just not deep enough. They stay on the surface of things as partial explanations. When I sit down with broken people and hear their stories, not only do I sometimes weep, I sometimes give them new language to describe what happened to them. I say, "What happened to you was evil, and in the strength and love of Jesus Christ you can be restored." Not just wrong, but evil. They know the deep devastation it wrought, and it helps to be able to name it for what it was and to hear there is One who can help, one who himself faced the Evil One and overcame him. Yes, they need a doctor and a counselor and a pastor and maybe a lawyer, but more than all these they need a champion and a protector and a defender. They need for Jesus Christ to come to their aid. And he will, as I have seen too many times to count.

We are not speaking here of our foe as some silly, cartoon character, a Halloweenish figure in red costume and pitch fork. No horns or cloven hooves either from ancient mythology. Such portrayals only serve to help us the more easily to dismiss the reality of evil and the organizing intellect who stands behind it.

We live in a world of agents, of people whose decisions affect one another. But not all the agents who are active in our world are visible, and here we make a clear break with secularism which only believes what it can see and put under a microscope in a laboratory. The church believes in a two-tiered creation, visible and invisible, which constantly overlap and interlock and interact with one another. It is taught in Scripture and verified in experience and reflection. In other words, what

you see is not all that you get. And here we speak of angels, those who remain faithful and those who fell. There is relational depth to our world; there is more than one layer of agency. There are more causes than we can measure or account for, and unless they are included we end up with only a partial diagnosis. Evil and the Evil One are factors to take into account. Satan is no joke, the primary evidence being that Jesus Christ took him so seriously in the desert showdown (Matthew 4:1-11) that preceded his public ministry. The bully had to be dealt with before his hostages could be freed. I do not believe that human sin and cussedness alone is an adequate explanation for the state of our world. There is a malignancy afoot that requires a more adequate accounting.

I frankly cannot explain the pain and horror filled world in which we live without resort to the Bible's insightful teaching about these matters. I often make referrals to doctors and counselors because that is what is needed. But I also reserve a place to inquire into people's interaction with the unseen world, and I take particular note when I find that they have been involved in occult practices or in seeking knowledge and power from spiritual sources outside the Christian tradition. Naivete about the dangers of such practices is widespread in our culture, and when you note the supernatural themes that fill current TV and film offers, you see how deep is people's curiosity. I suspect this column may open me to charges of being *medieval* or *biblicist*, but who cares? I find that the classic Christian faith when taken at full strength is a source of tremendous insight and practical help. It's time to name things rightly, and to turn to the only one who can help our broken world. Tell me, what explanation do you give for the ongoing agony of the human project?
