

fancy and superstition. Nowadays they prefer to appear strong and unprejudiced to pose as positivists, while at the same time lending faith to many unfounded magical or popular superstitions or, worse still, exposing their souls—their baptized souls, visited so often by the Eucharistic Presence and inhabited by the Holy Spirit!—to licentious sensual experiences and to harmful drugs, as well as to the ideological seductions of fashionable errors. These are cracks through which the Evil One can easily penetrate and change the human mind.

This is not to say that every sin is directly due to diabolical action; but it is true that those who do not keep watch over themselves with a certain moral rigor are exposed to the influence of the "mystery of iniquity" cited by St. Paul which raises serious questions about our salvation.

Our doctrine becomes uncertain, darkness obscured as it is by the darkness surrounding the Devil. But our curiosity, excited by the certainty of his multiple existence, has a right to raise two questions. Are there signs, and what are they, of the presence of diabolical action? And what means of defense do we have against such an insidious danger?

Presence of diabolical action

We have to be cautious about answering the first question, even though the signs of the Evil One seem to be very obvious at times. We can presume that his sinister action is at work where the denial of God becomes radical, subtle and absurd; where lies become powerful and hypocritical in the face of evident truth; where love is smothered by cold, cruel selfishness; where Christ's name is attacked with conscious, rebellious hatred, where the spirit of the Gospel is watered down and rejected where despair is affirmed as the last word; and so forth.

But this diagnosis is too extensive and difficult for Us to attempt to probe and authenticate it now. It holds a certain dramatic interest for everyone, however, and has been the subject of some famous passages in modern literature. The problem of evil remains one of the greatest and most lasting problems for the human mind, even after the victorious response given to it by Jesus Christ. "We know,"

writes St. John the Evangelist, "that we are of God, and the whole world is in the power of the evil one."

Defense against the Devil

It is easier to formulate an answer to the other question—what defense, what remedy should we use against the Devil's action?—even though it remains difficult to put into practice. We could say: everything that defends us from sin strengthens us by that very fact against the invisible enemy. Grace is the decisive defense. Innocence takes on the aspect of strength. Everyone recalls how often the apostolic method of teaching used the armor of a soldier as a symbol for the virtues that can make a Christian invulnerable. The Christian must be a militant; he must be vigilant and strong; and he must at times make use of special ascetical practices to escape from certain diabolical attacks. Jesus teaches us this by pointing to "prayer and fasting" as the remedy. And the Apostle suggests the main line we should follow: "Be not overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."

With an awareness, therefore, of the opposition that individual souls, the Church and the world must face at the present time, we will try to give both meaning and, effectiveness to the familiar invocation in our principal prayer: "Our Father . . . deliver us from evil!"

May Our apostolic blessing also be a help toward achieving this.

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Pamphlet 078

Confronting the Devil's Power

Pope Paul VI

General Audience, November 15, 1972

What are the Church's greatest needs at the present time? Don't be surprised at Our answer and don't write it off as simplistic or even superstitious: one of the Church's greatest needs is to be defended against the evil we call the Devil.

Before clarifying what We mean, We would like to invite you to open your minds to the light that faith casts on the vision of human existence, a vision which from this observation point of faith reaches out to immense distances and penetrates to unique depths. To tell the truth, the picture that we are invited to behold with an all-encompassing realism is a very beautiful one. It is the picture of creation, the work of God. He Himself admired its substantial beauty as an external reflection of His wisdom and power.

Christian vision of the universe

Then there is the interesting picture of the dramatic history of mankind, leading to the history of the Redemption and of Christ; the history of our salvation, with its stupendous treasures of revelation, prophecy and holiness, of life elevated to a supernatural level, of eternal promises. Knowing how to look at this picture cannot help but leave us enchanted. Everything has a meaning, a purpose, an order; and everything gives us a glimpse of a Transcendent Presence, a Thought, a Life and ultimately a Love, so that the universe, both by reason of what it is and of what it is not, offers us an inspiring, joyful preparation for something even more beautiful and more perfect. The Christian vision of the universe and of life is therefore triumphantly optimistic; and this vision fully justifies our joy and gratitude for being alive, so that we sing forth our happiness in celebrating God's glory.

The mystery of evil

But is this vision complete and correct? Are the defects in the world of no account? What of the things that don't work properly in our lives? What of suffering and death, wickedness, cruelty and sin? In a word, what of evil? Don't we see how much evil there is in the world—especially moral evil, which goes against man and against God at one and the same time, although in different ways? Isn't this a sad spectacle, an unexplainable mystery? And aren't we—the lovers of the Word, the people who sing of the Good, we believers—are we the ones who are most sensitive and most upset by our observation and experience of evil?

We find evil in the realm of nature, where so many of its expressions seem to speak to us of some sort of disorder. Then we find it among human beings, in the form of weakness, frailty, suffering, death and something worse: the tension between two laws—one reaching for the good, the other directed toward evil. St. Paul points out this torment in humiliating fashion to prove our need a salvific grace, for the salvation brought by Christ, and also our great good fortune in being saved. Even before this, a pagan poet had described this conflict within the very heart of man: "I see what is better and I approve of it, but then I follow the worse" (Ovid, *Met.* 7, 19).

We come face to face with sin which is a perversion of human freedom and the profound cause of death because it involves detachment from God, the source of life. And then sin in its turn becomes the occasion and the effect of interference in us and our work by a dark, hostile agent, the Devil. Evil is not merely an absence of something but an active force, a living, spiritual being that is perverted and that perverts others. It is a terrible reality, mysterious and frightening.

Seeking an explanation

It is a departure from the picture provided by biblical Church teaching to refuse to knowledge the Devil's existence; to regard him as a self-sustaining principle who, unlike other creatures, does not owe

his origin to God; or to explain the Devil as a pseudo-reality, a conceptual, fanciful personification of the unknown causes of our misfortunes. When the problem of evil is seen in all its complexity and in its absurdity from the point of view of our limited minds, it becomes an obsession. It poses the greatest single obstacle to our religious understanding of the universe it is no accident that St. Augustine was bothered by this for years: "I sought the source of evil, and I found no explanation."

Thus we can see how important an awareness of evil is if we are to have a correct Christian concept of the world, life and salvation. We see this first in the unfolding of the Gospel story at the beginning of Christ's public life. Who can forget the highly significant description of the triple temptation of Christ? Or the many episodes in the Gospel where the Devil crosses the Lord's path and figures in His teaching? And how could we forget that Christ, referring three times to the Devil as His adversary, describes him as "the prince of this world"?

Other New Testament passages

The lurking shadow of this wicked presence is pointed up in many, many passages of the New Testament. St. Paul calls him the "god of this world," and warns us of the struggle we Christians must carry on in the dark, not only against one Devil, but against a frightening multiplicity of them. "I put on the armor of God," the Apostle tells us, "that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against the Principalities and the Powers, against the world-rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness on high."

Many passages in the Gospel show us that we are dealing not just with one Devil, but with many. But the principal one is Satan, which means the adversary, the enemy; and along with him are many others, all of them creatures of God, but fallen because they rebelled and were damned—a whole mysterious world, convulsed by a most unfortunate drama about which we know very little.

Man's fatal tempter

There are many things we do know, however, about this diabolical world, things that touch on our lives and on the whole history of mankind. The Devil is at the origin of mankind's first misfortune, he was the wily, fatal tempter involved in the first sin, the original sin. That fall of Adam gave the Devil a certain dominion over man, from which only Christ's Redemption can free us. It is a history that is still going on: let us recall the exorcisms at Baptism, and the frequent references in Sacred Scripture and in the liturgy to the aggressive and oppressive "power of darkness." The Devil is the number one enemy, the preeminent tempter.

So we know that this dark disturbing being exists and that he is still at work with his treacherous cunning; he is the hidden enemy who sows errors and misfortunes in human history. It is worth recalling the revealing Gospel parable of the good seed and the cockle, for it synthesizes and explains the lack of logic that seems to preside over our contradictory experiences: "An enemy has done this." He is "a murderer from the beginning, . . . and the father of lies," as Christ defines him. He undermines man's moral equilibrium with his sophistry. He is the malign, clever seducer who knows how to make his way into us through the senses, the imagination and the libido, through utopian logic, or through disordered social contacts in the give and take of our activities, so that he can bring about in us deviations that are all the more harmful because they seem to conform to our physical or mental makeup, or to our profound, instinctive aspirations.

Ignoring the Devil

This matter of the Devil and of the influence he can exert on individuals as well as on communities, entire societies or events, is a very important chapter of Catholic doctrine which should be studied again, although it is given little attention today. Some think a sufficient compensation can be found in psychoanalytic and psychiatric studies or in spiritualistic experiences, which are unfortunately so widespread in some countries today.

People are afraid of falling back into old Manichean theories, or into frightening deviations of