

One understanding of evil is that it is an absence of good, and we have a story today that illustrates this more sharply than most, and says something about the puzzle and the pain of living in a world in which Christ has come and yet such massacres of innocent children continue. What is the point of Christianity if evil continues to have such power? To put it bluntly: how does the birth of one child compensate for the death of so many?

The whole problem of evil on God's watch is at issue here, but shouldn't be allowed to obscure the fact of human agency. Indeed, it's the presence of good in a human person that often provokes evil in another. This battle between good and evil is not then taking place in some ethereal realm which challenges God's right to exist but is fully enfleshed in us in an evolutionary world where it has existed from the beginning. But the message of Christ is that evil can be overcome – can, in one sense – be forgiven. That's hard to take on board at this present time when we see Hamas and Israel murdering innocent people including many children. But Christ will survive to fight another day; to fight evil, that is; the evil that is in all of us – with good; to fill that vacuum where evil prospers when good is absent. The choice then is not about despairing at the continuance of evil after Christ, after good, has come, but appropriating that good for ourselves so that we diminish the evil that will otherwise prosper. This is the agency we have been given through the grace of Jesus Christ and we appropriate it best in the service of others. This is where our interior good feeds on exterior practice. But, as in Christ's day, this good still provokes evil in others so we have to hold on to the larger fact of Christ as not only fully human but definitively divine. Or, in the words of St. John:

*I am writing this, my children, to stop you sinning, but if anyone should sin, we have our advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, who is just. He is the sacrifice that takes our sins away and not only ours but the whole world.*

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