

Interrogating evil:

Responsible and critical engagements with church, ideologies and persons after July 22

Contribution to paneldiscussion

September 19, 2015

What can we learn from July 22 as it pertains to the nature of evil?

1. Breivik on July 22 2011 reintroduced in the Norwegian public space the enormous capacity humans and humanity have for evil acts. He is one of us! We are living in a society which has managed to curb a major portion of societal evil. Our culture is marked by the belief that science and technology in combination with political decisions and awarenessraising campaigns have the capacity to solve all major challenges and bring security to all of us, even to eradication evil. And any way, one firmly believe humans are good at the bottom of the barrel. Evil has very little space in this worldview. Evil acts most therefore either be linked to "the other", pushed under different types of carpets, described as acts of demons or be diagnosed as an illness which can be cured with pills and therapy.

If this description has some truth to it, we need to explore, in line with the South African Kairos document, whether we have developed a "Church theology" which is harmonising conflicts and cover the reality of evil. Are we silent in the face of evil

realities people in Norway experience? And do we seduce people to believe that they will be able to avoid evil experiences or overcome evil in themselves and in their lives? Do we have a theology which alienate all those in our communities struggling with anxieties and sadness because we don't any longer relate to the existence of evil and the resulting evil acts?

And on the other side : are we accepting to justify evil acts by the intentions of the perpetrator ? Our history as humankind is covered with victims of other people's good intention.

2. Secularisation makes religion and church to a sector and segment in society, closely linked to individual statement of faith. Faith is seen as an individual decision and religion is therefore a private matter and limited to the religious arenas, sermons and spaces.

When the church accepts this place and pulls herself into the church buildings, will the society potentially lose an important voice in the public space interpreting trends and events. Car. Habermas and his invitation to churches participation in the public space. That empty space is then filled by other actors who use religion at will. In today's contemporary Europe there is a space for extremist theories which explains reality and pretend to defend society against evil with methods of exclusion and violence, often with religion as part of their ideology.

We need therefore a theology which encompass the whole societal reality, in this generation not from a position of power, but by being relevant for people as an interpreter of societal realities and participate in the public discourse on how to combat evils, accompany those who suffer and promote a just and participatory society.

3. The "simul iustus et peccator " concept is a relevant key for interpreting evil. This doctrine makes it impossible to sanctify any societal order. All human constructions have the possibility for evil, including Churches and those with good intentions.

I am reluctant to classify a societal system or religion as evil. It may label all persons in the system as evil which denies their potential for doing any good. Secondly, you don't negotiate with evil, you combat and overwin evil with wars that never ends as a result.

So my preference is that we limit the use of evil to evil acts and behaviour, to avoid any metaphysical misuse when operationalised in society.

Conclusion: We may use the term "signs of evil" as we are using the term "signs of hope". Then the challenge is to choose the side of hope.