

Martin Buber, the 20th century Jewish philosopher and mystic, author of the highly influential book entitled *I-Thou*, once observed the fundamental estrangement that separates the Christian and the Jew. In 1932, Buber wrote:

“Now to the Christian, the Jew is the incomprehensibly obdurate man, who declines to see what has happened; and to the Jew, the Christian is the incomprehensibly daring man, who affirms in an unredeemed world that its redemption has been accomplished.

“This is a gulf that no human power can bridge.”

“But,” Buber goes on to say, this “does not prevent the common watch for a unity to come to us from God, which, soaring above all of your imagination and all of ours, affirms and denies, denies and affirms what you hold and what we hold, and that replaces all the creedal truths of earth by the ontological truth of heaven, which is one.”

I bring this quotation to your attention because of what Buber says about the Christian point of view with regard to the world. Let me repeat this: “The Christian is the incomprehensibly daring man, *who affirms in an unredeemed world that its redemption has been accomplished.*” Whether he knew it or not, Martin Buber touched on a perennial problem for Christians. We say that God’s redemptive purpose for humanity, and all creation, has been accomplished through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. But 2000 years later, can we honestly say that the world is really better off? It’s a tough question. In other words, in terms of history and current events, what difference has Christ made? Does the world—especially given what humanity has gone through in the 20th century—give any indication of being redeemed?

I say this question is perennial because it has been asked steadily from the very beginning of the life of the Church. And it is essentially the question that is raised in today’s Gospel lesson, in Jesus’ parable of “the weeds of the field.”

* * *

“Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where, then, did these weeds come from?” The “weeds,” Jesus explains to his disciples, are the “children of the evil one sowed by the devil.” Meanwhile, the good seed are the “children of the kingdom.” Jesus makes clear that it is God’s intention, and thus part of God’s divine scheme for the salvation of humanity and the redemption of the world, to allow the weeds to grow up right along with the good seed.

This parable provides an answer to the question of how a Christian can affirm in an apparently unredeemed world that redemption has been accomplished. The good seed has been planted, and has begun to grow—and even now is growing—slowly, but surely—and for the most part *invisibly*.

It is important for us to recognize that the kingdom of heaven (also known as the kingdom of God) is not something that will take place in the future; quite the opposite. The kingdom of heaven is not a destination-point; rather it’s a process, a process of becoming, a process of *becoming Christian*.

It is a divine process that is taking place now in this life—whether we are aware of it or not—and it is a divine process that will continue unceasingly until “the end of the age.”

Unlike many of his parables, Jesus gives a fairly complete explanation of this one. “The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man; the field is the world in the present age; the good seed is the children of the kingdom; the weeds are the children of the evil one; and the enemy who sowed the weeds is the devil.”

The devil, we should know, is “*diabolos*.” That’s the Greek word which is translated “devil.” *Diabolos* sounds familiar because from it we get our word “diabolic” and “diabolical,” meaning, according to the dictionary, “fiendish” or, not surprisingly, “devilish.” But what does “diabolic” literally mean? Going back to the Greek we find that *diabolos* is derived from “*diaballein*,” which means “to throw apart” or “to separate.”

According to psychologists Mihaly Csikszentmihalye and Eugene Rochberg-Halton, what is diabolical, and the essence of evil, “is what separates the self of a person into conflicting forces, what divides one person from others, and what sets up people against the cosmos. It is *chaos*, the force of entropy that destroys the order on which life depends.”*

What is diabolical is also, and especially, what separates men and women from God.

In this sense the serpent in the Garden of Eden was clearly diabolic. The serpent instigated a division, a separation, a “falling out,” as it were, between Adam & Eve and God.

The chief enemy of God has been called the Father of Lies. From a Biblical perspective, what’s wrong with deceit is precisely that it’s *diabolical*. It throws people apart; it estranges people.

Returning to our parable, the weeds in the field represent nothing less than diabolical forces. Divisive forces. Forces that throw people apart from one another.

Now ironically this parable of the weeds of the field can itself appear to be rather diabolical. What does the parable do but quickly divide people into two separate groups. And, although some forbearance is shown to the children of the evil one, they’re allowed to grow up along side of the children of the kingdom, it’s only temporary, and in the end they’re thrown into the fire where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Bad for one group and good for the other group; the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father! One group’s in and the other one’s out.

The problem with this diabolical interpretation of the parable is that it fails to take into account that weeds of the field have been planted by God’s enemy not just out there in the world, but most crucially in here, in our own heart and soul. *The weeds are growing within us.*

As is the good seed.

Our concern, as much as we are interested in the kingdom of heaven, should always be: which kind of growth are we cultivating in our own lives? That of the good seed or that of the weeds?

This is not a part-time job. We, like angels, must be constantly vigilant, always paying attention, always engaged. For, as God tells Cain in the Book of Genesis, who diabolically has begun to allow himself to become estranged from his brother Abel through envy and anger, God warns him: “Sin is lurking at the door; its desire is for you, but you must master it.”

St. Peter is even more dramatic. As he counsels fellow Christians in his first letter (chap. 5, vs. 8): “Discipline yourselves and keep alert! Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour.” And because the weeds are growing right along side the good seed, you never know when or where *el Diablo* will appear.

Speaking of the diabolic, I’m reminded of a somewhat humorous story about a social-psychology experiment that was conducted a number of years ago. A group of about 25 men were put in a large room together. They were each randomly given either a red hat or green hat to wear. No instructions or explanations were provided other than the psychologists would be back in a while to provide further instructions.

Then the men were left alone. The psychologists of course ran around to the room with the two-way mirror and waited to see what would happen next. At first, the subjects did nothing much more than idly inter-mingle and chat. But then something curious took place: slowly but surely the men, apparently without even being aware of it, segregated themselves into two separate groups, each at other ends of the room. The groups were divided according to hat color!

Then the following exchange was recorded: One green hated man said to another: “Hey, do you have any idea what we’re supposed to be doing here?”

The other man replied, “No I don’t. But I’ll tell you one thing for sure: those guys over there in the red hats *are up to something!*”

And so it goes...in the field where both the weeds and the good seed grow up together, now and until the end of the age. Therefore, as St. Paul counsels, allow yourself to be led by the Spirit of God and do not fall back into fear...suffer the present time as Christ Jesus did, with faith, with hope, and with love for all. AMEN.

*See *The Meaning of Things: Domestic Symbols and the Self* (1981), p. 40.