

*In this issue of the Yaroslavl Forum newsletter, we return to the topic of the readiness to the political evil, which we touched upon in the previous Russian Journal newsletter. Today's author is Guy Walters, a British researcher focused on history and a writer. He has authored nine books, primarily covering topics related to WWII. His recent book *Hinting Evil* (2009) is about the history of how Nazi war criminals managed to escape after the war, and how they were brought to justice. Guy Walters spoke to our reporter about the nature of political evil from a point of morality. His position is receiving more interest in connection with the main topic of the future Yaroslavl Forum, and one of its sections is dedicated to justice.*

## FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS DO NOT WANT TO KILL PEOPLE

Guy Walters

Well, I don't think there is any difference between personal evil and state-sponsored evil, in the sense that evil is an abstract concept. So the expression of evil may be different, but whether we are talking about Stalin slaughtering thousands of people or millions of people, or one person committing a murder, they are both equally evil acts. But I think what makes state-sponsored evil is the ability to make it into a sort of a bureaucracy, to transform evil into a machine, which only the state is really capable of doing.

There are somewhat different. We cannot unconditionally identify Wall Street a sort of evil today. Banks do not want to kill people. So, no, I dismiss this as a kind of lazy, morally relative argument – the kind put forth by students who are ill educated. And **any group of people who wishes to kill innocent people in the street must be considered evil.** Regardless of what their cause is, this is evil because they are killing people who have nothing to do with their fight.

Politicians often label someone as evil. Of course, it is a successful approach, because the population likes to see things in black and white terms. We look at the Second World War as the battle of good against evil. And although that picture, in many ways, is right, it was not always true. The fact is that both sides of any conflict inhabit morally grey areas, and you have to work out which one is a darker shade of grey than the other one.

Many things depend on which country you live in. I think that, in the United States, there are a few different



shades of gray. I think that, in the United Kingdom, we may think that some countries are evil, but there is a bit more tolerance in that regard. I think that if you ask an American, he will probably say that Iran is an evil place, but if you ask someone in Britain: 'Is Iran evil?', he might say: 'No, but there may be some evil people in charge.' So, I think it is hard for **politicians not to use such concepts as good and evil**, and just present the argument, because that does not really work to drum up support.

If you look at the United States, I think that you will find that democratic presidents have paid reference to the battle against evil. If you look at Jimmy Carter or Bill Clinton, they were often talking about evil. I haven't conducted research as to how often a republican or a democrat tends to use the word 'evil', but certainly yes, you do find that it is used more often by Christians who are firm believers, because people like that inhabit a very obvious moral universe.

Both politicians and scientists likely use the rhetoric of evil because people love evil, specifically because, without evil, there would be no entertainment industry. One is a good man, and one is an evil man, but you would only want to know about the evil man, because evil is transgressive, and in many ways there is a glamour to evil, which it is in all of us and thus, we all like it.

I can suppose this is the root of the significant attention paid to the history of the Third Reich with its largest evil – the Holocaust. **While the Holocaust is evil, it is not a unique evil.** Other acts of genocide have also taken place, and all genocides are equally evil. The Holocaust is considered to be number one, but there are also a lot of other number ones. The Soviet government's starving the Ukrainian peasantry in the 1920s and 1930s is just as evil and the genocide in Rwanda is just as evil. Chopping up babies with knives in Rwanda is certainly just as evil as sending the Jews to the gas chambers. It is not fair to turn around and say that the Holocaust is the most evil thing that has ever taken place. It is not true. All of these huge tragedies are all equally bad.

I think that to say, in some way, that weak and powerless people were actually as responsible for that the Holocaust as those who committed it ascribes a kind of universal guilt to Germany that I do not subscribe to. I do not blindly agree that the Germans were basically the executioners of the Jewish people. ■

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