

Excluding Killers Marks Christian Failure

Memorials to the victims of two episodes of mass killings were unveiled this fall in Blacksburg, Va., and Littleton, Colo. Neither memorial honored those who were identified as the gunmen at Virginia Tech or Columbine High School.

"I think it's going to be a place of healing and forgiveness," the mother of one Columbine victim said at the dedication on Sept. 21. The \$1.5 million Colorado memorial includes a Ring of Healing.

One day earlier, the administrator of the \$7 million Hokie Spirit Memorial fund that will compensate families of those slain at Virginia said that no money would go



Virginia Tech

Stones memorialize names of victims at Virginia Tech's "interim memorial," which was dedicated Aug. 19. But there is no mention of the shooter, Seung-Hui Choi.

"Christians think that bad things such as these are evidence of how deeply damaged the world is, and that lamenting them is part of what it means to worship God. "But Christians also believe that the damage suffered by the killers at Columbine and Virginia Tech was far worse than that suffered by those they killed, or even by those who lament the loss of their sons and daughters.

"We are commanded to pray for enemies as well as friends, and, it seems rapidly to follow, to remember those who have damaged us and our beloveds at the same time as we remember those loved ones. Not to do so—to exclude the names of the killers from the public memorials at Virginia Tech and Columbine and Oklahoma City, and thereby to exclude them from our tears and memories and prayers—is to fail in a fundamental Christian duty.

"This is not to say that what the killers did is good; neither is it to say that they deserve our acts of public remembering; nor, most of all, is it to ignore how very difficult it is to say or think anything good about

those who have done something so terrible.

"But the young men who killed at these places had mothers and fathers too; they, like their victims, were God's creatures, made in his image. We become less than we might have been if we fail to memorialize them along with their victims, and our failure and lack in this respect makes us less capable than we would otherwise have been of redressing the world's damage." ◀

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to the family of Seung-Hui Cho, the shooter, "because we are trying as best we can to promote healing."

Vital Theology asked Paul J. Griffiths, Schmitt Professor of Catholic Studies at the University of Illinois at Chicago, whether healing can occur in such circumstances. His response follows:

"The public memorials to the dead at Columbine and at Virginia Tech belong to the architecture of public mourning and public memory, and in that respect they are good. Something bad happened at these places— young people killed and were killed—and bad things need to be remembered and mourned.



Paul J. Griffiths