

Is violence the mental illness or sin of our society?

Mary Ann McGivern | Jan. 17, 2013 NCR Today

One of my brothers asked me last week if I thought violent video games were related to our current spate of school gun murders. He said he knew there were no links to television mayhem, but what about video games? He set me onto a five-minute diatribe that's been reverberating in my head for eight days now.

Since the 1970s, when I began to understand our U.S. military budget, I've wondered if a nation can be mentally ill. Our choices of where to put our money have been, to put it technically, crazy. Then, in 1976, to recognize the bicentennial, this paper, the *National Catholic Reporter*, asked Catholic public figures to write brief reflections about American history. Dorothy Day submitted one word: "Repent!"

So here's my question: Is our outsized Pentagon spending, our willingness to wage wars from Afghanistan to Grenada to Yemen, our use of the death penalty, our imprisonment of 10 percent of the black population, our huge personal stores of weapons, our national fascination with violence -- video games, television, "if it bleeds it leads" news reporting -- is all this mental illness or is it sin?

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