

SUNDAY ARTICLE

ST DAVID'S PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH ♦ 12 NOVEMBER 2017



Loving Our Enemies

David Robertson

26 people dead. 24 seriously wounded. Yet another US gun massacre.

They are now so common and we are becoming so desensitised that less than 24 hours after the tragedy it had become a side note on many news programmes.

Perhaps it would be different if people realised that Devin Patrick Kelley, the shooter who walked into the church and shot as many of the worshippers as he could, was a Muslim immigrant who shouted "Allahu Akbar" as he mercilessly gunned them down?

Except he wasn't. He had nothing to do with Islam or with immigrants. (Sadly, in today's perverted world there will be those who are disappointed that this is not the case.)

Maybe if people realised that he was a redneck evangelical Christian, we would now be having discussions in the media about the dangers of religion and how the Christian "Taliban" in the Southern US is as dangerous as the Muslim Taliban in Afghanistan? The secular and humanist internet pages would be filled with dire warnings about how this proves the danger of religion.

But that turns out not to be true either.

President Trump has already announced that this was a mental health issue by tweeting "this was not a gun issue, it was a mental health issue". Perhaps there was

a history of mental illness but it would be wiser to resist the almost pathological urge to tweet these kinds of pronouncements. It really doesn't help those who suffer from mental illness to equate them with massacring people.

There is however an issue that has gone largely unnoticed in almost every news bulletin and report I have heard; an issue that explains why websites have been so quiet about the whole thing.

Known for His Hate

It appears that Devin Patrick Kelley, as described by those who knew him, was a militant atheist who despised Christians.

But why is Kelley's atheism and hatred of Christianity ignored and regarded as irrelevant to the fact that he massacred Christians at worship in a Church?

If he had been a homophobe who shot up a gay nightclub, then this would automatically be classed as a crime motivated by homophobia.

If he had been a white supremacist who shot up a Mosque, then howls of Islamaphobia would dominate the media.

But when an avowed atheist goes into a church and kills 26 Christians, why is his worldview not even considered a possible factor?

Is it because so many of those who report our news find it incomprehensible that anyone would do such a thing because of atheism?

In their eyes atheism is never a motivating factor for anything. When faced with the fact that Stalin was an atheist they usually respond with a witty jibe such as, "Yes, but he didn't like beards either, does that mean he attacked barbers?" In other words, his atheism was meaningless. Except that Stalin destroyed 20,000 churches and killed thousands of clergy. As far as we know he left barbershops alone!

But atheists, we're told, don't do hate speech. Really? Let me share a couple of personal comments made in public (among the more printable ones) made about yours truly from some so-called non-hate atheists.

"I hate organised religion, but boy, I sure do hate you more!"

"Personally, as a secularist, I hate religion and feel I have every right to."

I even once had a death threat against me on an atheist website along with one for Professor John Lennox who was told his legs should be broken and if that failed he should be killed for crimes against humanity.

***... an avowed
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What disturbed me was not so much that they appeared on the website (we cannot be responsible for all the weirdos that post on our pages) but that they were allowed to remain.

For many decades there has been a militant form of atheism that regards religion in general and Christianity in particular as a virus that needs to be eradicated. Nietzsche, for example, argued

“I call Christianity the one great curse, the one great intrinsic depravity, the one great instinct for revenge for which no expedient is sufficiently poisonous, secret, subterranean, petty – I call it the one immortal blemish of mankind”

Richard Dawkins gave the green light to this kind of hate speech amongst his followers when he opined in *The God Delusion* that teaching children the truth of the Bible might be worse than child sexual abuse!

Rather than cause a degree of contrition and caution amongst the more militant atheists, the Texas Church Massacre has apparently caused even further justification for their anger against the God they don't believe in.

I have already seen several comments which mocked Christians who have prayed for the situation. *“They were in church. They had the prayers shot right out of them. Maybe try something else.”*

Even the BBC news report on the atrocity this evening signed off with a snide gibe that Americans seem to think the answer is in guns and God.

Known for Our Love

As Christians we believe we are to do unto others as we would want them to do to us. Therefore, we must resist the temptation to respond in kind, rush into judgement, proclaim this as an atheist hate crime against Christians, tar all atheists with the same brush, and suggest that atheism inevitably leads to such persecution of Christians.

Irrational atheists like Richard Dawkins like to cite Westboro Baptist as the example of where Christianity leads. They think that their hatred of Christianity is justified by the examples they post of the tiny percentage of the world's three billion Christians who do extreme and wicked things. We must not do likewise and claim the Texas Church Massacre is the inevitable consequence of atheism.

However, we must not ignore the fact that teaching hatred through atheism (or any other ideology) does have bad consequences. It may be that Kelley had “domestic issues”, or “mental health” issues, or other factors (as is so often the case, real life stories are usually far more complex than the 24 hour/24 second sound bite culture we live in) and that his expressions of hatred against Christianity were only secondary factors, if factors at all. But nonetheless there is an

important message that we all need to hear. Preaching hate always produces hate-filled fruit.

It is vital that in our interactions at a personal or social media level, we do not foster the demonisation of the “other” and we do not use the communication opportunities we have to communicate hate. Atheists, Muslims, Christians, Humanists – and indeed every human group – can all too easily do that.

As a Christian I don't believe that “hate speech” should be criminalised and controlled by the State – mainly because the State cannot control it and also because there is the danger that the definition of hate speech can itself become a way of institutionalising hate.

But I do think that we should all realise that words can wound and kill as well as heal and bring life.

As a Christian I face a far higher standard than that of the State. I must one day stand before the Christ who says that every careless word and thought will be judged.

His standard is love and forgiveness for our enemies. That is so essential to Him that He tells us only to pray for forgiveness as we are prepared to forgive others!

And if we think we can get away with just using love as a cute but undefined term we need to think again. Christ does not give us that option. Through His Word He tells us what love is. It is only through being in Him, the One who is Love, that the love of God can be shed abroad in our hearts.

“Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonour others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.” (1 Corinthians 13:4-7 NIV)



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