

The impossible dream: that we could ever believe without acting

I'm upset this morning at the news of yet another slaying of abortion doctor, George Tiller, in a church in Wichita, Kansas yesterday. Immediately, the right-wing press went to work to distance themselves from the act of terrorism. An Associated Press Article included the following quip: "The pro-life group Operation Rescue issued a statement denouncing the shooting. 'We are shocked at this morning's disturbing news that Mr. Tiller was gunned down,' said Troy Newman, Operation Rescue's president." Come on. Really? 'Shocked?'

Time and time again, throughout my life, I've noticed how religious groups will distinguish a class of people, such as blacks, or gays or abortionists as "evil," or "unworthy of God's love," and then pretend to be surprised when certain parishioners act on this language. Are they truly so naïve as to believe their words have no effect on actions, or is this denial of culpability simply a convenient tactic, a plausible (if improbable) deniability that only serves to justify the continued support of violence?

It has been said by philosophers throughout the ages that our ideologies are only useful to us inasmuch as we are willing to act according to them.¹ Most of us would agree that failing to conduct our lives according to our ideology is how we define "wickedness."

The practical application of this most obvious remark is that, if we are told by our religious leaders that, for example, "Abortion is murder," or James Dobson's remark that "This [homosexual] movement is the greatest threat to your children," then how could any reasonable being not see this as a call for ethical people to take up arms to uphold such an ideology? In this case, it has become a wicked thing indeed for certain people *not* to assassinate a murderous abortionist, especially since the existing laws and authorities seem incapable of protecting people from abortionist murders, or the attacks by gays on our most fundamental family values? Indeed, the American Family Association published their own account of Tiller's murder in an article entitled: "Like abortion, Tiller's murder 'senseless act of violence.'"² The operative phrase here, of course, being "Like abortion," clearly stating



¹ The philosopher Louis Althusser showed that our ideology only functions within the context of our actions: "Throughout this schema we observe that the ideological representation of ideology is itself forced to recognize that every 'subject' endowed with a 'consciousness' and believing in the 'ideas' that his 'consciousness' inspires in him and freely accepts, must 'act according to his ideas,' must therefore inscribe his own ideas as a free subject in the actions of his material practice." He (Althusser) goes on to point out these actions are in no way optional or discretionary, because: "If he does not do so, 'that is wicked.'"

² Charlie Butts, OneNewsNow, June 1, 2009, <http://www.onenewsnow.com/Culture/Default.aspx?id=549886>

the murder of this doctor was in no way worse or different than the abortions he condoned – in other words, that he *deserved* to be killed.

It is no accident that we do not see in the news stories about pro-choicers taking up arms and bombing pro-life headquarters. It is no freak of history that we do not see roving bands of gays and lesbians “bashing” or murdering straight people. The reason we are not aware of stories like this is because our ideologies do not make such attacks imperative. Pro-choice and pro-gay preachers do not call the existence of their opposition or the existence of people different from them an abomination to God, or their ideology an attack on our most fundamental family values. Simply stated, they do not attack or cause physical harm because their ideology, their pastors, do not call them to attack.

I think it's time our religious leaders started preaching peace. If the Old Testament makes violence seem like the only answer, then perhaps we should turn to the New Testament. After all, Christ's new commandment was that we love one another.

-- Troy Carlyle