

Shootings a reason to reach out to others

I had horrible thoughts about the shootings at New Life. This column is my penance.

My first thoughts as the story broke weren't about the people threatened by a deranged psychopath. My first thoughts were about the religion of the gunman. That's horrible.

I thought about the religion of the gunman because I was terrified that he'd be Jewish. How paranoid is that? The survival instinct among Jews runs strong. We're always worried about not making trouble with the "goyim" (Hebrew for "others"). Instead of thinking about whether innocent people would die, I thought about the chances that a new wave of anti-Semitism would wash over Colorado Springs. Silly, really.

Then I thought "Please don't let the shooter be Muslim." That could've been the spark that sets off another Crusade, a Christian-Muslim conflict that at least one blogger on The Gazette site believes inevitable.

Sometimes I get so obsessed over "big" issues, they're the first things that come to mind. I have friends at New Life, but I thought of the holy war angle before I thought of them. That's horrible.

But my subconscious still wasn't done. In order for the shooting to affect me as little as possible, the gunman had to be Christian, or at least from a Christian background. That would tie everything together in a neat little package. The shooting would become merely another horrific, senseless act of violence. Heaven forbid I should have to deal with something that had larger political consequences.

Well, lucky me, I got my wish.

I had other horrible thoughts too. I wanted the gunman dead, not merely captured. Even if he surrendered, I wanted him killed. When I heard a New Life security guard had gunned him down, and then the gunman finished his own life, I wasn't just relieved. I was ecstatic. Good for her, and good riddance for him.

That's a horrible thought. You're not supposed to want people dead.

I also found myself looking for theological references, and screaming in frustration when people made them. Why would a minister be certain it was God's hand that placed him in the emergency room to help people grieve, without thinking about the reason



OPINION
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people were there grieving in the first place? How could the security guard possibly believe the Holy Spirit was guiding her, when she arrived just after two teenage sisters were shot in front of their father?

What exactly is good about thinking that way? I find it maddeningly incomprehensible.

Those are horrible thoughts to have, because they indicate a kind of intellectual narcissism. The members of New Life Church are under no obligation to make their beliefs comprehensible to me or anybody else. Why am I arguing theology

with people who can't respond, who are consumed with fear and grief? Must I ponder the intellectual significance of everything I see and hear? What is wrong with me?

Enough already. I want to do something for New Life. I hope everybody does. Regardless of how you feel about what they believe, no community should have to go through what they have gone through. So I'd like to ask the community to show them that people from all walks of life are capable of transcending their differences to reach a core of caring, sympathy, and simple human decency.

Go to a New Life service, they'll be glad to have you. Set up a scholarship fund in memory of Stephanie and Rachael Works. Volunteer for New Life in your area of expertise. Give money to Youth With a Mission. Or just call the church and ask them what they need. Help them if you can.

There are other things this can inspire us to do. Does your church or synagogue forbid weapons on the premises? Ask the membership to rethink that, it might save some lives. There are ways to secure our gathering places discreetly and professionally, if we can just get over our hang-up about guns. Americans should have better alternatives during shopping, school and worship than fleeing in terror from a pathetic psychopath.

My heart goes out to everyone at New Life. I have made no secret about our disagreements, but I don't care about that right now. How much more must New Life endure? Here's hoping that this is the last news story about your church for a long, long time.

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