

Sandy Hook and public theology

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The good thing about being a blogger is that there is the vibrancy, immediacy, and energy in the act of posting. It's like jumping into a lively conversation, with my attention being drawn in and then distracted by the next shiny object. On Twitter raw emotional responses are [ephemeral](#), like the quick flicker of match light. Other times a thought catches on fire and spreads around the globe.

The wonderful thing about social media is that it allows us to organize for quick and nimble action, especially when we have a longing for justice that has burned for years and it finally finds voice in our larger culture.

The difficult thing about social media is revealed in times like this. We can jump into the noise, spewing our thoughts without much consideration or editing. We lack communities to challenge us, until the match is lit.

One week after the shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary school, there seems to be so many failures in the ways that our theology is playing out in the public sphere. And while a quick response, blog posts, sound bytes and tweets are important in this moment, as they emerge from varying political and evangelistic agendas, they also expose some of Christianity's devastating aspects. It is a reminder that we will also need to keep wrestling in the years to come for deeper changes in our theology and narratives that structure our lives together. In light of the atrocity, I've been struggling with these aspects of our tradition.

Redemptive violence. When we focus on the brutal crucifixion of Jesus Christ (rather than the life, teachings, suffering, or resurrection) as the source of our salvation, I worry that we send the message that violence is the answer to violence. When we lift up the death of the sinless, we communicate that violence against one who is innocent is particularly redemptive. In the light of Sandy Hook (as well as so many other horrors), can we begin to rethink this impulse?

I shudder to imagine that the line of reasoning might be infecting our culture so much that we feel that the only answer to violence is more violence, particularly as people insist that guns make us safer, and some hope to arm teachers or police at schools. I don't think that my child will be safer with more guns in school and our paths to peace will not come with building more weapons. Our impulse to correct savagery with more violence makes me worry that our culture seems bent on self-destruction.

Human depravity. When a nation is in mourning for the loss of the little ones in Connecticut, as well as so many children whose lives have been cut short due to gun violence, our theology reminds us of the sinfulness of all humanity. While I am Reformed, I often wonder how this affects people. What could possibly be redemptive in telling a mourning mother that she is totally depraved as her children are slaughtered?

When we raise our children, we lift up their goodness, as people with dignity who are formed in the image of God. What does it do to our culture when we tell each other how depraved we are in the midst of such tragedy?

Scapegoating. In some theological systems, we scapegoat, transferring guilt and blame from one party to the next, even if they are unrelated. We have a theological bent toward scapegoating.

In the aftermath of the murders, some have blamed the violence on some random perceived moral failure. Why did the children get shot? [James Dobson](#) would say it's because of our abortion or marriage equality laws. Many acts of scapegoating bring up issues that fuel a particular political agenda, jumping to unrelated causes, and coming to the devastating conclusion that God caused or allowed innocent to suffer because of our sin.

God's providence. In light of suffering, it can be comforting to some to hear that this was all in God's plan. But it's brutal to [others](#), especially in the light of Sandy Hook. If God planned the massacre of children, what does that say about the nature of God?

In the months to come, in the raw emotion, the status updates, the 140 characters, we will need to keep working on our grief and responding. We need to work for systemic change in a violent culture. And, this is also a moment for us to be aware of how our long-standing traditions play out in public, in the midst of this horror. It is

a call for us to think deeply about how our theology shapes and informs our life together.