

Christian right should rebuke bigots' 'religion'

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Even Buford O'Neal Furrow thinks he's a madman. He attempted to check himself into a suburban Seattle psychiatric hospital last year but ended up, instead, serving jail time for pulling a knife on the staff.

Given his history of homicidal fantasies -- at his earlier arrest, he reportedly talked to police about committing mass murders -- there is little doubt the man is mentally unstable. But there is little doubt, either, that hate -- a vicious and irrational hatred of racial and ethnic minorities -- was the match that ignited his combustible personality.

Furrow, who has been linked to white supremacist groups, proudly admitted to a violent rampage at a Los Angeles Jewish community center, telling investigators that the shootings were "a wake-up call to America to kill Jews," according to published reports. Never mind that he was so much the coward that he shot small children, he still flashed a smile as he was being hauled away in handcuffs, after turning himself in Wednesday to authorities in Las Vegas. (Furrow has also been charged with the murder of postal worker Joseph Iletto, targeted, apparently, because he was Filipino-American and worked for the federal government.)

Crazy as Furrow is, crazier still are the pseudo-religious overtones of the hate groups with whom he apparently found companionship and comfort. It's not enough that these groups have adopted a dangerous and perverse world view that considers Jews and people of color subhuman.

These vile organizations, many of which adopt the warped religious belief system called Christian Identity, also claim to promote and defend Christianity. Their "religion" rests on the notions that Jews are descended from Satan and that people of color are "mud people" without souls. You'd think Christian leaders -- especially those on the Christian right -- would be all over the airwaves denouncing those claims.

Does something so obvious need to be said? Yes, it does, given all the hatred, intolerance and violence carried out in the name of Christianity -- from the murders of abortion providers to the gay-bashing pickets at the Casper, Wyo., funeral of gay victim Matthew Shepard last year. The Christian Coalition and its allies have a special responsibility to denounce these distortions of Christianity; unlike its counterparts on the Christian left, the religious right has not distinguished itself with a history of tolerance and inclusion.

Of course, denunciations from legitimate Christian organizations, whether liberal or conservative, would not have discouraged a homicidal lunatic intent on getting his 15 minutes of infamy. Nor would rebukes by Jerry Falwell or Pat Robertson be likely to discourage the likes of Matthew Hale, the Illinois would-be attorney who has organized his own so-called "church" -- the World Church of the Creator -- to advocate the deportation, perhaps the elimination, of all "inferior, colored races."

Any denunciations of those perversions of Christianity would be merely symbolic, a reassertion of the moral authority of which the Christian church seems bereft these days. But symbols are important.

The Rev. Falwell had time to mount a crusade against Tinky Winky, the purple Teletubby he claimed promoted homosexuality. You'd think he might be moved to crusade against a more obvious target -- the fringe haters whose distortions of Christianity seek to defend racist murders.

And what of Robertson? Between his denunciations of gays and lesbians and his warnings that Orlando would be destroyed for hosting gay gatherings, does he have no time for stern public rebukes of un-Christian Identity?

Furrow may be nuts, but his race-baiting, Christianity-perverting ideology is increasingly finding adherents who are not nearly as crazy. You'd think more good Christians would be offended.

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