

## **Friday Meditation: on the Religion of the Gun**

Somewhere beyond hope, and far beyond the reach of “thoughts and prayers,” I struggle with rage and grief. Yet another massacre in a public school, and eighteen similar tragedies in this year alone. I cannot look at those beautiful faces of our lost children now being posted on the internet without feeling shame, rage, unspeakable loss. What does my religious faith have to say about these crimes?

***Religion is the state of being grasped by an ultimate concern, a concern which qualifies all other concerns as preliminary and which itself contains the answer to the question of a meaning of our life.*** -- Paul Tillich

So, one may rightly ask, what seems to be “the ultimate concern” of our fabled republic? What is the real religion of America? Is it the lives of its citizens? Is it the lives of its children? Hardly. Transcending the concern for the lives and well-being of its people is concern for the money (read “bribes”) offered to law-makers to NOT pass laws restricting the sale and distribution of guns and more guns. America has become a temple dedicated to the false(?) god of money and violence, and the money-changers are doing a lively business.

Who is going to march into this temple and upset the tables stacked with blood-money?

***When it was almost time for the Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple courts he found people selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money. So he made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple courts, both sheep and cattle; he scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables.*** --John 2:13-16 (Also see Matthew 21:12-13; Mark 11:15-18; Luke 19:45-46.)

It seems to me that this paradigmatic act -- told in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John -- shows us one strategy for dealing with those who desecrate our sacred places, and is not a school a sacred place, a place set aside for the uplift, well-being and safety of children. We braid us a whip of three strands -- anger, courage, and love -- and we drive them out! Whose anger, courage, and love? All of us who have ever borne a child; loved a child, or been a child.

Tillich wrote in *Dynamics of Faith*, “. . . history has shown that the most terrible crimes against love have been committed in the name of fanatically defended doctrines.” Our “fanatically defended doctrine” is the one that insists that weapons must be bought and sold, without hindrance or conscience, on the open market.

Why will we need anger, courage, and love? Bertolt Brecht, in *Mother Courage*, remarked that it takes a long anger to effect change and that most people cannot sustain anger long enough to be effective. Courage, because we must remember that the man who drove the money-changers out of the temple was killed just a few days later. And love, yes. Love for the lost children; love for the grieving parents, siblings, grandparents, and friends; love for the suffering souls whose pain urges them to murder; love for the whole human tribe that cannot long sustain this kind of desecration and loss; love for the money-changers? That is beyond my spiritual capability at this time, but I will put them on my altar and purify my heart and try to find the words of “bravest fire” to drive them out of the most sacred place to save their souls and ours.

This has been hard to write; I know it may be hard to read. Thank you for being here to hear my lament.

Bless you all, and keep you safe.