



“Metal Illness”

Right after Devin Kelley used his semi-auto weapon to slaughter and wound the worshipers in that Baptist church in Sutherland Springs, Texas, that disaster was the leading news on all the media. Especially in Texas.

One news report that conveyed a comment by one of the gunman’s high school classmates also contained a timely, truth-laden typo. “It’s crazy,” the misquoted quote said, “what time and metal illness can do to you.”

Of course, the classmate actually said “mental illness.” Lawmen investigating the tragedy found that the attacker had been on psychiatric meds since his early teen years. They uncovered his atheistic rants on social media and easily tracked his earlier convictions for child and wife abuse and for animal cruelty. Soon they learned of more recent family fussing that fueled his hate.

But in those post-shooting days, as always happens after a mass-shooting, liberals began ranting for stricter gun controls. They focused on guns—on “metal illness”—as the root problem.

Investigators verified that existing gun laws had not been applied. The anti-gun lobbyists were right about this. A fellow like Kelley never should have touched a gun. But Kelley’s guns were not the root problem. Devin Kelley’s real problem was “mental”—not “metal.”

Years before the church massacre, Kelley’s mental illness got him jailed and dishonorably discharged from the U.S. Air Force. Uncle locked him up, but current mental health protocol in the civilian world left him free to roam unmonitored in Texas streets. He was a predict-able disaster going somewhere to happen.

Back in the Dark Ages—in my first decade as a pastor—the daughter of a lady in my Arizona flock was in the state hospital’s ward for the criminally insane. She had come after her mama with a butcher knife.

But, as psychotropic meds became the therapy of choice, the asylum keepers began releasing her to come to church on Sundays. She brought with her another medicated patient—a woman who had put two dozen slugs into her husband in the lobby of a downtown office building.

Sunday after Sunday this would-be killer and her killer-friend sat on the fourth pew in our sanctuary. Every week I wondered: what if one of them has decided not to take her meds?

Today in-patient mental health therapy is brief and rare. Much of the violence in our headlines can be traced to sick people who did quit taking their meds. The problem is not “metal.” It’s “mental.”

By Gene Shelburne