Why we report their names

Posted by TBN Editor On 04/17/2018

Hollywood, MD - Attending the two-hour class dealing with the response to active shooters Sunday night, April 15 at Chesapeake Church gave all in the audience—including myself—a lot to think about and absorb. For me, it wasn't just how to react and take precautions. More to come on that, but this essay should begin with a big thumbs up to law enforcement for stepping forward and quelling the community's anxiety. One of the big lessons learned is that it isn't just schools that are in peril. Any workplace can find itself in an armed and dangerous perpetrator's crosshairs. Every one of our region's schools—public and private—should eagerly invite these peace officers to share their presentation. There are still a few weeks left in the current school year to make it happen. It might even make a good summer school session for businesses as well as educators.

So, what was that other thing I took from this? It had to do with something one of the state troopers said at the end of the presentation. She told the audience "don't say the names" of the perpetrators, specifically the mass killers, adding that the public acknowledgement was what the gunman craved. The trooper did appear to concede that the media was probably still going to reveal the shooters' identities. But as I do so many times, I heard the word "media" being uttered in a pejorative tone. While I agree with her that we ought to praise those brave people who stop, attempt to stop, rescue and sacrifice when such a heinous crime is occurring, withholding the identities of anyone involved in these human dramas doesn't really serve a purpose.

Still, there's a movement—probably several movements—to place an embargo on naming the perps. There's a web site--www.dontnamethem.org/ that has concluded that by releasing the names of the attackers the press is causing more of these shootings to occur.

After Cain killed Abel, the Scriptures set a precedent—report the names of the accused and the victim. Some media outlets might decide not to release names—that is their choice. But they certainly aren't taking the high road when they choose to do that. I also think it's a huge presumption to say the gunmen are doing this in order to become famous. We need to ask questions like "why did this happen?" "Who was this person and why did he (or she) do what they did?" "Where did they get the gun?" "Could this have been prevented?" We have to know who this individual is or was in order to answer those questions. Unless you can accurately analyze their personalities there's no way to prove the fame-seeker theory in every case. Many of those gunmen died along with their victims. Dead people don't have a mortal's sense of satisfaction.

In an effort to cover all bases, there might be some question as to why rape victims' names are not released. This is a widespread policy of news organizations, although in at least two U.S. states it is against the law to release rape victims' names. While there has been widespread discussion within the media and in academia about this seemingly universal policy, the National Alliance to End Sexual Violence continues to make a good case for adhering to the practice. Releasing the names, the alliance states, would deter victims from coming forward to report the violation. For the sake of seeing justice served, the embargo in this case seems logical. I don't feel the logic holds up with other crimes.

There are no easy solutions to the madness mankind has been creating and coping with for centuries. The generations who now occupy the Earth may have ramped up the technology of violence but they sure didn't invent violence. It was part of society long before Guttenberg invented the printing press. We again commend law enforcement for their efforts to help real-time society deal with this current scourge.

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