

H A T E C R I M E S

Hatred and violence are ancient widespread human pastimes. Like anchovies, some people enjoy them, and other people don't. The ones who enjoy hatred and violence usually are more interested in giving than receiving, in a twisted parody of Jesus' teaching "It is better to give than to receive." Interestingly, many of these people are also narrow minded, intolerant, fundamentalist so-called Christians. The Christianity they practice is more in the style of Torquemada and the Spanish Inquisition, rather than the commonly quoted bits about Love and Forgiveness. Equally interesting is that most of the "Law" they use as justification for their actions and attitudes is taken from the Old Testament rather than the New Testament. As I recall from Sunday School, one of Jesus' main points is that his teachings supersede the old laws. Maybe the hateful people didn't go to church that Sunday.

If I thought it would do any good, I might advocate taking hateful people out behind the barn and give 'em a whuppin'. Quite likely, they have already enjoyed such experiences in their family upbringing, and generously share these activities with their own children.

In America of course, we are free from the problems of thuggery and violence because we have rule by law. It's somewhat unfortunate (from the victim's point of view) that the impressive and powerful legal machinery that we have can only be invoked after the murder, rape or assault has occurred. The alternative, preemptive law enforcement, has been nicely explored in Steven Spielberg's film "Minority Report", which shows that even the best intentions can go badly wrong when put into practice.

I think it is reasonable to *not* practice preemptive law enforcement. This leaves unsolved the problem of stopping violence before it happens. Self protection using pepper spray, or other weapon is condoned, but quite problematic in practice. The most effective method might be for every person in the society to have the wisdom and skill to regulate their own behavior so as not to escalate violent confrontation. This is approximately the same as wishing that the Bolsheviks who are ransacking your village would just stop and go away. Although it is not a very effective approach, nonetheless if one accepts the social contract of rule by due process of law, such wishful thinking is one of the foundational techniques for regulating anti-social behavior.

This conundrum illustrates the appealing aspects of hatred and violence: there is not any ambiguity or moral issues. As they say, "If at first you don't succeed, put another bullet in the gun."

How then, might we try to defeat these violent and hateful attitudes? Certainly the first step is to bring everything out into the light. Criminality, like cockroaches, do not flourish when exposed to open view. Finding the perpetrators of hateful speech and graffiti might help, but such people can always move through an open society. Punishing them by jail, re-education or mandated public service is as likely to improve their skills and harden their attitude as it would be to change their minds. And these measures can only be used *after* they have already hurt some one. Forced sterilization has one very appealing aspect – at least they would not directly pass their psychoses on to children.

The only effective short term solution that I can see is to help empower potential victims by teaching them conflict mitigation skills, crisis intervention and other techniques that can defuse a problematic situation. Any approach that attempts to dominate power with power will not work if the hateful people have more power, be it personal, technical or whatever. Potential victims should travel in groups with several cell phones, pepper spray and maybe a few tazer guns as a precaution, but should rely first on communication skills. Good luck, y'all.

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W H Y C H R I S T I A N I T Y I S R I G H T

In the fourth century A.D. the Emperor of Rome, Constantine, realized he needed a new way to do business. In particular, the Empire was rotting away, inside and out. The Roman Military had maintained its technical supremacy over every other army in the world for at least 400 or 500 years, and still looked very efficacious, although capricious. The retirement plan for most Roman Emperors was the sharp end of a knife in the hands of the Praetorian Guard. Constantine was far too savvy to end up like that, but he could see that the Empire was going to destroy itself as an effective social and political organization, and maybe fairly soon. Being a true patriot, he wished to see his country

and culture continue as the leader of the world forever. Being a realist, he knew that it would not, because the political organization and institutions would fail. He thought at length and realized that by transforming the political power of Rome into a Religious entity, he would have a good chance of assuring that Rome would continue to rule the world, even if the government fell apart. Some people think that God inspired Constantine to take this action, but I think he was just a very shrewd politician.

So Constantine looked around the Empire to see what religions were the most popular. Christianity topped the list, followed by Mithraism and some others. Constantine organized a conference, directed by him, whose purpose was to put together a plan for defining the most broadly appealing religion possible, and then to declare it to be the official religion of the Roman Empire. Since the religion was composed of all the most popular elements of all the most popular religions, he expected it to easily take over the culture, especially with the persuasion of the Roman Legions behind it. With a few setbacks from people like Emperor Julian, who wanted to restore the traditional Roman Gods, Constantine's plan went fairly smoothly for the next thousand years.

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