

Hate crime

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We are endlessly being misdirected in search of the crude “hate crime.” After centuries of racial oppression and violence, our society eventually became uncomfortable with the overtness of the racism of the past. Slavery is taken for granted as a horrific thing, something that couldn’t be assumed a few generations ago. For mainstream America, to be accused of being racist is to have been labeled something despicable. Few would willingly accept this charge upon themselves, defending themselves adamantly against such accusations. However, even worse than the racist label for those within the dominant culture, is for a person to be accused of a hate crime. Hate crimes have been created to isolate the most heinous of offenses that have been committed because of prejudice.

Hate crimes are things that terrible people do, or so that is the way we like to think of it. Hate crimes are believed to be done by the non-human. It is done by the coldhearted, malice, evil, apathetic, and sadistic monster. The hate crime is done by the KKK bogey man. That is, in hegemonic imaginations, hate crimes could never be committed by everyday regular white American Christians. This type of deed cannot be committed by oneself, by one’s close network of friends, or by one’s family members. Hate crimes are done by the super-evil. The one who commits such crimes are what evil villains are made of.

It is no wonder then that so many people within dominant culture question every application of hate crime. When statistics show that black people are being gunned down by police and vigilantes at disproportionate rates. In protest, racism is cried out by communities most affected by it. Very quickly, white people want to slow down “playing the race card,” and making unfair accusations. Strangely, many white people can admit that a police officer probably acted out of fear, but since dominant culture also has developed racialized fears of black people, to them it appears as a justified fear. No hate crime there. A white man can get out of his car, use racial epithets, and in the process he can strike a black man in the face. Our society says, nope, sorry, no hate crime there, it was just road rage. And we already know that a

vigilante can stalk young black teens on their way home, killing them out of their own perverted and racialized view of humanity, and yet still, no hate crime. It seems like hate crimes as a label is useless because they are reserved only for actions that reflect common practices from the early 20th century Jim/Jane Crow and lynching era. In fact, it seems that by constantly deciphering whether something is a hate crime or not, we have missed the more obvious reality. Something else appears in the horizon once we step back and view things historically from the origins of America to the present.

The United States is a hate crime. That is right. The entire imperial experiment known as the United States is one large hate crime. It is all built upon and exists because of two realities. The first reality is white people settling in the Americas, breaking treaties, committing near-genocide, and displacing Native American families and tribes while stealing their land. This is hate crime. And without this stolen land there is no United States of America. It just isn't possible. Our forgetfulness of this reality is our society's complicity as ongoing participants to this hate crime. Next is the reality of stolen and racialized bodies forced under subjugation as free coerced labor to white people for 250 years. This is hate crime. The American economy boomed from the practice of chattel slavery. Likewise it created a hierarchical caste system based on race, also known as white supremacy, which still exists today. What I am saying is that the very existence of the United States is because of hate crime. The United States is one enormous project of hate crime.

I could go on and talk about the ongoing historical and present mutations of those two basic foundations: stolen land and stolen labor. Truth is you can pick up a history book and fill in the dots yourself. The task today is to reflect on how we discuss hate crime in society in general, and then to consider its implications for the church. We are called to remember the truth about our society particularly that the United States of America was built on one large ongoing, yet often mutating hate crime. This grounds the everyday existence of our lives.

If the U.S.A. is one large hate crime, how might that affect how we talk about individual incidents? I suggest that our conversation on hate crimes has been reversed or inverted from the actual reality. We spend time deciphering whether or not something is a hate crime or not, which dominant society has never been ready to admit when it is such. And yet, most people in dominant culture in the United States are complicit, participatory, accommodating, or benefitting from the ongoing

hate crime. So the question ought not to be judging whether something falls under “hate crime,” as though they are abnormalities. The more honest engagement is to decipher the qualities that makes something ‘not’ a hate crime. Where are the examples of people, lives, experiences, and communities that have resisted the ongoing hate crime? Where can we point to, finding subversive modes of being to the normality of a context of hate crime?

Unfortunately, on a wide scale, the white Church in America has been deeply implicated in the original foundation of such hate crime that I am identifying as the United States of America. Rather than resisting white supremacy, the white Church of America has too often been the author of such Christian deviations. Rather than taking on its role to be the extension of Love Incarnated, it practiced Hate Crime. Love Incarnated demanded a renouncing of domination but Hate Crime demanded conquering in the name of manifest destiny. Love Incarnated invites us to take on the form of the slave, vindicating their humanity, but Hate Crime demanded the subjugating of other people out of the form of humanity and into the form of the slave. Love Incarnated bids us to come and follow as it confronts Hate Crime. Hate Crime in response crushes and crucifies Love Incarnated. Love Incarnated, however, cannot be defeated, and is still alive and well in the world. As things look right now, it seems like Hate Crime will always dominate and ‘lord over’ our society, but Love Incarnated will be vindicated. Love Incarnated is the door to a new way of being, it is the abundant possibilities available even right now while living in the midst of Hate Crime. It is the grounding of all true flourishing, liberation, restoration, healing, and grace.

The time to repent and break away from the Christendom complicities in Hate Crime and to gather around Love Incarnated has always been now. But can the Church learn to speak truthfully, not only about the U.S.A., but also of its own direct responsibility for the past 400 years of atrocities that is so easily puts out of its memory. Can we move from a people of amnesia towards a people of remembering? It is precisely because our most fundamental practice as Christians is gathering together around a cup and bread to remember the Hate Crime inflicted upon Love Incarnated that we must now learn to resist being complicit and must relearn what it means to speak truthfully and to love others concretely.