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OPINION

Telling the Truth about Religious Violence

Critique has GOP defending the Crusades

BY DONALD KAUL

President Barack Obama committed the ultimate political blunder the other day. He blurted out the truth.



Speaking at the National Prayer Breakfast, he warned his Christian brethren against “getting up on our high horse” when condemning the violence of Muslim terrorists.

“During the Crusades and the Inquisition, people committed terrible deeds in the name of Christ,” he said. “In our home country, slavery and Jim Crow all too often was justified in the name of Christ.”

Naturally, all hell broke loose.

The Rupert Murdoch army launched into full attack, supported by Rush Limbaugh air strikes. Rabid Fox News commentators, foaming at the mouth, fought each other for control of the mics to condemn the president’s remarks as “un-American” and, even worse, liberal. He was derided as irreligious, weak, and not a real American.

It was to be expected.

People will forgive a politician for telling lies. Sweet deceptions, after all, are what politics are all about. But let him speak the truth just once, even inadvertently, and he becomes the object of scorn, ridicule, and contempt.

Remember the case of George Romney?

Running for president in 1967, he confessed that he had been “brain-washed” by Pentagon propaganda into believing that the Vietnam War was winnable. And he had been, of

course, as had most of the American public at the time.

But as soon as Romney uttered this truthful statement, his presidential hopes vanished in a blink—never to be seen again.

I’d like to note that this lesson wasn’t lost on George’s son. As nearly as can be determined, Mitt Romney never told the truth once during his 2012 campaign. He lost anyway, proving that it takes more than a lack of honesty to fool the American people.

But back to Obama. What he was trying to say, at an inter-faith event, was that we shouldn’t hold all Muslims responsible for the acts of a relative few. Christianity also has a skeleton or two in its historical closet.

The Christian right, which includes most of the Republicans in Congress, pounced.

The Crusades were a righteous response to Islamic aggression, they

said. The Inquisition? Highly over-rated as an atrocity. And Jim Crow? That was “a thousand years ago,” said Limbaugh.

To which one can only say, “Oh come on.”

The truth is, you can act as though terrorist violence against the West is unprovoked. But it’s not. It’s the bitter fruit of the past 100 years of subjugation of the Arab and Muslim peoples by Western powers, thirsty for the oil beneath the Middle East.

For a century the United States and its allies systematically subverted any suggestion of democracy in the region in favor of vicious thugs we could control through bribery.

And when a popularly elected politician would surface every once in a while, we’d get rid of him and install our own puppet. Think of the popularly elected Mohammed Mossadegh in Iran, whom the CIA

overthrew in 1953, replacing him with the brutal and corrupt Shah.

That’s the genesis of the mess we’re dealing with now. Not Islam, not pure evil, but 100 years of Western domination.

In any case, it’s more than a little hypocritical for the Christian right to be up in arms over the perversion of Christianity.

This is a group, after all, whose representatives in Congress have sought to take health insurance from the poorest workers among us. They’ve tried to deport young Americans because their parents brought them here without papers many years ago. They’ve supported the use of torture and fought to cut off unemployment insurance to the long-term unemployed.

Any of that remind you of Christianity?

OtherWords columnist Donald Kaul lives in Ann Arbor, Mich.

Three Years Post-Trayvon: What Has Changed?

Movement grows to find solutions

BY LAURA FINLEY

On Feb. 26, 2012, supposed “Neighborhood Watchman” George Zimmerman shot and killed Trayvon Martin, a 17-year-old black man, as Martin walked home from visiting a convenience store in Sanford, Fla. The case ignited questions about racial profiling, vigilantism, and Stand Your Ground Laws.



On July 13, 2013, Zimmerman, was acquitted of both the second-degree murder and manslaughter charges. Despite national and even international attention to the case, one has to wonder what has really changed in the three years since the killing.

The murder of black men by police or their wannabes has not stopped. This is a mere sample of cases that occurred after Martin’s killing.

Kimani Gray, 16, was shot by two plainclothes officers in Brooklyn, N.Y., as he walked home from a birthday party on March 9, 2013. The two men who killed him claim he had a gun, but no weapon was found at the scene. Three of the seven bullets that penetrated Gray’s body entered from the back, suggesting

he was moving away, not threatening the officers. No criminal charges were brought against the assailants.

Randall Kerrick, a Charlotte, N.C., police officer, shot and killed former college football star Jonathan Ferrell as he sought police assistance after an automobile accident on Sept. 14, 2013. Kerrick was not charged for Ferrell’s murder.

Research by the Urban Institute has found that in Stand Your Ground states, white-on-black homicides are 354 times more likely to be ruled justified as white-on-white homicides.

On Dec. 2, 2014, 24-year-old father of four Romain Brisbon was killed when an officer mistook his bottle of pills for a gun.

Just seconds after seeing 12-year-old Tamir Rice at a park in Cleveland on Nov. 22, 2014, an officer shot and killed him. While Rice did have a BB gun, video footage seems to show that the officers arrived at the scene and were not threatened but instead decided to pull the trigger.

Unarmed Akai Gurley, 28, was shot in the dark stairwell of an East New York housing project on Nov. 20, 2014. Even Police Commissioner William Bratton has called Gurley a “complete innocent.”

Officer Daniel Pantaleo killed 43-year-old Eric Garner by inflicting a prohibited chokehold when Garner

dared to speak out about being continually targeted.

Supposedly, Victor White III shot himself while handcuffed in the back of a police cruiser in Iberia Parish, Louisiana on March 22, 2014. Yet reports show that he had to have been Harry Houdini reincarnated to make that move—far more likely is that he was shot by officers.

20-year-old Reynaldo Cuevas was shot by police as he fled armed men who had attempted to rob his bodega. The Bronx District Attorney did not find the officers at fault.

And of course, Office Darrin Wilson, who shot and killed Michael Brown in Ferguson, Mo., was not indicted. Since Brown was killed, 14 black teens have been killed by police officers, according to a Nov. 25, 2014 article on the Daily Beast.

It’s not just black men who suffer from this official or quasi-official violence. On Feb. 16, 2014, 47-year-old African-American Yvette Smith was killed when she opened the door to officers responding to a domestic violence call at her home.

Meanwhile, George Zimmerman has not changed. He has been ar-

rested multiple times since being acquitted, most recently for aggravated assault and domestic violence with a weapon. Zimmerman was accused of domestic violence in 2013 but no charges were brought.

Stand Your Ground Laws also remain. Although Attorney General Eric Holder stated that it was time to question Stand Your Ground Laws, no state has repealed its law. In fact, states like Georgia and Florida have considered expansions of the Stand Your Ground protections.

In Florida alone, at least 26 children and teens have been killed in Stand Your Ground cases since Trayvon’s death. Research by the Urban Institute has found that in Stand Your Ground states, white-on-black homicides are 354 times

more likely to be ruled justified as white-on-white homicides.

Three years post-Trayvon, little has changed except there is now a nationwide movement to fix this. I remain hopeful based on the courageous organizing I see occurring in most of our cities. For instance, peace and justice activists are working with affected communities to organize the first Truth Telling Weekend in St. Louis, Mo., the weekend of March 13-15. Rather than simply expressing outrage, these folks are acting to bring people together to discuss solutions. Really....It’s time for change.

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