

Editorial: Who should we be—unequivocally—in this world?

May 18, 2022

There are weeks when I find it hard to focus an editorial in one direction. This is one of them. The amount and variety of anger, fighting, violence, suffering—the sheer extent of evil—overwhelms.

When I find myself trying to absorb events like those of the last week, I often find myself returning to the question, “Who am I to be in the middle of this?”

Any response I might have to seemingly boundless evil must be grounded in who, as a follower of Jesus, I am to be. If you are a follower of Jesus, this question can ground you, too.

Two years ago

The news arrived over the last several days much like it did in the spring and summer of 2020. It actually started Oct. 12, 2019, when a Fort Worth police officer shot and killed Atatiana Jefferson. A similar incident happened Mar. 13, 2020, when Breonna Taylor was shot and killed by a Louisville, Ky., police officer. Both were killed in their homes.

Just a couple of weeks earlier, February 23, vigilantes shot and killed Ahmaud Arbery near Brunswick, Ga. Most of us didn’t know about his death, though, until cell phone video of it surfaced May 5. Just 20 days later, May 25, a Minneapolis police officer killed George Floyd. His death also was captured by cell phone video.

These deaths were like a succession of uppercuts on top of the sustained body blow of the COVID-19 pandemic and thrumming of racial and political tensions defining Donald Trump's presidency.

The last week

And here we are again.

May 11, [a man shot three women](#) inside Hair World Salon, a Korean-owned business in northwest Dallas. The incident has an eerie similarity to the killings of eight people—most of whom were women of East Asian descent—in the Atlanta, Ga., area March 16, 2021.

May 14, a white man shot 13 people in a Tops Friendly Market in Buffalo, N.Y., killing 10 of them. Reports say he chose that store in that neighborhood "[to target Black people](#)," and that he planned further killing.

May 15, a Chinese American man shot and killed John Cheng and injured five others during a morning service at Irvine Taiwanese Presbyterian Church in Laguna Woods, Calif. Orange County Sheriff Donald Barnes believes the shooter "[was motivated by anger](#) over political tensions between China and Taiwan."

Abortion fight

During this same five-day period, Southern Baptist Convention presidential candidate Tom Ascol [tweeted](#) a call for Brent Leatherwood's removal as acting president of the SBC's Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission.

May 13, Ascol accused Leatherwood of using "SBC resources to smear our name & defy our clear resolve to protect the unborn" by signing [an open letter](#) released May 12. This letter was signed by 75 other pro-life and anti-abortion leaders from every state in the United States and a number of

religious organizations, including Ralph Reed of the Faith & Freedom Coalition.

Ascol took umbrage with this statement at the bottom of Page 2 of the letter: “We state unequivocally that we do not support any measure seeking to criminalize or punish women and we stand firmly opposed to include such penalties in legislation.”

Just a day before the open letter was released, Chelsea Sobolik of the supposedly “rogue” ERLC roundly criticized a failed U.S. Senate bill to protect abortion. [Baptist Press quotes her](#) stating: “The erroneously named Women’s Health Protection Act does nothing to protect women or preborn children, but instead is the most pro-abortion bill to be brought to the Senate floor.”

“It not only removes all restrictions and limits on abortion and allows for abortion up to the point of birth, [but] it also removes all pro-life protections at the federal and state levels and eliminates a state’s ability to legislate on abortion,” she continued.

Despite the ERLC’s consistent opposition to abortion, abortion abolitionists like Tom Ascol, his brother Bill and many likeminded Southern Baptists [expect such opposition to go further](#) in keeping with the resolution submitted by Bill Ascol and passed during the 2021 SBC annual meeting.

The [resolution states](#) the SBC understands abortion unequivocally as murder and a crime that must be punished, and any exceptions and incrementalism are to be rejected. Louisiana state representatives considered a bill to do just that—charge women who have abortions with murder—until [the bill’s sponsor pulled it](#) May 12, purportedly in response to the open letter.

This fight undoubtedly will feature in the upcoming 2022 SBC annual meeting during which Tom Ascol may or may not be elected SBC president.

[David French](#) doesn't think Ascol will win, but the abolitionist presence at [last year's meeting](#) doesn't support such confidence.

Who we should be

In the United States, racism swirls around us, and bitter fights among fellow pro-life advocates threaten deeper division. Meanwhile, the rest of the world is in turmoil. Who are we to be in the midst of this maelstrom? We are to be imitators of Jesus.

We are to remember Jesus did not take the side of the religionists unequivocally when he confronted sin. When he addressed sin, he said to stop it. That is clear. When he addressed sinners, he loved them in ways that sure looked like compromise to the religionists. Jesus told us to love that way, too.

Religionists in our day seem to be expending their energies on demonizing critical race theory and meeting women in crisis with criminal charges. That doesn't look like Jesus to me.

When I consider Jesus' life and teachings, it's easy to see we love better when we work against hatred, pride, racism, poverty, disease, greed, exploitation and all other equally heinous horrors than when we turn our teeth against each other in bitterness and anger.

For that, some will accuse me of weakness or compromise. That's fine. I'm not trying to convince them. I'm trying to convince those who want us to be who Jesus calls us to be—people known by our love—that there is another way: Jesus' way.

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