

Commentary: Christian compassion demands care for the mentally ill

December 18, 2012

Mike Huckabee was [back on the news](#) this weekend speaking in his self-appointed role as America's Christian conscience. I admit it—he speaks and I react. I am a devoted follower of Jesus, but I do not understand Mike Huckabee's expression of faith. So, I join others in responding to the Huckabee interpretation about the massacre in Connecticut. Huckabee's passion for his faith and our country sparked controversy when he suggested the shooting was related to the lack of religious expression in public schools. He said we shouldn't be surprised at the violence when we have "systematically removed God from our schools."

Jon Singletary

Huckabee made the circuit again Monday morning, talking about morality, evil and sin, invoking the Ten Commandments with his message that America has lost our way and that this was a matter of a young man's sin. He stated, "We carefully and intentionally stop saying things are not sinful, and we say they are disorders or even normal." This time, he pointed out that we don't need new laws; we need to enforce God's law: "Thou shalt not kill."

Well, there's another biblical command that gets brought up less frequently in these debates—the Sermon on the Mount. It isn't as popular in public discourse as the Ten Commandments, but here Jesus says love is the ultimate law. Here is a law that disavows revenge and retaliation. Here, Jesus says to love and pray for those who hate you and plan to harm you.

I agree with Huckabee that teaching our children not to kill is essential. But I also want to find real ways to live out Jesus' teachings about love. I'm not always sure how to do that, but the Bible is clear that if we have resources and see a brother or sister in need, we are to fill that need. I am convinced that loving my brother who is sick means that I have to find a way to address that illness. This includes my brother who is mentally ill.

My family members and I enjoy healthy online chats about these kinds of things. This morning on Facebook, I was reminded by a family member that God is at work in our nation's schools, but we have shoved him out of our public lives and to the sidelines. I can agree with this statement, but I disagree with what it means for God to be pushed out. God is not pushed out because we can't pray a school prayer over the loudspeaker; God is not pushed out because we can't post scripture on the courthouse lawn. God is pushed out because we cannot find ways to love our brothers and sisters who are in need. God is not pushed out because of a lack of prayer; our prayers are abundant. God is pushed out because of the ways we deny affordable and adequate health care.

Morality isn't only about the evil of shooting, although I agree that is absolutely immoral. Morality also is about our unwillingness to fund mental health care across our country.

If we want to see change and if we want to see God at work, then we need to pray; we need to see the sin in this atrocity; however, we also have to see the sickness in it. And then we have to treat the sickness and not just name the sin. Loving our neighbors in times like this is not easy. The shooter's mother loved him; mothers love their children even when they do not know how to treat their mental illness. But we have to join our mothers as we learn to love our neighbors in need. We have to offer help to mothers so they do not feel like they are alone in loving their children.

In our recent online chat, my family member reminded me to "never, ever

underestimate the power of God to change our nation. God is at work, but not in a nation-changing way, because as Huckabee said, we have shoved him out of our public lives and to the sideline.”

That may be right, and prayer may be the answer, but so is love for our neighbor. So is love for our brother and sister in need. And that love requires feeding them when they are hungry, clothing them when they are naked, and providing them with the professional care they need when they are mentally ill.

Visit www.nami.org to learn more about how to support mental health care.

[Jon Singletary](#) is the associate dean for baccalaureate studies in the Baylor University School of Social Work and the Diana R. Garland Chair of Child and Family Studies.