

A culture of hatred

Written by Special to the Filipino Reporter
Thursday, 01 November 2018 16:36



In praying for the dead, the injured and the families of victims in last week's Pittsburgh synagogue shooting that resulted in the death of eight men and three women and injuries to six other persons, Pope Francis denounced the "inhuman act of violence" and prayed for an end to the "flames of hatred" that fueled it.

The synagogue shooting, and the mailing of pipe bombs to prominent critics of President Donald Trump and an earlier shooting of two blacks in Kentucky may have been carried out by obviously deranged men, but it was the "flames of hatred," as the Pope calls it, that were fanned by demagogues who regularly spew toxic political discourse that triggered the recent wave of ultra-right violence.

"We're in an environment now where deranged individuals feel that it's their place to bring about change in our society with an AR-15 or a series of pipe bombs," said Jeh Johnson, who was Homeland Security Secretary under President Barack Obama, as he called on Americans to pressure their leaders to promote a more civil public dialogue.

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At the forefront of this venomous public discourse is the leader of the supposedly greatest nation on earth, President Trump.

Since the start of the presidential campaign, Trump has continuously driven a wedge among people based on race, religion and political beliefs.

In an opinion article in the Israeli publication Haaretz, David Rothkopf correctly pointed out that “the massacre in a Pittsburgh synagogue is the result of Trump’s constant endorsement of hate against the other, a hate-and-fear-mongering which has brought America to a very dark place.”

Rothkopf continued: “We saw it in the first attempts to bar refugees from the United States on the basis of their religion. We saw it when white supremacists marched in Charlottesville, Virginia. We saw it when the people of Puerto Rico were denied the full support of their federal government in the wake of a devastating hurricane — and the president’s history of anti-Latin racism was clearly a contributing factor.

“We have seen it in the president’s active support of ethno-nationalist leaders and regimes from Israel to Eastern Europe. We have seen it with the Republican Party’s active embrace of voter suppression targeting black and Latino voters.”

He said the events of the past week saw an acceleration of the hate-and-fear mongering carried out by the president and the people around him.

The violent week started last Wednesday when a white man, Gregory Bush, with a history of violence tried to barge into a black church, and after failing to do so, shot and killed two African-Americans in a nearby grocery store.

On the days following the shooting, pipe bombs were mailed to prominent persons who have been highly critical of Trump’s policies — two former presidents, a former vice president, a former secretary of state, a former director of national intelligence, a former CIA director, a former attorney general, senators, congress people, a prominent philanthropist, an activist movie star and CNN.

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The alleged sender, Cesar Sayoc, son of an Italian mother and a Filipino father but who considers himself a white man, was an ardent Trump supporter and despised Democrats as evidenced by his postings on social media.

In the months leading to Trump's election in 2016, the Facebook pages of Sayoc, whose pictures on social media showed him wearing Trump's infamous "Make America Great Again" hat while attending Trump rallies, regularly promoted articles containing bizarre conspiracy theories about Democrats — including allegations Trump's rival, Hillary Clinton, sold weapons to the jihadist group ISIS, claims Democrats were "buying votes," and rumors of an imminent Muslim terror attack.

He also warned against the horrors of George Soros, a Jewish billionaire who was one of the targeted by the mail bombs.

Sayoc's social media accounts provided an insight into how conspiracy theories promoted by Trump himself have found themselves in the public discourse and how incendiary remarks can fan the "flames of hatred."

On Saturday morning, a man shouting anti-Semitic slurs opened fire at a Pittsburgh synagogue, killing 11 people attending Jewish services.

The shooter, Robert Bowers, told arresting officers that the Jews were committing genocide and that he wanted them all to die.

Some people blamed the shootings to the present political climate.

"When you spew hate speech, people act on it. Very simple. And this is the result. A lot of people dead. Senselessly," said Stephen Cohen, co-president of New Light Congregation, which rents space at Tree of Life.

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Eric Trump himself, son of the President, conceded during a TV interview, that harsh political rhetoric “might” be linked to recent violence.

His father’s presidency should be held responsible for the culture of hate that now pervades over the United States.

Even while campaigning, he rallied his political base by uttering inflammatory speeches that sought to inflame divisions in the country.

He called Mexicans “criminals” and rapists.

He barred people from some Islamic countries from entering the United States.

He falsely claimed that Muslims danced on the streets of New Jersey in the aftermath of the 9-11 terrorist attacks and that illegal immigrants voted for Hillary Clinton during the presidential elections.

He said that there were “very fine people” among the neo-Nazis who marched in Charlottesville.

He calls mainstream media “Fake News” and described media men as “scums” and “enemies of the people.”

He suggested that Rep. Greg Gianforte, who grabbed a reporter by the throat and threw him on the ground, was “my kind of guy.”

He inflames his crowd’s anger who chants “Lock her up” every time he calls Clinton “Criminal

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Hillary.”

He once suggested that “Second Amendment people might have to ‘do’ something if Hillary Clinton got to pick judges they didn’t like.”

He depicted George Soros, one of those who received mail bombs, as part of a cabal of globalists — all Jewish — who have “bled our country dry.”

These incendiary remarks from a leader who once boasted during the campaign that he “could shoot someone in the middle of Fifth Avenue and not lose support,” fomented hate and division throughout the country and emboldened white supremacists to step out of the shadows and impose their hateful beliefs on the people.

And how did Trump react to the series of violent incidents during the week?

He again blamed the press for the attacks and suggested that the bombs were a “false flag” designed to hurt his Republican Party in the impending midterm elections.

“A very big part of the Anger we see today in our society is caused by the purposely false and inaccurate reporting of the Mainstream Media that I refer to as Fake News,” Trump wrote.

“It has gotten so bad and hateful that it is beyond description.”

Just replace Mainstream Media with Donald Trump and I’ll say amen to that.

valabelgas@aol.com