

Obama comes to Boston

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Three days after the bombing that killed three people and wounded more than 170 at the Boston Marathon, President Barack Obama flew to Boston to deliver a speech at an interfaith service for the victims and survivors.

This marks the fifth time that Obama has delivered such an address following mass killings, beginning with Fort Hood, Texas in November of 2009 and including Tucson, Arizona in January 2011, Aurora, Colorado in July 2012 and Newtown, Connecticut last December.

The corporate media, which has cynically dubbed Obama the “consoler-in-chief,” hailed his latest speech as “inspiring,” “powerful” and “moving.” It was all they wanted to hear and in no way conflicted with their efforts to frame the events in Boston within the reactionary narrative of the “war on terrorism,” turning them into another justification for war abroad and attacks on democratic rights at home.

In reality, it was painfully evident that Obama was working off of a template, engaged in a national ritual that is utterly routine, banal and insincere.

Almost invariably, he begins these speeches by invoking “scripture.”

“Scripture tells us,” were the first words out of Obama’s mouth after he rose to address the crowd from the pulpit of Boston’s Cathedral of the Holy Cross.

“Scripture tells us, ‘Do not lose heart,’” he began his remarks to a prayer vigil for the 26 victims of the Newtown school massacre.

“Scripture says that ‘He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more.’” he said at the start of his speech following the Aurora theater massacre that killed 12 and wounded 58.

“As Scripture tells us, ‘There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God ...’” he declared at the beginning of his address to a memorial service for

the victims of the Tucson mass shooting.

The next disaster that prompts Obama to invoke scripture, he might consider the following, from Proverbs 6, which declares “six things doth the Lord hate,” first among them, “A proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood.” One could hardly ask for a more concise description of the American president.

Obama’s biblical quotations are generally followed by thumb-nail descriptions of the victims and a hymn to the indomitable spirit of the American people. The survivors are then assured that they are not alone, when in fact they will be quickly forgotten by the politicians and the media as the next massacre and the one after that takes place.

When it comes to explaining the source of these terrible events, why they have happened, the president offers nothing beyond references to senseless “evil.”

As he declared in his Tucson speech, “Scripture tells us that there is evil in the world, and that terrible things happen for reasons that defy human understanding.”

This “evil” is presented as a malady that has befallen its victims from out of the blue, something aberrational in an otherwise stable and healthy society.

Far from being exceptional, however, mass shootings and other forms of violence are a quintessential American event.

Between the speech Obama delivered in Tucson in January 2011 and the one he gave in Newtown in December 2012, there were—among the many more mass killings across the country—the following incidents:

* July 2011—A shooting rampage in Grand Rapids, Michigan that claimed eight lives.

* August 2011—A gunman killing seven people in Copley, Ohio before being killed himself.

* September 2011—A shooting at a Carson City, Nevada IHOP that killed five.

* December 2011—Six people shot to death on Christmas morning in Grapevine, Texas by a man dressed as Santa Claus, who then turned his gun on himself.

* April 2012—A mass shooting at an Asian school in Oakland California that killed seven.

* May 2012—Five people killed in a shooting spree in Seattle, Washington.

* August 2012—The shooting deaths of seven at a Sikh temple in Wisconsin.

* September 2012—The killing of six in a workplace shooting in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

When “evil” recurs with such numbing regularity, it clearly must have deep roots in American society.

In light of Obama’s incessant mouthing of biblical quotations, it is worth considering how another American president employed scripture.

In his second inaugural address in March of 1865, Lincoln, who was not known for quoting from the Bible, invoked Matthew 18:7: “Woe unto the world because of offenses.” Citing slavery as such an offense, he stated that the Civil War represented “the woe due to those by whom the offense came.” If it were God’s judgment, he continued, the war would continue until “all the wealth piled by the bondsman’s two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid by another drawn with the sword.”

Lincoln’s biblical metaphor cut to the heart of the objective crisis confronting America in the Civil War, while Obama employs scripture to cover up and declare incomprehensible the social and political roots of today’s events.

What are the “offenses” from which the violence plaguing present-day American society flows?

The United States has been involved in ceaseless wars of aggression for more two decades. Since 2001, it has been waging its undeclared and endless “war on terror” in which the entire planet, including the US itself, is proclaimed a battlefield. The victims of this war in Afghanistan, Iraq and elsewhere number in the millions.

In one of the more cynical moments of Obama’s speech, he invoked a widely circulated image of the youngest of those killed in the Boston bombings, eight-year-old Martin Richard, holding a poster upon which he had written, “No more hurting people. Peace.”

Obama repeated the phrase twice.

The day before he came to Boston, US drones fired missiles into a Pakistani village leveling a house and killing five people inside. Seven others were wounded. On the same day, a drone strike in Yemen demolished a car, killing its five occupants. As is well known, Obama personally selects assassination victims and has arrogated to himself the power to order the deaths of American citizens without charges or trials. The young boy’s plea reads like an indictment of the US president himself.

The mass killing by the American state, justified by the media, cannot but produce deadly consequences within the US itself.

These bloody deeds on the world stage are coupled with the increasing brutalization of society at home, characterized by unprecedented social inequality. In the fifth year of the deepest economic crisis since the Great Depression of the 1930s, the working class confronts mass unemployment, falling wages and deepening poverty under conditions of unprecedented increases in stock prices, corporate profits and CEO pay. The existing political setup works to deny any progressive outlet for the increasingly explosive growth of social discontent.

It is no wonder that Obama does not care to ponder what underlies the bloody events from Tucson, to Aurora, to Newtown to Boston. Any serious examination going beyond incomprehensible “evil” would inevitably involve an indictment of himself, his government and the social order over which he presides.



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