

“Not as the sin is the grace” -- an open letter of hope

To Jeanne Assam and the staffs of New Life Church in Colorado Springs and the Youth With A Mission training center in Arvada, CO. To the families of Matthew Murray’s victims, including his surviving victims. And to the family of Matthew Murray himself.

You have been given a terrible challenge this week. There has been heroism, but also tragedy; and even the heroism was born of tragedy and in its own way contributed to tragedy while averting yet more tragedy and pain.

You all are Christians (or so I have heard), and yesterday (Wednesday Dec 12) you will have had services for those who have died; though possibly not yet for Matthew. We know that of the four who have died, we should have hope for them, that they are now with God and will be at peace.

But I have hope for Matthew Murray, too.

I say this as an orthodox trinitarian Christian; I say it as a hope that follows from believing in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit; I say it in the hope of Jesus in Whom all the fullness was pleased to dwell, making reconciliation on the cross (crucified under Pontius Pilate) between all things whether in the heavens or in the earth. I say it in the name of Jesus, which is “The Lord is salvation”.

Mr. and Mrs. Murray (and their family): I pray that this will be of consolation to you, in this tragic and horrible time, to have someone who studies and professes and defends orthodox Christianity, which you yourselves accept and believe, assuring you that God still loves Matthew Murray, and will never give up trying to save and heal him. The Good Shepherd does not leave the hundredth sheep outside the fold, but goes out after the one lost sheep, to bring him finally home; where there is more rejoicing over the one who was lost than over the ninety and nine who never had strayed.

I don’t know how many Christian counselors or preachers or theologians have thought to give you this hope. I wish I could believe that it was a majority of them, or even all. I know that it was likely few or none of them instead. But some of us do still believe this: that the river of life flows out from under the seat of Christ and down through the New Jerusalem beneath the Tree of Life; that this river goes out through the gates of the city--the gates that shall *never* be closed!--so that all those who may in the judgment be living outside may come and drink freely of that water without any cost, given freely for their sake, and so obtain permission to come into the city and eat of the Tree of Life, the leaves of which are for the healing of the nations. Some of us, I promise, do still believe this.

Your son may have gone out against God with thorns and thistles, and it cannot be denied that he committed murder. But *all* of us are murderers--I do not

consider myself to be any better a person than Matthew--all of us, the sinners, are enemies of God. And the Lord has said to Isaiah, concerning us (that is, concerning the Jews and the Gentiles both, all of us together then):

“There is no wrath in Me! If someone goes out against Me with thorns and thistles, I will go to war, and burn up those things with fire. But if he (then) clings to Me for a refuge, he makes Me his Friend--he makes Me his Friend.”

God Himself is still the living hope for your son, God Who Himself is love. Trust Him, then, to always be working and acting to save your son and bring him home. Trust Him to love your son even more than you do; please.

Jeanne Assam: You did what was right and just, and stopped Matthew from hurting anyone further other than himself; and you even managed to do so without killing him, insofar as you could. You fought him fairly and without a hatred in your heart, bringing honor thereby from Heaven on the name of your family “Assam”: an honor well-needed in this country whose people might otherwise be suspicious of a name of Middle-Eastern descent. Be comforted then that God has no hatred in His heart for Matthew Murray either, and will not abandon Matthew into his own pain and hatred, but will instead continually seek to bring him home, reconciling him with you and with his victims and with his family, in the day of the Lord to come.

Families of the victims: It is natural to grieve, and it is natural to hate the man who has done this to you. I know how much anger and hatred I would feel, myself, if someone attacked the one whom I love the most under God. You have a deep and terrible challenge laid before you, a challenge you did not ask for, any more than your loved ones asked to face a firing gun. You can, if you choose, accept a hate and hopelessness for Matthew Murray; or you can choose to strive to actively hope for Matthew and for his sake and for the sake of those who still love him--even God. I pray in hope that God will strengthen you and bring you peace, today or in a day to come.

This is a word of hope, for those to receive if they can and if they will.

For, where else can hope be found for Matthew Murray?

The atheists have no hope to speak for him, for if atheism is true then Matthew has ceased to exist and what he has done can never be reconciled; moreover you all someday will simply cease to exist as well--if even you now exist at all as persons which may be doubtful in itself, according to some in that camp.

Those who teach that your personhood is a declension and fall, that it is a sin and a crime to exist at all, cannot offer hope, if their teaching is true; only the advice to exterminate your self, first by non-attachment: do not grieve for Matthew for he never was real in the first place, and neither are you. This is acceptance of utter despair; not a word of hope.

The agnostics, by definition, know of no hope to give, though bless their hearts they often hope with all their hearts.

Those who teach that God exists but has no care for this world, can likewise offer no hope if their teaching is true--no hope for Matthew, and no hope even for yourselves, aside from whatever little kindness you can give one another before you fall away to nothing under the eye of the Impersonal One. Likewise those who claim that all of us are only the fevered dreams of God, destined to vanish when He awakens; they have no hope to give if their teaching is true.

Some of the pagans see only the struggle and strife of the world, and nothing beyond this; all is competition and domination, and perhaps the 'all' is doomed to die in the end. But Matthew has lost the competition if what they are teaching is true, and was denied his power and his dominion by the woman who dared to stop him. What hope is there in this?--nothing, only barbarism, and the wolfing of the flesh.

Some of the pagans most keenly desire, on the other hand, that love is in fact the greatest of truths; they hope, and have their stories. But, their stories are only some stories, of dreams of hope, real though those dreams may be in their desire; the most they can offer are feelings and sensations. They have little to no theology to give, in connection with their hope; and their stories are, at best, an example or type. Their myths are not also historical; their beliefs can only flirt and kiss and play and maybe sleep with logic, at best. There is no marriage commitment to Reason; they taste the hope, and truly desire, but have no word, no *logos* to give, beyond their inspired imaginings.

And what of those who believe in God, the Creator of heaven and earth? They have a word to give; but no hope for those beyond that word. The Lord, the Merciful and the Compassionate, has no such compassion or mercy for Matthew. They briskly deny that God is a Union of Persons; that God Himself is an active eternal love. And so they issue judicial decisions against each other, warring among themselves in their clans and tribes and divisions. No one has mercy upon Ebola, and that is all they would see of Matthew (and to be honest of you and me as well). At best they might perhaps admire him a moment for taking a war to the infidel; but then he was stopped, overpowered, by only a woman (and what was a woman supposed to be doing inside a church in the first place? with a gun no less!?) And then, besides, his war was a war of the atheist against the infidel. No, they would have no hope to say for Matthew Murray; no hope that they could give for him or to his grieving family or victims.

The other branch of Abraham's family might have some word of hope to give, perhaps; those who have not yet themselves forsaken YHWH as only a game for children. Will any of the remaining remnant, the teachers or the mothers among them, dare to give a word of hope to the family and the victims of Matthew Murray?--the man who shot Christians because he rejected YHWH? Which rabbi, within his own theology, would dare to say such a thing? There may be some, perhaps (I certainly hope so); but can they profess that God Himself is love--a singular active Union of Persons, in His own self-existence? Would they confess

that God Himself gives Himself in sacrifice, not only in principle from eternity, but in living history once and for all; dying in solidarity, not only with the victims of Matthew Murray (whom He loved enough to treat as a child, if a rebellious one, and not as some mere puppet on a string) but paying for the sin of Matthew himself? Who of the rabbis will dare, in this day and time, to say such a thing? (But there were rabbis who did dare, in days and times long past, to say such a thing, in secret as well as from the rooftops...)

So far I have spoken of those who in one way or another would clearly and intentionally deny the doctrines of orthodox Christianity. There are others of them I could speak of--but, why bother? For the question must now be asked: who of those among the orthodox faith will stand and dare to say such a word of hope?!

Doubtless, they may perhaps give the hope as well as they can--while carefully tucking away their theology for some other day, when they will decide to teach instead that we cannot trust our God to keep on seeking forever for the salvation of Matthew Murray. The hope they may give is politeness, or maybe a feeling; not a coherent word of hope.

And then, what of the others? Those who teach that Matthew died outside the proper communion; worse, who died unconfessed of his sins for he died (strictly speaking) a suicide? What hope do *they* have to give for Matthew Murray; what word of hope can *they* speak to his family?

And yet again, what of those who profess that the God Who is love is not, of course, love--that would be ludicrous, and unbecoming of His stature--but instead is a God of mere power a God of authority Who, it may be true, can be trusted to persist in saving the relative few whom He elects beforehand to save. But who are those few? Can they give an assurance that Matthew Murray, or any of his family, or any of his victims for that matter, are of those few--the ones whom our Father in heaven can be trusted to seek and to save at all costs? The others, the ones whom God has pre-damned, have no good at all in them, now or ever (according to this teaching). No good, no Good, for God the Holy Spirit refuses to work in them, His non-children. Any appearance of good or of piety they may have is only hypocrisy, only a lie, only some seduction to draw away the ones like themselves into destruction, perhaps to entrap and degrade the elect for a time. Who are these non-elect?--these who may even be feeling and even believing themselves to be the saved of God, but who will discover in the final day that God rejects them utterly after all, never to be even trying to save them from their sins? Can you assure the ones who love Matthew Murray that he was not one of these, he who died an apostate murderer, who murdered to show his apostasy?--can you assure them that they themselves are not of these cigarette-people? (Despite whatever they may profess and feel themselves to be?) Can you even assure them that *you* are not such a deceiver?? What word of hope can you give to them, for them?

It will be noticed, and I think it should also be said, that Matthew spoke of Christians and Christianity being an evil blight on history, a blight that must be removed. From where did he get this idea? At this time, I have no way to say for sure. But, I do know of those who have made their fortunes recently trumpeting such a teaching to the world; then falling back, perhaps, for a time, to say that they really of course didn't mean that--before going back again to this vomit of rhetoric. At this very time, an international film has been released, based on novels that strive to teach such a thing to children and youths, not about some fictional 'Magisterium' only (which, only by happenstance I am sure, resembles the Catholic Church--except that the author confirms it is *not* by happenstance at all), but about the beliefs and the church of this 'real' world as well; for these are mentioned in the novels as threats to the souls and lives of every child.

And this man is far from alone in what he is saying to youths and adults alike. Numerous other men and women have blithely or have heatedly said the same thing for years. Well, here was a youth who had heard you and believed you; and here is the fruit of your labor. Rejoice!--if you can. From my own experiences I can tell you, he was not the only one of his kind. There will be more. There have been more.

That being said, I know why you speak as you do, to some extent; because to some extent you see and name the hopelessness taught among us Christians, too. You see and hear (and likely have learned from!) the horrible rhetoric here, the doctrines of hopelessness, of justice that cannot be love and love that must be unjust. No, I do not blame you for what you say against us.

But, I issue a call to those on all sides of the aisle: put aside this rhetoric, and insist on respect and on love for your enemies! I mean if you can: if your own theology or anti-theology or quasi-theology allows you to do so coherently! If you must fight then do so!--I understand, that sometimes in this valley of separation such fighting is necessary. But fight your own hatreds as well! Otherwise all you will do is beget a new vengeance in each generation!--a cycle that *never* will end this side of death! What peace is there now, what peace can there possibly be, if you are not soberly seeking to love your enemy?--even the one you must fight? Would you not die to save your brother!?--do you not know that all living souls must be brothers and sisters, the children of God!? Or do you not believe in a Father of all of us!? Or do you not believe in the soul!? Or, perhaps you believe that the soul at its best can be only an evil, only a tragedy?

Those who deny that we all are beloved by the One Who is Good, even God; those who deny that the One Who is Good is Himself true love, an eternal and ever-consistent relation of Persons in one single unity; those who deny that the Nature around us and in which we live is beloved of God; those who deny that the Lord of Reality dies to give life and give hope to the world, even to enemies everywhere; those who deny that God cares, including for that and for those not-God, which He will not treat as a puppet of His but as an abiding creation (creations contributing facts and events in derivative fashions, for better or for worse, to the story of History, which God Himself does pay for, too); those who

deny the existence of God; those who decry even doctrines (as if you yourself could escape from proclaiming a truth to be true)--

--your hopeless denials will lead to mere might making right; will lead to rejection of women by men and men by women; will lead to dehumanization and sexual slavery; will lead to addictions and dark enchantments and viruses twisting mimetically into the minds of illusions of conscious will; will lead to survival of only the fittest in utterly ruthless and loveless and merciless blood and flesh and semen; will lead to pragmatic acceptance of outright lies and contradictions, whatever it takes to get done what a person wants done and to hell with the consequences. It will lead to a worship of power-effect and a burning desire to be causing reactions in other persons in order to ascertain safety of the self.

It will lead to all this within *and* without Christianity.

It *has* led to this, within and without Christianity.

I do not believe for a moment that what I am saying will somehow create some effect of mere reversal--how could it? How *should* it?! Should I be implanting some dark enchantment, too?! No; *all* of you who are reading me are persons. You have your own responsibilities, your own obligations: your honor as children of God. If what I am saying seems reasonable; or, if what I say seems unreasonable--decide and judge and take action *yourselves*. Keep walking according to whatever light you can see; keep looking for more light thereby.

But I, too, have a word to say. And so I have said it, along with St. Paul:

"Where sin exceeds, the freely given joy of God *does* superexceed; for *not* as the sin is the grace."

In hope for Matthew Murray; and for his family; and for his victims.

God give you peace, now or in a day to come.

Jason Pratt, 12/13/07