



THE ULTIMATE TERRORIST

There is no fear of God before his eyes.
Psalm 36:1

FEW INCIDENTS STRIKE TERROR into the heart as does a school shooting. If you are like me, your first reaction to news of some horrible act of violence is to ask, “Why?” On April 20, 1999, two high school students, Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, killed thirteen people at Columbine High School in one of the most infamous massacres in US history. Since then, we have learned much about the plans and motives of the shooters. In the wake of that tragedy, we have seen changes in legislation and school policies and the implementing of various safeguards and drills. Still, the mass shootings occur, and we still ask why. Could it be we are asking the wrong question? Instead of asking why, maybe we should ask why not.

Dressed to Kill

If that question sounds shocking, what about the question, “What should I wear to a mass murder?”

Undoubtedly, you have not asked yourself that question. However, when Harris and Klebold dressed for school on that fateful day, they did. They likely did not grab the first shirt from their dresser or closet. Anyone who has teenagers knows they can be obsessed with their appearance, despite all evidence to the contrary. It must have occurred to the boys, given they were planning to exact carnage on a massive scale, that their names and physical descriptions would be published worldwide. Though the final body count was horrendous, it was minuscule compared to what they had intended. The two accomplices planted propane-tank bombs in the crowded lunchtime cafeteria—bombs that failed to detonate. Armed with semiautomatic weapons, sawed-off shotguns, and pipe bombs, they positioned themselves strategically for picking off the panicked and bewildered survivors, whom they anticipated would flee the burning wreckage. In addition, they left bombs in their cars, which were parked in the school parking lot, to kill and injure the relatives, friends, reporters, rescue workers, and bystanders who would gather after the initial devastation had passed. They were aiming to kill several hundred people. With that in mind, Klebold selected a T-shirt emblazoned with the word *Wrath*; Harris's read *Natural Selection*.³ Their clothing choices were not intended to answer why, but to shout *why not*.

In Science We Trust

Though tragic, Columbine is only one in a long string of school shootings. There have been sixty-eight since that fateful day, and according to a recent study, they are becoming more frequent.⁴ It grieves us, but it should not

³ Cullen, *Columbine*, 41–42.

⁴ Luis Melgar, “Are School Shootings Becoming More Frequent? We Ran The Numbers,” *Guns & America*, May 17, 2019, <https://gunsandamerica.org/story/19/05/17/are-school-shootings-becoming-more-frequent-we-ran-the-numbers/>.

surprise us. Through a steady, relentless assault, anti-God activists in our courts and legislatures have succeeded not only in removing all mention of the Christian's God from the classroom, but also in suppressing any acknowledgment of divine activity from our taxpayer-funded public schools. Science has now assumed many of the attributes of deity. Science is eternal, omnipotent, omnipresent, and immutable. To the theologians of bygone eras, these were the characteristics unique to God alone. To the modern atheist, they are the unique attributes of his "deity." Missing from this modern deity, however, are what the theologians of old called God's communicable attributes, those characteristics that could be passed on to his creatures such as righteousness, justice, and goodness. Nature makes its choices, but they are not right or wrong, just or unjust, good or bad. They flow from an impersonal, immutable, overwhelming force that plows through centuries, leaving behind interesting artifacts for study, maybe even wonder, but nothing worthy of worship or obligation.

We have introduced conflicting and competing messages and values into our academic environment. We want our children to be honorable, compassionate, and loving, yet, we take away every basis for defining honor, compassion, and love. Without a Designer there is no design. Without a design there is no purpose, no intended use. There is no *ought* or *ought not*. Disagreement about what ought or ought not to be done is not the issue. In a universe that owes its existence to some mysterious, random, cataclysmic event, the concept of *ought* is meaningless. We are all nothing more than fallout. In an ever-expanding universe, we are just one mass among many. In terms of size, we fall somewhere between the dust particle and the planet. In terms of complexity, we rank higher than the block of granite and the butterfly, while in value and purpose, we are all just unexplainable anomalies of an evolutionary process started by no one and going nowhere.

With that as the basis of our understanding of the universe, there is no place for morality. If the Big Bang is the ultimate cause of all that exists, then we are nothing more than debris, and our actions are simply its path. The debris from a multi-billion-year-old explosion is under no moral obligation to fall anywhere in particular. If we live in a world of nothing more than complex randomness, then a random act of kindness stands on the same level as a random act of violence. Neither is better nor worse than the other. Both are just random acts.

Villains, Victims, or Heroes

It is one thing for a teacher, a school, or a whole educational system to promote a concept of learning devoid of intelligent design or moral absolutes. It is quite another thing for a student to have the *courage* to believe it, own it, and act upon such beliefs. For years now, we have seen our educational institutions become more *evangelistic* in calling disciples to climb on board their vessel and experience the excitement of moral relativism—the idea that everyone makes his own moral standard. They label as bigoted, judgmental hypocrites those who claim there is a moral standard that applies to all without exception. They love throwing stones at those who believe in moral absolutes, but they have conveniently kept their ship in port just a stone's throw from the shore of moral absolutes. We often applaud those who are bold enough to stand against the tide of ignorance, cowardice, prejudice, and oppression. If the Judeo-Christian values have so oppressed and repressed us as a society, then where do Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold stand in history? Are they villains, victims, or heroes who bravely launched their ships into the vast ocean of relativism?

If we deny our accountability to a sovereign Creator, then we must erect a monument to Harris and Klebold. There is no reason we should reserve our praise for those

who gave their lives to secure the safety and freedom of others. Without an overarching purpose that exists outside of ourselves, the one who falls on the grenade to save the life of a comrade is no more worthy of our tribute than the one who plants the bomb in a school cafeteria to kill and maim as many of his teachers and fellow classmates as possible. Both are living out their own value system.

In a society that exalts the concept of personal freedom and self-actualization, one must recognize a kind of freedom that comes with having no accountability to a personal Creator—freedom from having an absolute set of rules and values forced upon you, freedom from guilt and shame, freedom from condemnation. But why must we stop there? Why not freedom to do whatever we please, whenever we please, to whomever we please?

If we embrace a godless universe, then we have no basis for condemning the Columbine shooters. If we are all just the result of some impersonal cosmic explosion, then should not our mantra be *why not?* A school building full of children is for one person an opportunity to fill young minds with facts, formulas, and theories that will increase technological progress and cultivate the welfare of the human race. Why not? To another, it is an opportunity to conduct a social experiment to transform society more to one's liking. Why not? To another, that same building full of students provides a way to pursue personal gain and aggrandizement. Why not? To another, it is one big shooting gallery, a way to make history and not just study it, a way to become the ultimate terrorist. Why not?

Inescapable Purpose

The reason why not is that the premise is flawed at its core. We do not live in that world. Every day we are compelled by the concept of *ought*. We expect our lives to have a purpose. We make the effort and take the time to discuss issues or argue positions because they matter. In

fact, we measure life in terms of what matters—what *ought* to be if nothing else could be. These are the things that belong to our soul, and they are just as real as the air we breathe and the ground on which we walk. They owe their existence to the same source to which the physical universe owes its existence. They do not and cannot owe their existence to some impersonal cosmic accident. It is time we accepted the truth that fits reality. There is purpose. There is design. There is a Designer.

If we want to be left with more than the question *why not*, we must acknowledge that the answer to *why* comes from our Designer. For many of us, our initial reaction to tragic mass shootings is to find the answer in the world around us. After considering the evidence of the Columbine shootings, many point to some failure in society: bad parenting, a broken public school system, violent video games, TV, etc. We are comfortable with cause-and-effect scenarios. All these factors likely influence society; however, these explanations fall far short of reality in two ways: they overlook the comprehensive nature of the problem of evil, and they discount the active involvement of God in his creation.

The Reason Why

The Bible gives us a clear reason why we have school shootings and a host of other social maladies. Humans were created by God and for God. We were made to delight in God and to find our ultimate satisfaction in obeying our Creator. Deviating from that purpose involves twisting and distorting human nature into something diabolical. That is the state in which we now find ourselves:

The fool says in his heart, "There is no God."
They are corrupt, they do abominable deeds;
there is none who does good.

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The LORD looks down from heaven on the
children of man,
to see if there are any who understand,
who seek after God.
They have all turned aside; together they
have become corrupt;
there is none who does good,
not even one. (Psalm 14:1–3)

Human institutions or inventions are not the source of evil. Human nature is. The problem is not around us; it is within us.

Furthermore, the human heart wants so badly to escape the dominion and jurisdiction of God that we would gladly erase him from our minds or put in his place something of our own choosing. When a society denies God, or worse, relegates him to the realm of the irrelevant, they bring upon themselves his displeasure and indignation. By giving us over to our ungodly, destructive tendencies, God is manifesting his wrath against a godless society, a society that fails to give to him his rightful place in their minds and hearts:

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. . . .

And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind *to do what ought not to be done*. They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent,

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haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless.
(Romans 1:18–19, 28–31, emphasis added)

That is the answer to the question *why*. It explains our broken world because it reveals at the root of the problem a broken relationship with the God who created it. It is the only answer that fits the reality we see around us. We ignore it to our own eternal peril. But if we accept that answer, we can begin our journey back to God.