

In today's highly polarized political context, there is a great deal of political vitriol and frequent statements that are nothing short of appalling. Every now and then something is said that is far beyond the pale even by the standards of today's political discourse. Pastor Charles Worley's comments of May 13 are an example of this. Worley suggested, "Build a great big large fence 50 or 100 miles long. Put all the lesbians in there. Fly over and drop some food. Do the same thing with the queers and the homosexuals. Have that fence electrified so they can't get out. You know what, in a few years, they'll die out."

Comparisons to Hitler are too common in our political discussions as assertions that, for example, President Obama's health care policy is comparable to Nazism, are ridiculous. However, in this particular case comparisons are appropriate. Worley's ideas regarding gays and lesbians are not similar to Hitler's - they are the same as Hitler's. The idea of putting gays and lesbians into concentration camps and killing them is not something out of Worley's distorted imagination, but is something that actually happened during World War II as gays and lesbians were rounded up along with Jews and others and sent to death camps.

It is possible that the practice of invoking words like Hitler, Stalin, Communism and Nazism to describe something that speaker passionately opposes, a practice which we have seen more frequently since President Obama took office, has made us less sensitive to these claims, and less aware of the meanings and historical events behind these terms. Raising taxes to what they were under Ronald Reagan is not Stalinism, but proposing rounding up gay people and killing them is, in fact, the same policy supported by Hitler. The problem with constant comparisons to Hitler and Nazis is that when somebody actually proposes a Nazi-style final solution, we, as a society, no longer have the words to describe it.

The origin of Worley's hatred is baffling, and suggestions that this is a response to President Obama's recent support for marriage equality are insulting and cannot fully explain Worley's radical, murderous proposition, with its strong echoes of Hitler's genocidal views. While there is disagreement about marriage equality, which will likely remain for years, Worley's views are well beyond anything that might be called reasonable disagreement or debate. There can be many possible explanations of Worley's extreme and hateful ideas. Fear of a changing world, a deep and profound misreading of the life and teaching of Jesus, and the opportunity to build a lucrative congregation of bigots are just some of them.

The reasons Worley made these remarks are not important, but the reactions to these remarks, support those comments received, and anger and hostility which they reflect are more significant. If there were no audience receptive to Worley's murderous rhetoric, he probably would have kept his mouth shut. Worley's views are also an insight into the depth of the hatred and bigotry which still exists in America, even at times when many of us are relieved and excited by the president's recent public statements about equality.

Worley's efforts to hide his bigotry behind his alleged Christianity are unfortunate and cowardly, but it also raises questions for Christians and Christian leaders across America. The protests that have occurred in North Carolina since Worley's comments are encouraging, but any American who claims to be a Christian, regardless of his views on gay people, marriage equality or anything else should be

furious at Worley for using his faith to propose policies that are unambiguously murderous and which would constitute crimes against humanity.

Obviously to judge all Christians, or even all members of Worley's church or denomination by Worley's words and ideas, is unfair, and nobody is doing that. Moreover, Worley is not the first, and won't be the last, person to use religious views to justify outrageous and hateful opinions, but the extreme hatefulness in his words are particularly galling.

Nonetheless, this is not a case of people using different interpretations of Christianity to rationalize different political views. Rather is a case of Christianity being misused to justify indefensible positions? It should perhaps go without saying that real Christians, regardless of their political views, condemn Worley, but it would probably better if these things were actually said, clearly and forcefully, by every Christian leader in the land. Moreover, it is conservative Christians who should be condemning Worley the most since they are the ones who have the most to lose if statements like Worley's are viewed as representing anything more than the fringe of the fringe of Christian thought. Party needs.