

# On the Assassination of Charlie Kirk

And the cultural sickness of the West

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Charlie Kirk has been murdered. He was shot at a campus event in Utah. His death is a senseless tragedy and will stand as one of the defining moments of our cultural and political era.

Kirk's brand of politics was inflammatory. His "in-your-face" style excited supporters and enraged opponents. He was well within his rights, however, to speak in the manner he saw fit, whether people liked it or not. That is how the First Amendment is supposed to work. Offensive speech is protected speech. After all, inoffensive speech doesn't need protection. I've always thought the way to combat bad ideas is with good ideas. These days, more and more people seem to disagree.

The alternative to the open expression of ideas necessarily involves some form of coercion. That coercion might take the form of legal restrictions on speech, as we see increasingly in the UK. Alternatively, it might take the form of violence, as we see in the murder of Charlie Kirk or the two attempts on the life of President Trump. Nietzsche called this the "will to power." Those with the strength to do so bend the world around them to their will... except it never really works like that. Violence begets violence. For every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction. The reaction to Kirk's assassination will be shocking.

A liberal democracy is predicated on the principle of peaceful disagreement. The idea is that we advocate for what we want, all the while realizing that we won't always get it. You win some, you lose some. Increasingly, constituencies within the U.S.—and other nations as well—are unwilling to lose some. The world of ideas has become a zero-sum game. Moral absolutism is becoming ever more entrenched in our ideological enclaves.

Why has this happened? The reasons are no doubt complex, but I suspect one key reason is that we are losing a sufficient common moral framework. The largely Christian ethos set in place by the First and Second Great Awakenings has receded to the point that we share precious little common ground. We have begun to see one another not as human beings with

whom we disagree, not even as political and ideological opponents, but as moral monsters. And what does one do with a monster?

It's easy to see, then, why the postliberal movement has gained such traction in recent years. Calls for a Christian theocracy have become louder and louder from some Roman Catholic and Reformed groups. The bottom has fallen out of the Western world, they say. We no longer share the common ethical framework required for a liberal democracy to function. The liberal ideal is dead. It's time for something new.

Is liberalism dead? By "liberal," I don't mean left-wing or progressive, though the word is sometimes used that way. I mean a political system predicated on the idea of innate human dignity and, correlatively, the open exchange of ideas. In the U.S., that kind of liberalism is definitely sick. I'm not ready to give up on it, though, in large part because I don't know of a better alternative. To those clamoring for a theocracy, we must ask which kind of theocracy they would implement. Will Roman Catholic integralists be satisfied living in a state governed by Reformed Christian principles? Will the Reformed theonomists be content within a Roman Catholic state? Whose idea of *Theos* will win the day? Just like that, we're back to the will to power.

It is moments like these in which the church must remain principled. We cannot allow ourselves to be swept up in political fervor, lest we lose our prophetic witness. We must call out injustice when we see it and work toward a better world. We must mourn with those who mourn. We must stay rooted in Scripture and pray for God's wisdom. We must guard our hearts from both hatred and despair. We must remember that Jesus is Lord and we owe our obedience to him above all others.

Beyond these prescriptions, I'm at a loss. I wish I had something very profound or powerful to say, but I don't. What can one say in the face of such senseless tragedy? How should we understand such wicked advocacy? How should the church respond to the ongoing collapse of corporate sanity? Perhaps in time things will become clearer. God, give us wisdom.

Whether you liked him or not, Charlie Kirk, a baptized Christian, was a brother in Christ. Please pray for his family, his young children, and for all who loved him. Please pray that

God may restore some sanity to our increasingly unhinged nation, and that he will show us how to be wise and faithful in this moment.