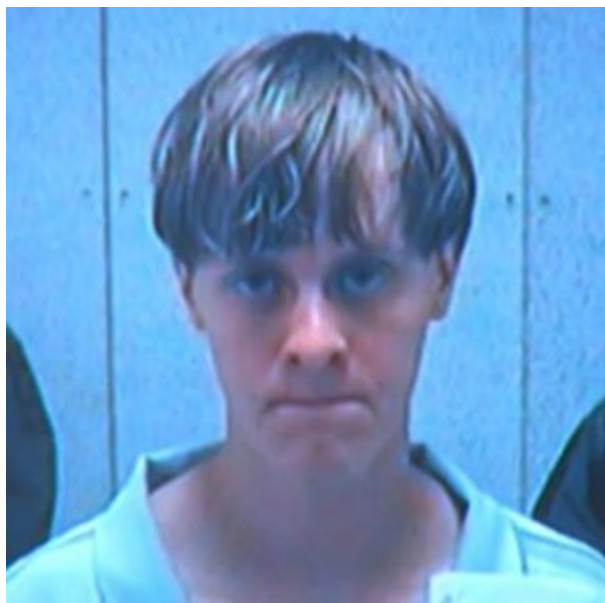


Families Show Charleston Killer Unbelievable Grace



What is it that gives people the strength to forgive the person who murdered their loved ones just two days earlier? It's a question many people might have been asking themselves today as they listened to the families of those killed by Dylann Roof address the monster who changed their lives forever.

At today's bond hearing for Roof, every family member that stepped up to the podium to convey their thoughts chose not to deliver a message of understandable anger or vengeance, but rather one of breathtaking grace.

"I forgive you," said one victim's daughter to Roof as she sobbed. She added, "You hurt me. You hurt a lot of people. But God forgives you. I forgive you."

Another said, "You took something very precious from me. I will never talk to her ever again. I will never be able to hold her again, but I forgive you. And have mercy on your soul."

"I forgive you and my family forgives you," said Anthony Thompson, a relative of victim Myra Thompson.

A granddaughter of another victim told Roof, "Hate will not win."

The sister of Depayne Middleton-Doctor said, "We have no room

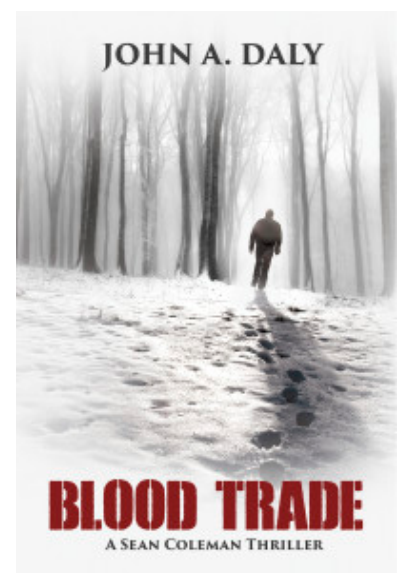
for hate so we have to forgive and I pray God on your soul.”

It was an amazing display, the kind I’m not sure I’d ever be strong enough to be a part of, if it were *my* family that Roof had destroyed. What we witnessed was something miraculous: The comfort and healing power that comes with having faith in God.

Yes, I truly believe that.

I’m a lifelong Christian, but I rarely write about my faith. For the most part, I don’t think it has a place in politics, and I certainly don’t have any interest in imposing my beliefs on others. I respect just about everyone’s religious backgrounds including those that reject religion all together.

When I hear people insist that religion (specifically Christianity when they’re talking about the United States) spawns bigotry and does more damage than good to society, I tend to let such assertions roll off my shoulders. I’m able to do this, because I know in my understanding of God’s message (and in my heart) that it’s just not true.



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Sure, there are people that use religion in narrow ways to justify bad (sometimes vile) behavior, and unfortunately those people are the ones held up by the media and other critics as being representative of an entire belief-system. They're wrong. Those who represent *my* faith are people like the families of the Charleston shooting victims, who clearly understand better than most of us that the word of God is not one of intolerance, but forgiveness.

It's a message you don't hear so much these days, outside of the walls of a church, but it's as powerful as ever.

These Charleston families are who other Christians should aspire to be. Even those who reject faith can learn from them. In the midst of unimaginable sorrow they showed remarkable grace. And from that, society can learn a profound lesson in humanity.

God bless the Charleston victims and their families.

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