

On the front page of Yesterday's Times Standard it described the closing arguments in a local shooting that took place about three years ago; it was apparently the not too rare case of a drug dealer or two turning bad. This brings to mind the staggering fact that each year in the United States over 10,000 fatal shootings occur. This means that in my own lifetime more than half a million Americans have shot other Americans; and that means we are overwhelmingly more menacing to each other than the Taliban and Al Quaida combined.

The past few weeks one particular shooting has been singled out over myriad others: perhaps because it signifies much about race, racial profiling and the sorry plight of young American males: particularly African-American males. As you know all too well, George Zimmerman was recently acquitted of shooting Trayvon Martin. Trayvon Martin was 17 years old and unarmed. Zimmerman alleged that Martin began the altercation by throwing the first punch and therefore shot the teen in self-defense. During the trial and after, the term, "Stand your ground" has come up again and again—even though Zimmerman's defense team never referred to the statute. Apparently the judge did! Such a law means that you are under no obligation to retreat if you feel physically threatened. Hence, the mortal gunshot wound to Trayvon Martin was seen by the jury as self defense.

The roots of 'stand your ground' might be traced to our national struggle for independence. For example: "Don't tread on me" was the motto of the early Naval flag with the picture of a coiled rattlesnake that symbolized American defiance toward the British. More recently, the lyrics to the song, "I won't back down..." by Tom Petty come readily to mind. Let me read them

Well I won't back down, no I won't back down
You could stand me up at the gates of hell
But I won't back down
Gonna stand my ground, won't be turned around
And I'll keep this world from draggin' me down
Gonna stand my ground and I won't back down.

Both characterize the no holds-barred-American bent toward fighting for your rights. Many would call our nation a Christian nation; others object. But there is no denying that Xianity was and is the major religion in the US of A.

What might the Church's founder, Jesus of Nazareth say about standing your ground? It's hard to know for sure, but, in his famous Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said to love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. He said **Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also.** He surrendered to a cruel death on the cross rather than resisting Roman arrest. So, it seems clear to me that 'Stand your ground' could neither be supported by the actions nor teachings of Jesus. And the supreme relevance of turning the other cheek gains new meaning in the American 21st century—especially if we want to stop the bleeding in our sadly divided nation and world.

This has been Dan Price for Community comment