

Facebook video killer turns gun on himself

Mail Foreign Service

A MAN who filmed himself shooting dead a pensioner in the US and posted the video on Facebook has killed himself.

Pennsylvania state police said Steve Stephens shot himself after officers tried to pull over his car in Erie County yesterday. A nationwide manhunt had been launched for Stephens, 37, after he randomly shot dead Robert Godwin, 74, in Cleveland, Ohio, on Sunday.

Stephens boasted that he had killed at least a dozen other people, but police said there was only one known victim.

The killer, a mental-health-care manager, said he was



Manhunt: Steve Stephens

'messed up' and blamed the violence on his ex-girlfriend Joy Lane. In a video watched by millions, he told Mr Godwin: 'She is the reason why this is about to happen to you.'

Mr Godwin shielded his face as Stephens shot him dead.

Facebook is facing a backlash after taking more than two hours to remove the horrifying video, and founder Mark Zuckerberg yesterday admitted the internet giant had a lot more work to do over the issue of violent videos.

A member of the public spotted Stephens's vehicle in a McDonald's car park yesterday morning and alerted police. Stephens fled and, after a 3km chase, officers rammed his car.

'As the vehicle was spinning out of control... Stephens pulled a pistol and shot himself in the head,' a police spokesman said.

Dr Mark Dooley



MORAL MATTERS

Let's not lose touch with sacred things

AS I see it, the biggest problem facing our society is the loss of respect for sacred things. I don't mean religious things as such, although they are intrinsically sacred. I mean all those things that command awe, reverence and esteem.

Traditionally, sacred things acted as barrier to our impulses. Such things stood beyond the ordinary flow of life, tempering our desire to violate or dishonour. They summoned the better angels of our nature, forcing us to recognise a threshold that we dare not trespass.

When I was a child, for example, the news that someone had died was received with communal mourning. My grandfather ran a butcher shop in a small village, and when a cortege was due to pass, he and his employees stood respectfully on the street. Indeed, the whole village shut down as a mark of respect for the deceased and the bereaved.

It is to their great credit that many towns and villages in rural Ireland continue this ancient practice. For them, the dead are not to be shoved out of sight. In closing their shops, and putting life on hold, they reverence those in whose sacred shadow we stand.

Thinking of things as sacred is the key to a civilised society. When people honour and respect things, when they recognise that certain things are off-limits, they can easily distinguish right from wrong.

But when there are no limits, when the sacred has all but vanished, even the dead no longer command respect.

It seems that we don't want anything to impede our desires or immediate impulses. We no longer want to bow or genuflect before things, and thus we tear them down or simply deny them. We despoil the landscape by building badly planned monstrosities, and pollute what is beautiful in the name of progress.

And yet, despite all this, something deep within us still cries out with a sacred longing. In the midst of so much violence, death and desecration, we still yearn for beauty, love and life.

For it is a simple truth that when we deny the sacred we are only half alive.

This is something we all realise at some point in our lives. Birth, mar-

riage and death give people an awareness of something beyond us – something that demands ritual and recognition. We can't quite say why this happens, but only that even those without any religion feel, in such moments, a sacred sense.

The cry of a newborn is met, not with a sigh, but with that deep sense of compassion and love which defines our humanity.

This howl of innocence is the sound of the sacred, and we respond with gentleness. We sacrifice our own needs in order to satisfy those of the child.

Likewise, when we confront sickness or death, we respond in a way that defies desire. We see the elderly, the infirm or the dying with eyes that reach beyond the surface. Somehow, even the hardest hearts thaw in the face of those who need our comfort and care.

Maybe it is because, at the limits of life, the sacred suddenly emerges from the shadows. It is so easy to travel through life without any sense of past or future, beginning or end. In this, our digital age, we can exist beyond night and day, birth and decay.

BUT then, as if from nowhere, it strikes – that unforeseen tragedy that forces us to confront our mortality and dependence on others. We see suffering and find ourselves responding with an open heart of compassion, respect and reverence. We see new life and feel unbounded joy.

One afternoon, I walked into what I thought was an empty church. It was only when I sat down that I heard the sobs of a young man in deep distress. He was crouching in one of the pews trying desperately to avoid my gaze.

It was obvious that he was not used to being in church and that something unexpected drove him there. I still remember the agony in his cries, the pain of a life tragically thrown into turmoil.

For me, that man was symbolic of our society, a society that has lost faith in the sacred but which still yearns for it. We all need love, respect, care and compassion. But what happens when we no longer value anything enough to know the meaning of love or respect?

Like that poor man, we may end up crying words I shall never forget: 'I am sorry, so, so sorry.'

—mark.dooley@daily@mail.ie—

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