

UNSPOKEN ISSUES OF GUN CONTROL

They're impossible to avoid: the election arguments about gun control, divided neatly along party lines. These are arguments about peoples' lives, often escalating after yet another gut-wrenching story about someone being killed in a violent shooting.

One side says, "Reduce the availability of guns. Fine gun manufacturers for guns used in shootings. Make it harder for everyone to own guns, especially handguns and semi-automatic rifles."

The other side says, "Owning firearms is a right guaranteed by our constitution to law-abiding citizens. We already have plenty of laws regulating firearm use; enforce them better, and let the good citizens exercise their rights."

This is not a political article I am composing, though I do have an opinion on the issue. I own firearms and would not dream of using them in anger against another human being. Every gun owner I am familiar with feels the same way. We would rather die ourselves than be responsible for the death of an innocent. Even if it came to an issue of genuine self-defense, if possible we would much rather run than hurt someone.

Why is that? Could it be that there's something more to the issue than simply the question of how many guns have been sold, or how many rounds of ammunition a magazine can hold?

I find it dismaying that the obvious issues remain unspoken in the public domain. No one, for example, seems to be asking: What is it about our culture, our times, that is encouraging violence? Could it be people, rather than guns, that are the issue?

I was taught by my father and mother, my teachers, my pastors and others, that human life is sacred, a gift of God to be defended. I learned in the fifth commandment his voice from heaven, "You shall not murder." Martin Luther expanded my understanding by teaching me, "We should fear and love God that we do not hurt or harm our neighbor in his body, but help and befriend him in every bodily need."

I was shown a Savior named Jesus who came from heaven to forgive my sins rather than punish me for them. He taught me to love my neighbor, even if he irritates or hurts me. "Love your enemies," he taught me, "Do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you... Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful" (Luke 6:27ff). He showed me that he has tender compassion for all people, and calls me to have that same attitude toward others. He wants me to serve them in humility and respect.

Why are we so blind to the real questions we should be asking as a culture: "What's wrong with people? What's wrong with us? Could it be that we have undermined the sanctity of life by denying the reality of sin; by mocking the Ten Commandments' thunder; by encouraging atheism and free-thinking; by turning the blood of Jesus Christ into a joke; by dismissing the importance of reverent worship; by making all 'religion' the same; by idolizing self and pleasure and me-first thinking; by teaching young men (at least, by example) that they can safely dismiss the permanency of marriage and family and irresponsibly leave their progeny fatherless; by pushing money-making video games and music and movies that glorify killing; by leading a generation headlong into the hell of self-satisfying lust instead of into the heaven of service and other-centeredness? Have we yet met the enemy and determined that he is actually us?"

I suppose that until these questions are faced head-on, people will continue to blame hardware for the ugliness they have created by separating themselves from the goodness of God. There are dire consequences for those who think righteousness is just for those looney Christian types. I believe we are witnessing just the tip of the iceberg.

Maybe if all the energy and talk and money that has been put into the gun-control debate had been invested in teaching people about God's holy laws and his saving grace in Christ, we wouldn't be facing this debate.

God bless our native land—with truth, and the repentance that accompanies it.