

We Must Change, or Perish by the Gun

Remember what Jesus reportedly said about guns? Actually, there were no guns in Jesus' day. The saying is about swords: "all who take the sword will perish by the sword" [Matt. 26:52]. Substitute "guns" for "swords" and you have a clear, succinct warning against the use of firearms to settle human conflicts.

Sadly, many Americans don't pay much heed to the teaching of Jesus (or most other religious teaching for that matter). Perhaps the best (or worst) example is Wayne LaPierre, executive VP of the NRA, who recently pontificated, "the only thing that stops a bad guy with a gun is a good guy with a gun."

Consider what evangelical Christian leader, Jim Wallis, has to say about LaPierre's statement: "That statement is at the heart of the problem of gun violence in America today – not just because it is factually flawed, which of course it is, but also because it is morally mistaken, theologically dangerous, and religiously repugnant. The world is not full of good and bad people; that is not what our scriptures teach us. We are . . . both good and bad. This is not only true of humanity as a whole, but we as individuals have both good and bad in us."

Still, Americans are obsessed with guns. The problem isn't just a mental health problem, or the occasional mass killing. Last year there were 505 gun deaths in Chicago alone, more than all the U.S. troop deaths in Afghanistan. Whether those deaths were intentional or accidental, the prevalence of guns made them much more likely to happen.

Now we have a domestic arms race on our hands. If not reversed, we will see increasing carnage in our schools, on our streets, and in our homes. There's no good reason for domestic possession of military assault rifles, neither by private citizens, domestic police, nor National Guard forces. These weapons are made for war, not for keeping the peace. Unless we want civil war, with no clear moral distinction between the good guys and the bad guys, we'd better find ways to eliminate these weapons.

Morally, religiously, theologically, spiritually, it's clear that the use of violence to take the life of another human being is always tragic. All the more tragic if we fail to disentrall ourselves of guns. We must change how we think about them, how we use them, and how we control their presence among us.

Copyright 2013 by Byron C. Bangert