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America's deadly obsession with violence and guns

Tony Magliano | Aug. 2, 2012 Making a Difference

From abortion to war, vigilante militias to hate groups, angry language to road rage, computer games to movies, violence holds so much of American society in its deadly grip.

Countless numbers of Americans have either become violent, are insensitive to the grave harm violence brings, or are entertained by it. These easily observable facts point to a society that has significantly lost its respect for the dignity of each human life.

There is no one single solution to America's obsession with violence. A multifaceted strategy must be employed.

We need to discover the values of kindness, courtesy, patience, compassion and selflessness. We need to more faithfully seek God's gentle wisdom, especially when dealing with opposition of any kind.

And in light of Jesus' words and example, we must break ranks with our violent culture and love everyone -- even our enemies.

And yes, we need strict gun control.

The recent tragic mass murder in Aurora, Colo., is but the latest in a long string of similar horrific events executed by mentally ill or angry persons who easily purchased guns, including assault weapons.

According to Joshua Horwitz, executive director of the Coalition to Stop Gun Violence [1], the suspected perpetrator of the Aurora, Colo., killings, James Holmes, had a questionable mental health history that should have prevented him from purchasing any weapons. But instead, "Holmes was able to outfit himself for war."

"When he walked into the Century Aurora 16 theater, he wore full body armor and carried four guns: two semiautomatic Glock handguns, a 12-gauge shotgun, and an AR-15 style assault rifle with a 100-round drum magazine," Horwitz writes [2] on usnews.com. "The AR-15 was one of the assault rifles banned under a federal law that Congress allowed to expire in 2004. It is now clear they made a tragic mistake."

Guns can be sold in the U.S. without a background check to screen out criminals or the mentally ill.

According to the Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence [3], "Sales between individuals, under federal law, do not require a background check. This means that felons can 'lie and buy' at gun shows and other places where guns are readily available."

According to the campaign, a gun in the home is far more likely to be used in a completed or attempted suicide, a criminal assault or homicide, or an accidental shooting death than in a self-defense shooting.

Of the more than 30,000 average gun deaths per year in the U.S., the FBI's Expanded Homicide Data reports that only about 200 of those killed are deemed legally justified self-defense homicides by private citizens.

Almost all of the rest are gun-involved murders and suicides.

Armed with the facts, we need to urge our local, state and national representatives to pass strict, common-sense gun control laws that will significantly reduce the carnage of gun-related murders and suicides.

During the Mass of Christian burial for 18-year-old Alexander Boik, one of 12 people killed in the Aurora shooting, Fr. Martin Lally said in his homily, "Our presence here is a true sign that love is more powerful than evil, that a gentle presence is stronger than bullets."

If the day ever comes when Christians and all people of goodwill realize and practice the Gospel truth that gentle love is indeed more powerful than evil and bullets, the kingdom of God will be upon us.

[Tony Magliano is an internationally syndicated social justice and peace columnist.]

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