

Gun Control or Heart Control? A Great Awakening?

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In the aftermath of another heinous act of mass murder, this time at a high school in Parkland, Florida, there was the usual spate of hand-wringing over the question of gun laws in the United States.

For the record, I'm not fond of guns and would like to see greater prohibitions on the sale of automatic weapons. That said, it was not at all surprising to hear certain commentators reflexively cite and blame the usual suspects (the NRA, the GOP) for "America's gun problem."

In a discussion after the Parkland shooting, MSNBC commentator Mike Barnicle asked the rhetorical question, "Is this a cultural problem?" The answer should be fairly obvious.

Our "gun control" problem is a resultant phenomenon, a symptom of a serious cultural and spiritual disorder. By all means, let's have the debate about guns and laws, but we need to understand this is not fundamentally a "gun problem" but rather a "heart problem."



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It's well-known that politics is downstream of culture. The Greeks understood this long ago; Plato was very perceptive when he cited musicologist Damon's assertion that "if you change the songs of a nation soon you will change the laws."

Politicians and our political punditry are reacting to the Parkland tragedy in the way they have for decades. Rather than examine deeper cultural concerns -- family breakdown, sexual immorality, a debased entertainment industry -- their focus immediately becomes political.

This is not to suggest there isn't a law-and-order aspect in the equation.

However, we already have many gun laws on the books. Both the Parkland perpetrator and Las Vegas shooter obtained their guns legally. There are as

many as 100 million gun owners in the USA and most are law-abiding citizens. Most gun-related crimes in the USA are committed with illegally obtained weapons. Chicago has some of the strictest gun laws in the country, yet annually leads the nation in gun-related crimes -- over 4,000 cases in 2016.

A study on gun-related crime published in 2017 by the federal National Institute of Justice found that between 1993 and 2013 gun ownership increased by nearly 50%. Yet during the same period, gun homicides decreased by nearly 50%. Kentucky Governor Matt Bevin pointed to the fact that in the 1950s there were far, far fewer gun laws on the books, yet the kinds of mass shootings we are seeing with disturbing frequency were almost non-existent.

In spite of the fact there are laws on the books intended to mitigate crimes such as murder, domestic abuse, driving while intoxicated, rape, etc., people still commit these crimes. When these occur, justice is usually served and punishment meted out. But laws will continue to be violated because this is not primarily a law-and-order issue, but rather a behavioral issue rooted in one's spiritual and psychological disposition. Because our identities, individually and collectively, are determined by what we value, treasure and love, our behavior will reflect those values.

It's no secret we are facing a moral crisis and our sense of morality has become deeply skewed. There are many of a liberal persuasion who wish not to engage in discussions regarding morals because of their trepidation about "religious" connotations and the accompanying component of "judgment." Because the current iteration of progressive orthodoxy hails openness and tolerance to be significant aspects of its Holy Grail, judgment is considered anathema to all that. For progressives, making distinctions on the basis of any moral standard *vis-à-vis* behavior is often viewed as being discriminatory -- invidious, in fact.

To be fair, there are some of a conservative/capitalist persuasion who also avoid moral issues because it might negatively impact profit margins. "Sex sells" is a primary dictate of Madison Avenue. Then there is Hollywood.

Unspoken in many of the "gun control" discussions is just how inured we've become to violence due to the promotion and glorification of sex and violence in popular culture. Film producers, directors and

musicians make fortunes by creating and aggressively marketing content that has morally corrosive aspects to it. Yet these same people are often the first to condemn the NRA or GOP for their failures to address the gun-control issue, as well as chide religionists for being backward and out of step with contemporary social norms. This double standard is fairly typical, but yet another example of the moral malaise in which we now live.

Causal Dimension

In 1934, anthropologist, J.D. Unwin, published his seminal book, *Sex and Culture*. In an attempt to examine the Freudian premise that "civilization is a byproduct of repressed sexuality," Unwin studied 86 cultures and tribes going back thousands of years (Sumerians, Greeks, Romans, *et. al.*), and found that in every case when sexual mores were loosened, societies fell into moral decay and tended to dissipate. As a liberal, Unwin was somewhat conflicted with his findings, but in the spirit of anthropological integrity published his results anyway. Not wanting to cast moral aspersions, he wrote:

"I offer no opinion about the rightness or wrongness... In human records there is no instance of a society retaining its energy after a complete new generation has inherited a tradition which does not insist on pre-nuptial and post-nuptial continence."

Monogamy, according to Unwin's research, has been the constant factor in the success and survival of all societies, regardless of their political, religious or cultural characteristics (his research corroborates St. Augustine's contention that people and nations fail because they choose to love the wrong things). Though his conclusion speaks to the importance of marital fidelity, his side-stepping of the moral issue -- rightness or wrongness -- leaves us needing a more thorough explanation. We need to connect the dots. Because family breakdown has become epidemic, children are not inculcated with well-defined moral codes; thus moral confusion often results in immoral conduct.

According to Divine Principle, it is precisely the misunderstanding of God's principles regarding love -- divine, parental, conjugal, filial -- that lies at the heart of our cultural maladies. Divine Principle instructs that the divine aspects of love, sexuality and morality must be understood in the context of Godism if we're ever to find our way out of the moral confusion that continues to plague humankind.

Chapter Two of *Divine Principle* explains that because humankind does not yet live in a time where God's absolute standard of goodness has been fully realized, moral and ethical standards in human societies vacillate. Consequently, we are living in an age in which conflicts -- political, social, cultural, ideological -- will inevitably occur. The course, motivation and ramifications of the Human Fall as described in *Divine Principle* provide an understanding of the root of human proclivities and how we might free ourselves from the wages of original sin and fallen nature.

Essential to the account of the course and motivation of the Fall are the matters of jealousy and "lack of love." Because the Archangel did not process jealousy in a principled fashion, he became predisposed to unprincipled behavior. This issue is of primary significance, for without knowing the principled ways to process inappropriate or unprincipled emotions, we inevitably deviate from God's ideal. By not being able to properly process resentment, jealousy or rage, we become predisposed to the problems of sexual immorality, family breakdown, corrupt politics, depraved entertainment -- and gun violence.

Accountability and Judgment

Most Unificationists are not likely supportive of Ayn Rand's concept of rational egoism, but all might agree she was correct when she stated, "You can avoid reality, but you cannot avoid the consequences of avoiding reality." As we come to terms with the reality of school shootings we see that many of the perpetrators were from broken homes, had mental health problems, spent copious time on social media, had misanthropic tendencies, and were addicted to video games.



Of all these contributing factors, a case can be made that family breakdown has the most deleterious effects on the hearts and minds of young people. It is an issue that should not be easily dismissed as being a myopic, Christian (and thus judgmental) explanation as to why these tragedies occur with alarming regularity. In this respect, judgment is an important component in shaping our cultural identity. Avoiding the discussion about the realities of family breakdown and infidelity because it may be "judgmental," or

because it may cast moral aspersions, is counterproductive to the process of solving the "heart control" issue.

As British philosopher Roger Scruton observes, judgment is implicit in any faith-based community because once ideals and tenets are firmly in place, there is expectation that good citizens of the community will abide by them in order to realize the "ethical vision." For the religious person there is an understanding that judgment is our destiny -- something we all will encounter when we ascend to the spiritual realm. This concept is deeply rooted in the Judeo-Christian cultural sphere and though we may live our lives with the intention of doing what is morally and ethically correct, how we actually behave in relation to others is the ultimate measure of our contributing to an ethical society.

As Scruton observes, our intellectual life has become "one vast commotion of specialisms," where making distinctions between the "virtuous and the vicious, the beautiful and the ugly, the sacred and the profane, the true and the false -- is to offend against the only value judgment that is widely accepted, the judgment that all judgments are wrong." A prevailing opinion in contemporary culture is that exercising any kind of judgment is somehow illiberal and mean-spirited.

Subsequently, the morality of our culture declines and we continue to be lost in the abyss of moral relativism, situational ethics or worse -- a "post-truth" culture (see Graham Simon's essay on the AU Blog on this topic).

Coming to the realization that there are moral truths, and not merely interpretations of truth, is crucial. By accepting such, responsibility and accountability become significant aspects in our psychological maturation. Not to accept this reality is being irresponsible and immature.

In his Farewell Address to the nation upon leaving office in 1796, President George Washington gave heed:

"Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, religion and morality are indispensable supports. In vain would that man claim the tribute of patriotism, who should labor to subvert these great pillars of human happiness, these firmest props of the duties of men and citizens."

Perhaps the Parkland tragedy will conjure a "great awakening" that will prompt us as a people to put an end to the day-to-day abnegation of religious-based morality.

Lack of love, jealousy, resentment, and the accompanying bad behavior triggered by these emotional impulses can only be assuaged by the proper understanding of the causal dimension of the Human Fall.

If we think about it, guns, fire, music, religion, money and even politics, can have beneficial aspects as well as deleterious ones. Motivation and intent determine everything. Dealing with the "heart control" problem starts with a proper diagnosis of the cause of the problem. Only then can a proper remedy be prescribed and real healing take place -- and our "gun control" problem be ultimately resolved.

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