**The Clarion Call**

* THE CLEAR CALL OF A BATTLE TRUMPET

**Jesus said, “My sheep recognize my voice. I know them, and they follow me.” (John 10:27)**

From the desk of:

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**... to Keep and Bear Arms** —

**A Right to Life and Liberty**

Note: This issue of The Clarion Call was written in the days immediately following the tragic shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, CT.

According to United Nations final data, the United States of America had 3.0 firearm homicides per 100,000 in national population in 2009. There were 14 other nations that had higher per capita rates in 2009, primarily in Latin America and the Caribbean. Because the U.S. is so large, it is better to compare America’s firearm violence to other affluent nations. Again, using the U.N. data, European nations typically have rates well below 1 per 100,000, or one-third the frequency seen in the U.S. In the last 30 years since 1982, America has mourned at least 61 mass murders. Who can forget these shootings just since the 1999 Columbine high school massacre in Littleton, Colorado where 12 students and 1 teacher were killed; the Amish schoolhouse in Lancaster, Pennsylvania were 5 young girls were bound and shot; the Virginia Tech campus shooting rampage killing 32 persons; the slaying of 13 soldiers at Fort Hood, Texas; or the impairing of Rep. Gabby Giffords (D-AZ) that further killed 6 attendees at her political rally at a Safeway market in Tucson, Arizona. Just last year (2012): 5 people were slain at the Café Racer Espresso in Seattle, Washington; 12 movie viewers murdered in a theater in Aurora, Colorado; 6 Sikh temple members killed in a gurdwara in Oak Creek, Wisconsin; 5 former co-workers shot to death at Accent Signage Systems in Minneapolis, Minnesota; 2 shoppers slaughtered in the Town Center mall in Clackamas, Oregon; and most recently, 20 children and 6 educators massacred at Sandy Hook elementary school in Newtown, Connecticut.

It was within days of the Sandy Hook elementary school shooting that many politicians began to discuss their agenda of a wide range of gun control … challenging the 2nd Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. This amendment, written in 1789 by the First Congress and ratified in 1791 by the States as part of the original Bill of Rights, states — “A well-regulated militia being necessary to the security of a free state, the right of the people to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed.” Among the reasons the 2nd Amendment was added to the U.S. Constitution was to provide protection against tyranny – to make it harder for any potential dictator or would-be king to take control of the entire nation against the will of the people. Stated another way, it was yet another extension of the concern for a separation of powers that would best protect the people against government misuse of power … for it meant that the federal government could never become the only entity in the nation that had all of the guns, and thus all the effective power.

The meaning of the constitutional right “to keep and bear arms,” and the segment of the citizenry to which that right applies, has been the heated debate of recent years. Specifically, what does “people” mean? Does “people” refer to the collective body (the “militia”) or does “people” refer to every citizen (individually)? While gun rights supporters assert that the right “to keep and bear arms” is an individual right … like the 1st Amendment freedom of religion and speech … gun opponents assert that the right pertains only to collective bodies (e.g., the military, law enforcement, etc.) and not to individuals. Believing that the U.S. Constitution offers no protection for individual gun ownership, gun opponents therefore encourage efforts to restrict or ban citizen access to firearms, particularly handguns. They frequently utilize highly-publicized, tragic instances of violence to bolster their argument that guns should be left only in the hands of “professionals.” But clearly, each Amendment was to protect an individual right; and to some of (continued … on page two)

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those Amendments were also added a protection on collective rights (e.g., of the people to assemble, of the militia, of juries, etc.). Based, therefore, on the individual protections appearing in each Amendment, it is illogical to assert (as do gun control proponents) that the 2nd Amendment should be the only Amendment to protect an individual right. There can be no doubt that under the original intentions and interpretations, the guarantees of the 2nd Amendment were extended to every citizen individually. This has been demonstrated by legal commentaries, declarations of the Founding Fathers, early state laws, and state constitutions. Nevertheless, an argument raised today against continuing those guarantees is that “times have changed” – Therefore, the original intentions of the 2nd Amendment should be modernized.

Today’s political question regarding gun ownership is this: Should governments prohibit private citizens from owning some or all kinds of guns? But for the Christian the question ought to be this: What does the Bible say about possessing a gun?

Though there is no reference to “guns” in the Word of God, the biblical worldview is relevant to the question of self-defense. Is it right to defend ourselves (and others) from physical attacks; and is it right ever to use a weapon in such self-defense? If self-defense is morally right, then gun ownership is primarily a question of what kind of weapon(s) to use in defending oneself and others from physical harm when able to do so.

The naïve reader of Holy Scripture wrongly interprets Jesus’ words to His disciples to “turn the other cheek.” These people mistakenly think that Jesus prohibited all self-defense when He instructed, “You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I say to you, do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.” (Matthew 5:38-39) Jesus is not prohibiting self-defense, but barring individuals from taking personal vengeance so as to “get even” with another person. The English verb “slaps” is the Greek word πατρίζει (rhapsizo), which refers to a sharp slap given in insult (a right-handed person would use the back of the hand to slap someone “on the right cheek” according to rabbinic literature). So the point is not to hit back when someone hits you as an insult. But the idea of a violent attack to do bodily harm or even murder someone is not in view of this text.

Other passages of Scripture seem to show that it is right to try to avoid being harmed by a violent attacker. In the Old Testament, when King Saul threw a spear at David, David “eluded Saul, so that he struck the spear into the wall,” and David fled from him. (1 Samuel 19:10). In the New Testament, when King Aretas attempted to capture the Apostle Paul in Damascus, he escaped by being let down in a basket through an opening in the wall (2 Corinthians 11:32-33). Jesus also escaped from an angry crowd at His hometown of Nazareth where they tried to throw Him off a cliff (Luke 4:29-30). On another occasion, Jesus hid Himself in the Temple and then escaped from hostile Jews who were seeking to harm Him (John 8:1-59; 10:31-39). In none of these cases did the person who was attacked “turn the other cheek” – That is, David did not hand the spear back to Saul and say, “Try again!”

In antiquity, people commonly carried swords for protection against robbers. In another passage of Scripture, Jesus seemed to encourage His disciples to have swords for self-defense. He said to them, “But now let the one who has a moneybag take it, and likewise a knapsack. Let the one who has no sword sell his cloak and buy one. For I tell you that this Scripture must be fulfilled in Me: ‘And he was numbered with the transgressors.’ For what is written about Me has its fulfillment.” And they said, “Look, Lord, here are two swords.” And He said to them, “It is enough.” (Luke 22:36-38) Apparently, at least two of Jesus’ disciples ... who had been with Him for three years ... were still carrying swords; and Jesus had not forbidden this nor rebuke them. When Jesus says, “It is enough,” He means that two swords are enough – an expression of approval for what they had just said and done. Clearly, Jesus encouraged His disciples to carry a sword for self-defense; and even to “buy one” (v. 36) if they don’t have one.

While it is true that Jesus later rebuked Peter in the Garden of Gethsemane for cutting off the ear of the servant of the high priest (Luke 22:50; John 18:10), this was because Jesus did not want His disciples to attempt to stop His forthcoming crucifixion or to try to start a revolt against Rome. This is also the meaning of Matthew 26:52 – “All who take up the sword will perish by the sword.” In that context, Jesus meant that those who take up the sword in an attempt to do the spiritual work of advancing the Kingdom of God by force will not succeed in that work; and if Jesus’ followers attempted to overthrow the Roman government as a means of advancing the Kingdom of God at that time, they would simply fail and perish by the sword. It is noteworthy – Jesus did not tell Peter to throw away his sword, but to keep it ... for He went on to say, “Put your sword back into its place.” (Matthew 26:52)

If these biblical accounts authorize the idea of self-defense (in general), and if Jesus encouraged His disciples to carry a sword as an effective weapon to protect themselves, then it appears morally right for a person to be able to use
other kinds of weapons for self-defense. Today that would include the use of a gun (where the nation or state allows this) or the use of other means such as pepper spray that would deter an attacker. God wants us to protect and preserve life, and not to encourage actions that would harm self or others. Therefore, acting in love both toward the attacker and toward one’s self would include opposing a violent attack before harm is done. Our failure to face a vicious attack will often lead to even more harm and more wrongdoing.

Among the reasons that people choose a gun as a weapon for self-defense is that a firearm is a great equalizer that offsets huge differences in physical strength. An 80-year-old woman with a gun, living alone in her home at night, or a frail 70-year-old shopkeeper in a high-crime area, would have an effective means of defense against a 25-year-old, 280-pound muscular male intruder. No other kind of weapon would give a person that ability.

In the vast majority of cases, merely wielding a handgun will cause an attacker to flee; and in the next most common event, the intruder is wounded and disabled … thus the attack is thwarted, and the attacker fully recovers and stands trial. The biblical mandate to “act in love toward neighbors” … to include even the intruder … implies that the least amount of force required to stop the attack should be used; resulting in the least amount of physical harm to the intruder himself.

It is a myth that gun control laws reduce crime. Statistics from a number of studies reveal that (in general) increasingly strict gun control laws have not been shown to reduce gun crime; and in several places they seem to have led to an increase in crime. Just the threat of gun control laws significantly increases the purchase and procession of more guns. In the U.S., official statistics estimate that 35% of American households own guns; but some estimate that the actual number may be as high as 50% because government statistics count only documented ownership, not ownership that is not recorded on any government database. There are believed to be approximately 270M firearms (e.g., handguns, rifles and shotguns) currently in circulation among the U.S. civilian population. There are some people who wrongly imagine that most of the guns found in the U.S. will eventually be used to commit a crime. But it’s interesting to compare the total number of guns with the total number of murders committed using a firearm. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, in 2009 U.S. deaths from firearms were 31,347 (55% of which was due to suicide) … as compared to 41,592 from poison; 34,485 from motor vehicles; 443,000 from smoking (another 49,000 from second-hand smoking; and 24,518 alcohol-induced deaths (excluding accidents and homicides) along with another 15,183 liver disease deaths.

Also contrary to popular myth, possession of a gun does not increase, but rather decreases, a person's likelihood of being injured in a crime. Studies performed by the U.S. National Center for Health Statistics report that victims of a crime (or attempted crime) who defend themselves with a gun are (in fact) less likely to be injured or to lose property than victims who do not defend themselves, or attempted to defend themselves without a gun. There is no evidence that using a gun for self-protection means that the attacker will take the gun away and use it against the victim. All of the statistics need to be understood in light of the estimated 2.1M crimes that are prevented every year through private ownership of guns.

While laws and policies should guarantee that citizens have the right to possess some kind of effective means of self-defense, government should place reasonable restrictions on gun ownership. It is appropriate for government to prohibit convicted felons and the mentally ill from owning or possessing guns. It is also appropriate to prohibit the processing of guns in certain sensitive places (e.g., in courtrooms or on airplanes). It is reasonable to implement the requirement of some certification in gun safety training. Other reasonable restrictions would include the prohibition of private ownership of certain types of weapons not needed for personal self-defense – For example: fully-automatic assault weapons, anti-tank rocket launchers, or anti-aircraft missile launchers … that would only be needed in military conflict and some such weapons by law enforcement. To guarantee compliance with such restrictions, a background check would seem appropriate when someone wants to buy a gun. But it should not become so difficult that it actually becomes a means of preventing gun ownership by legitimate, law-abiding citizens.

A part of Just War Theory is jus in bello (Latin – meaning “law in war”) which concerns the just conduct in the midst of battle (after it begins). The ethical conduct falls on the shoulders of all soldiers. Such accountability may involve being put on trial for war crimes. They are held responsible for any breach of the principles of proportionality (exercise restraint in corresponding ratio) and of no reprisals (retaliation or revenge). Soldiers may only use force proportional to the end they seek; they must restrain their force to that amount appropriate to achieving their aim or target. Weapons of mass destruction, for example, are usually seen as being out of proportion to legitimate military ends. A reprisal is when country A violates jus in bello in (continued … on page four)
war with country B. Country B then retaliates with its own violation of jure in bello, seeking to chasten A into obeying the rules. There are strong moral and evidentiary reasons to believe that reprisals don't work, and they instead serve to escalate death and make the destruction of war increasingly indiscriminate. Winning the battle "well" is the best revenge.

The Apostle Paul said to Christians in Romans 12:19 — “Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, "VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY," says the Lord.” (upper case is quoting Deut. 32:35) According to Barnes’ Notes on the Bible (1834), the command is, to avoid a spirit and purpose of revenge. But this command is not to be so understood that we may not seek for “justice” in a regular and proper way before civil tribunals. If we are robbed and plundered contrary to the law of the land, religion does not require us to submit to such oppression and injury without seeking our rights in an orderly and regular manner. If it did, it would be to give a premium to iniquity, to countenance wickedness, and require a man, by becoming a Christian, to abandon his or her inalienable rights of life and liberty. The command here “not to avenge ourselves” means that we are not to take it out of the hands of God, or the hands of the law, and to inflict it ourselves. It is well known that where there are no laws, the business of vengeance is pursued by individuals in a barbarous and unrelenting manner. In a state of savage society, vengeance is “immediately taken,” if possible, or it is pursued for years, and the offended man is never satisfied until he has imbrued his hands in the blood of the offender.

What is missing in our national dialogue is the need to reinstitute moral teaching in the public arena. Shortly after the April 1999 Columbine shooting, Darrell Scott, the grieving father of student victim Rachel Scott, was invited to address the House Judiciary Committee’s sub-committee back in June 1999. What he said to our national leaders during this special session of Congress was painfully truthful. They were not prepared for what he was to say, nor was it received well. The following is a portion of the transcript: “Since the dawn of creation there has been both good and evil in the hearts of men and women. We all contain the seeds of kindness or the seeds of violence . . . The first recorded act of violence was when Cain slew his brother Abel out in the field. The villain was not the club he used . . . The true killer was Cain, and the reason for the murder could only be found in Cain’s heart . . . Men and women are three-part beings. We all consist of body, soul, and spirit. When we refuse to acknowledge a third part of our make-up, we create a void that allows evil, prejudice, and hatred to rush in and reek havoc. Spiritual influences were present within our educational systems for most of our nation’s history. Many of our major colleges began as theological seminaries. This is a historical fact. What has happened to us as a nation? We have refused to honor God, and in so doing, we open the doors to hatred and violence. And when something as terrible as Columbine’s tragedy occurs, politicians immediately look for a scapegoat such as the NRA. They immediately seek to pass more restrictive laws that contribute to erode away our personal and private liberties. We do not need more restrictive laws . . . The real villain lies within our own hearts . . . ”

Darrell Scott is correct – The real solution to humanity’s sinful nature of rebellious evil against the moral codes of the Creator is to invite the living presence of God’s Spirit into our hearts, and live according to righteousness as manifested by God through the incarnate Christ Jesus. The absence of moral absolutes in our society has contributed to our nation’s moral decay and decadence. More gun control will not (and has not) changed the hearts and minds of our fallen humanity. Only the indwelling Spirit of God can “lead us not into temptation and deliver us from evil” . . . as we so often pray in the prayer the Lord Jesus taught us (Matthew 6:13).

Postscript
Far too many times, people will take Jesus’ words to “love your neighbor as yourself” (Luke 10:27) and to “do unto others as you would have them do to you” (Luke 6:31) out of the biblical context, and dare to use it as a means of “proof-texting” their position in opposition to gun-control. These central commands of Christ in the social arena was a rousing call that we actively seek to ease the suffering of others; to go above and beyond in our love for others. Jesus was rephrasing the Law of Moses which says, “Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I AM the LORD.” (Leviticus 19:18) But Christ changed the context of the command. In Leviticus, it is more of a “negative” command … telling us what not to do. In Leviticus, “love your neighbor as yourself” is clearly given in the immediate context of refraining from actively harming someone — “do not seek revenge.” Perhaps Christ saw this “negative” context as insufficient, so He gave it a new, “positive” context. In Luke 10:27-37, Jesus agrees with a man that the greatest command toward our neighbor is that we love him/her as ourselves. But then the man asks, “Who is my neighbor?” Jesus responds by telling the story of the “Good Samaritan.” In this story, a man goes out of his way to help a stranger who was robbed and beaten half to death. He spends a lot of time, effort, and even his money to make absolutely sure that the stranger will recover. He goes the extra mile. It is easy to see that Christ has far removed the command to “love your neighbor as yourself” from its original context of “do not take revenge.” He has given it the new context of “go out of your way to do everything in your power to ease the suffering of your fellow human being, even if that human being is a total stranger.” The way that Christ shifted the context of the command to “love your neighbor” should further reinforce our interpretation of the “do unto others” Bible verse as emphasizing proactive action on behalf of others.