



BULLETIN of THE NORTH TEXAS CHURCH OF FREETHOUGHT

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MASS MURDERS AND GUNS

The mass shooting at a school in Florida this past February 14th has again brought the controversy over "gun control" and "gun rights" into prominence. The terms must be set off in quotes as just what they mean is itself controversial. Freethinkers can and do disagree on this subject as there is no "right" opinion. This is because there is considerable subjectivity in considering how facts and reason relate to the need for political institutions and public policy to protect "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." Rugged individualism including carrying a firearm clearly suits some but just as clearly is not for everyone. Perhaps what is most distressing is the inability of so many on all sides of the issue to understand other points of view and to see their own views as anything other than the one certainty. Opinions about the Second Amendment and its relation to violent crime are a lot like theological doctrines in that way.

There ought to be less controversy about those who commit atrocities. Those who commit violent crimes are seldom ordinary people who "snap." Crimes that are out of character for the perpetrators are rare. And even those that may seem out of character often turn out not to have been so when looked at more closely. Perpetrators of mass shootings have all been individuals that were recognized as being "weird," "loners," had trouble relating to and getting along with others and who exhibited many habitual antisocial behaviors. Many were fascinated by weapons, death, violence and mayhem. Some expressed hatred of various social subgroups or a wish for others they knew to die. Others expressed admiration for mass shooters or boasted that they planned to commit such crimes. In the case of the Florida shooter, others were aware of such behaviors that were also exhibited on social media to the point where numerous tips were com-

municated to the Broward County Sheriff's Office going back to 2016. The FBI received similar information in September of 2017 and again in January of 2018. Neither of these law enforcement agencies took any action. One wonders how many other such missed opportunities that did not result in deaths and injuries on the scale of the Florida incident but which, in the aggregate, nationwide, may well have exceeded the Florida death toll, could have been avoided.

Part of the problem seems to be a mindset on the part of law enforcement that until and unless there are actual injuries of some kind that they cannot take any action. In five states now, this is not the case. Connecticut was the first to pass, in 1999, a "red flag law" allowing police to temporarily confiscate guns from those considered by a judge to pose a threat to themselves or others. Similar laws are now in force in California, Washington, Oregon, and Indiana. Texas currently allows weapons to be taken away from mentally ill people who are deemed dangerous. But the "red flag laws" do not require that a medical diagnosis be made, only that the person's behavior is threatening. An article in *The New York Times* this past February 23rd described cases under "red flag laws" in which guns were taken away from a distraught man who said that he would kill himself, his wife and their child if they left him, from an ex-Marine who expressed his unfounded fears that others wished to harm him, from an intoxicated man who discharged his weapon in his backyard, and from people suffering from dementia, alcoholism or accused of domestic abuse.

Even in Connecticut the 1999 law was slow to be used. Perhaps the reluctance to pass such laws, or to use them when they are in force, reflects a cultural reluctance to take action against those

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who are "only" threatening. We are reluctant - and should be reluctant! - to demonize people for simply being eccentric or expressing offensive ideas. Americans are people who believe in giving everyone the benefit of a doubt and in second chances. Unfortunately, many also believe in harsh punishment for some criminals, which works against the idea of "red flag laws" which is simply to help keep everyone safe. Yet surely confiscating guns from those who pose a threat is better than confiscating the guns of everyone who has them, especially when the latter is impractical or politically impossible. It is simpler and more direct, as with background checks for the purchase of firearms, to determine who should not have guns as a consequence of their own behavior than to try to determine who can be safely allowed to have guns.

What may seem more controversial but ought to be less so is the idea that we should begin to make efforts to identify those who are at risk of future violent criminality as early in childhood as possible. As with identifying children with visual and hearing impairments who can be helped, children with cognitive and social interaction impairments may be helped, not only to reduce their risk of behavior problems, but to improve their chances of living productive and satisfying lives. And if we truly believe that violent criminals think and behave as they do because of what is going on in their brains rather than because they choose to do evil - who in their right mind would do that?! - then it makes sense to try to understand it psychologically/neurologically. We should work to discover what it may look like in its earliest stages and, especially, what interventions may reduce the risk of its developing into its full-blown form regardless of how much is from "nature" and/or "nurture." In addition, issues of civil rights violations are less troubling when it comes to the state's interest in the well-being of children. Nothing could be more loving than doing whatever may be possible to avert the misery and suffering connected with violent crime, both of victims and perpetrators. What is not loving is idly watching children grow into dysfunctional adults and then demonizing and punishing them when they hurt others. Regardless of the Second Amendment's ultimate fate, we need to get serious about the roots of violent crime and addressing its greater costs.

Further reading: *The Criminal Personality: A Profile for Change* 2000 by Samuel Yochelson and Stanton Samenow (see also youtube video lectures by Stanton Samenow)

All NTCOF events can be found through our website calendar, or our meetup page, from which you can RSVP, at: - www.meetup.com/church-of-freethought - JOIN THE NTCOF MEETUP GROUP !!!

Social Luncheon: Today, immediately after our Service, join us for lunch and discussion at the Jason's Deli on MacArthur Blvd just south of 635, at 7707 N MacArthur Blvd, phone (972) 432-0555.

Freethought Salon: Discuss today's service topic or other conundrums of interest. It happens most non-first Sundays of the month, over breakfast, at the Hilton DFW Lakes Hotel restaurant "The Vineyard" - inside the hotel - in Grapevine beginning 10:30 AM.

Game Night: Nearly every Friday night at the IHOP on 2310 Stemmons Trail (I-35), near Northwest Highway (Loop 12). Plan to arrive at about 7:30 PM, and stay late playing Le Havre, Carcassonne, and other fun games!

Have Another Idea? Email or call! Read bulletins & presentations and post on the FORUM at www.churchoffreethought.org LIKE US at www.facebook.com/northtexaschurchoffreethought/ and sign up for our Twitter feed at twitter.com/ntcof !

PLANNED FOR NEXT MONTH:

"JUST KIDDING!"

> Sunday, April 1, 2018 <

COMFORT INN DFW AIRPORT NORTH

(Take the Freeport Parkway exit, then the frontage road east just past the Best Western; service starts at 10:30 but come early for coffee and snacks - you can bring some! - and conversation)

THANK YOU !!

FOR YOUR GENEROUS DONATION OF TIME & FINANCIAL SUPPORT to the NTCOF !! It is needed, appreciated and Tax-Deductible !

The North Texas Church of Freethought The Fellowship of Unbelievers

Pastor (It's a job description, not a title!) Tim Gorski
Presenters (how about YOU?)

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