

*Sunday December 23, 2012*

## **An open letter to all Americans**

By Jim Taylor

The Sandy Hook shooting should not have surprised anyone. Theyre simply the most recent in a series of multiple murders. Since 1966, when Charles Whitman climbed into a tower on the University of Texas campus in Austin and started picking off random victims, the pattern has been depressingly familiar. The list of massacres rolls off the tongue like a litany: Columbine, Aurora, Virginia Tech, Tucson, Fort Hood, Nickel Mines, Oak Ridge, Sandy Hook...

Has no one set it to music yet?

It's always the same; go to a place where people gather, where they think they're safe – a school, a theatre, a place of worship, a shopping mall -- and mow them down.

You call America “the land of the free, and the home of the brave.” Nonsense. Only the cowardly hide behind high-powered rifles, pumping bullets into helpless children. And where's the freedom when elementary schools and hospitals have to practice lockdown procedures?

John Cory writes, “The unthinkable has become a normal occurrence for which we have to train our children and grandchildren...”

You let this happen. Because you were afraid of standing up to idiots who believe bullets work better than brains. For the sake of avoiding conflict, you didn't confront neighbours, gun store owners, and politicians who grovel at the altar of the National Rifle Association.

### **The most dangerous organization**

Tell me, how many Americans have been killed by socialist conspiracies or communist cells? You don't know, do you? Nor do I. But I know it isn't 87 a day. That's how many die by getting shot. Over 30,000 unnecessary deaths a year.

And the NRA defends this record. America already has one gun for every adult. Yet the NRA claims that increasing the number of guns will make Americans safer – they'll be able to defend themselves.

You moderates, who haven't sold your souls to the NRA, who occupy the vast middle ground of sensible people, you let this happen. Yes, you.

I submit that the National Rifle Association is the most dangerous organization in your country. It has 4.3 million members. That's barely one per cent of your adult population. But you let them lead your country's legislators around by the noses. Or perhaps by their wallets -- \$17 million of political payoffs last year alone.

And you let them use their favorite weapon – the Second Amendment. Without that clause about “the right of the people to keep and bear arms,” the NRA would be shooting blanks. They would have to defend the right of deranged gun owners to slaughter innocent children. Instead, they can take the moral high ground, defending “constitutional rights.”

In all the rhetoric pumped out since the Sandy Hook tragedy, I have not heard one commentator – not even professional iconoclast Michael Moore – suggest that the Second Amendment should be scrapped.

Why not? If Amendments can be added, they can be removed.

## Treason, not reason

The Second Amendment made sense when the States – all thirteen of them – feared seizure by European empires. The fledgling country needed an armed (and regulated) militia that could be called up instantly.

Does anyone seriously believe that James Madison intended to defend Adam Lanza's right to fire hundreds of rounds into huddled six- and seven-year-old schoolchildren?

Far from providing security against external invaders, the NRA has turned the Second Amendment into the right to take up arms against America's own government. The Constitution defines that as treason, not reason

Here's William Rivers Pitt, writing for Truthout, "You're going to defend yourself against a government that has nuclear weapons, stealth bombers, drones, SEALs and the United States Marine Corps with your piddly-ass AR-15? Good luck..."

## Bullets and Bibles

I don't like guns, but I cannot condemn them totally. As long as criminals carry guns, police will need them too. Park rangers may need guns to defend themselves against attacks by bears or enraged moose.

But no one needs an AK-47 to bring down a deer. Or a Bushmaster with a 100-round clip to chase off burglars. Or a 9mm Glock to blast marauding squirrels off the bird feeder.

I'm moved by the heroism of Sandy Hook teachers and administrators who put their own lives on the line to protect their students. But the effort to prevent Adam Lanza's killing spree should have started long before he shot his way into the school.

An unholy alliance of literalist Christians and libertarians have wrapped bullets and the Bible in the American flag and called it patriotism. And you let them get away with it. You failed to challenge them to live the faith they claim to have received from Jesus – to turn the other cheek, to go the second mile, to love rather than hate....

Instead of risking your own lives for what you believed in, you risked your children's lives.

You should be ashamed of yourselves.

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## YOUR TURN

The news fascination with Kate Middleton's morning sickness, the Australian DJs, and the consequences of their prank phone calls seems to have mercifully faded away. But you had some interesting comments to contribute as a follow-up to last week's column.

For example, John Willems wrote, "When my daughter was a little girl, I thought I might have an talk with her about how to live in a complex world. I asked her, how she knew the difference between right and wrong. 'Oh Daddy,' she said, 'that's easy, I do whatever I like and if I get disciplined for it, I know it's wrong.'"

"Fortunately for everyone, she grew up. Unfortunately for everyone, some never do. If you think that as a journalist you operated in an environment as unstable as a bowl of Jello, try being a Pastor!"

Wayne Irwin enjoyed that "bowl of Jello" metaphor. "I appreciate your comments, but, I particularly love your similes:

'accepting garbage as if it were gold',

'as unstable as a bowl of Jello'

‘like painting lines on a lake’.  
They make reading your material an experience ‘as smooth as swallowing yogourt’.”

More seriously, Ted Spenser picked on media practices: “If these folk are complicit in the nurse's death, so too are their customers (listeners) and their bosses who, clearly, hired them specifically to exercise this very sort of crap journalism. Spin across the dial on any morning, and you'll hear folks doing the most egregiously empty-headed radio twaddle, and piles of folk are obviously listening in, or it wouldn't be there.

“Perhaps it's time for all of us to realize that radio and TV broadcasters -- with a very few, very notable exceptions -- exist solely to provide suitably primed consumers to their advertisers. Any listener to such goings-on is a willing participant in the swindle, and at least partly responsible for the outcome.”

Steve Roney wrote, “I think you overlook an important distinction. It is not just a question of whether journalists are overly diligent or lazy. It is also a question of what is and is not legitimate news.

“The extent of the Duchess of Cambridge's morning sickness is not news. Neither were the intimate liaisons of the former Princess of Wales. These are matters all of us should have the right to keep private, and the appropriate behaviour of journalists is indeed to read the press releases, no more. They ought to be vulnerable to prosecution for reporting this stuff. Reporting on ‘climate change, abortion, monetary policy, unions, euthanasia’ is a very different matter, and involves a public right and need to know.

“This being so, I take a far dimmer view of the Australian disk jockeys than you do. I don't think they should lose their jobs for this, because that would be scapegoating; other journalists are commonly just as bad. But laws should be passed with punishments for this sort of thing in the future.”

Laurina Tallman had some thoughts about the mental state of the woman who apparently committed suicide: “What about a woman in a responsible position (nurse) whose sense of responsibility is so warped she would commit suicide over an issue that should have been laughed off? The sacrosanct attitude to the royal family does not prevail in England, let alone across the Commonwealth. The Queen has been known to take a joke or three in regard to her own prestigious social position. [So] the journalists can hardly be faulted. The woman who took their call and/or those around her who exacerbated her inappropriate sense of humiliation are the ones who should be analyzed for their twisted values. A loss of the sense of humour is one of the symptoms of mental illness....”

Janie Wallbrown had similar thoughts: “I cannot believe that a prank call caused the nurse to commit suicide especially when she had two children. I'm surprised that journalists haven't dug into to find out the truth of it but I suppose that wouldn't have made as interesting a story.”

One letter writer to the local newspaper hypothesized that this might have been an “honor suicide”. Her name, Jacintha Saldanha, suggests an Indian or Pakistani origin. If her family felt that she had brought dishonor on their good name by passing along the Australian call, she might well have come under considerable pressure to make amends by killing herself.

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## **HYMNSIGHT**

My friend Ralph Milton, who published his Rumors newsletter for many years, has something special for you. It's called HYMNSIGHT, and it's for any church that currently projects the words of hymns and prayers, or plans to.

Ralph writes, Since retiring, I have rediscovered my old love of photography, and found creative use for my pictures in the life of First United where Bev and I worship. Our entire liturgy is projected, so that people read responses and sing hymns from screens. I use my photos to add color, vitality and depth to all the hymns and most of the liturgy.

In the course of this, I have developed slide sets to go with 600 hymns, plus about two thousand slides, in both the standard screen and the newer wide screen shape. You can use all of them, in any way you wish, without permission, and absolutely free, as long as it's non-profit and church related.

All you need to access the website is go to: <http://www.hymnsight.ca>

In addition to all that visual material, there's a comprehensive "how-to" manual for using projected visuals in church.

HymnSight provides a set of suggested visuals to go with each hymn, but the words to the hymn are not there, mainly for copyright considerations.

Please take a look at this service. If you think it's worthwhile, please let some of your colleagues in ministry know about it. And if you know of a website that could benefit from a link to HymnSight, why not add it?

Blessings,

Ralph Milton

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#### TECHNICAL STUFF

This column comes to you using the electronic facilities of Woodlakebooks.com.

If you want to comment on something, send a message directly to me, at [jimt@quixotic.ca](mailto:jimt@quixotic.ca).

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You can access several years of archived columns at <http://edges.Canadahomepage.net>.

I write a second column each Wednesday, called Soft Edges, which deals somewhat more gently with issues of life and faith. To sign up for Soft Edges, write to me directly, at the address above, or send a note to [softedges-subscribe@quixotic.ca](mailto:softedges-subscribe@quixotic.ca)

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#### PROMOTION STUFF...

If you know someone else who might like to receive this column regularly via e-mail, send a request to [jimt@quixotic.ca](mailto:jimt@quixotic.ca). Or, if you wish, forward them a copy of this column. But please put your name on it, so they don't think I'm sending out spam.

For other sources worth pursuing, try

- David Keating's "SeemslikeGod" page, [www.seemslikegod.org](http://www.seemslikegod.org);
- Alan Reynold's weekly musings, punningly titled "Reynolds Rap" -- [reynoldsrap@shaw.ca](mailto:reynoldsrap@shaw.ca)
- Isobel Gibson's thoughtful and well-written blog, [isabel@traditionaliconoclast.com](mailto:isabel@traditionaliconoclast.com)
- Wayne Irwin's "Churchweb Canada," an inexpensive service for any congregation wanting to develop a web presence, with free consultation. <http://www.churchwebcanada.ca>
- Alva Wood's satiric stories about incompetent bureaucrats and prejudiced attitudes in a small town are not particularly religious, but they are fun; write [alvawood@gmail.com](mailto:alvawood@gmail.com) to get onto her mailing list.

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