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## Ending School Violence – There is One Answer

The horrific shootings of 20 students and 6 school staff at the Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown Connecticut a few weeks before Christmas left America in shocked grief. This incident is one more in what are becoming an all too frequent string of incidents of deranged, evil murderers striking out against unprotected defenseless people. This time the victims were first grade students but a few months' earlier a dozen theatre goers in Aurora, Colorado were slaughtered by another psychopath, and we can all site other incidents going back to the infamous Columbine shootings that shattered our conscience over a decade ago. These senseless evil acts seem to be spreading.

The political response to the Newtown tragedy has been pointed, energetic and largely off base. The debate in Congress has focused on three possible responses: 1) ban weapons, 2) increase funding for mental health and 3) provide armed guards for schools. The supporters of each of these solutions are certainly sincere and should be commended for grasping for solutions. But they have missed the point that the heart of the matter is the heart of man. Theologian RC Sproul drove this point home in a blog posting, "Reflections on Newtown: In Adam All Sin," saying, "Everyone is looking for systemic sources and institutional solutions, because we don't know who we are. We want to blame guns, drugs, video games, anything but the real cause—our darkened and evil hearts." Sproul was also right on the mark when he offered the only real solution, "The answer is Jesus. We need Him not just so little children won't be murdered, but so that we won't be murderers of little children. In Adam, we are all murderers. In the Second Adam, we are made alive."

So is there nothing policy makers can do? There is no simple policy solution but last month the Heritage Foundation issued a helpful report that shed some important light. "The Newtown Tragedy: Complex Causes Require Thoughtful Analysis and Responses" by John Malcolm and Jennifer A. Marshall does discuss the second amendment right to bear arms, school safety solutions and mental health issues but also speaks to the real cause of the problem stating, "Strong religious belief and involvement can likewise shape the emotions and actions of individuals." The report cites research that faith does make a difference in reducing factors associated with anti-social behavior and carries this finding to the logical conclusion that policy should, "reinforce the rationale for America's constitutional protection of religious liberty and heritage of limited government that leaves wide space for religious and other civil society institutions. Policy should not erode these important freedoms."

Christian public school teachers know that they should not use their position as teachers to evangelize children. However school districts, out of fear of law suits, often also discourage appropriate exercise of religious freedom by students and school employees. A student evangelizing other students is behavior that is protected under the Constitution. It is also permissible under the Constitution for teachers to sponsor before and after school Bible clubs; and teachers may respond freely and truthfully to student questions about their faith. Such activism by Christian students and teachers is a much needed balm for our ailing culture.

Of course we need not worry about the Lord being hampered in carrying out the work of salvation. Even if Christian testimony is squelched by Federal guidelines or school policies, the saving work of Christ will not be stifled. We should not forget that one of the legitimate functions of government is to restrain evil (Psalm 82:2-4) and we should support measures that do this. However when policy makers want to know what can be done to really change the hearts of those who commit heinous murders, we should respond with the truth. There really is only one way to change man's heart, and that is by turning to the one who said, *"If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'"* ( John 7:37-38)

If you have thoughts or comments on this issue or other federal education issues please share them with us. You can address your thoughts and comments to JMitchell@ceai.org.

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