

Editorial

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On Friday December 14, I was uncharacteristically at home at midday and turned on the television to be greeted by the initial shocking news of the massacre of school children and teachers at the Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut. I was appalled and then became transfixed as the news expanded with more and more gruesome details of the shooting and its traumatic aftermath became available. I remained glued to the television and to other news outlets as the weekend progressed right up and through President Obama's address to the families and the nation on Sunday evening.

I suspect that my reactions to this event were not different from those of others. I have spent a significant portion of my professional career in the ordained ministry in the field of professional pastoral care in hospitals and am thus well acquainted with the range of responses to death and loss. Prominent among these was being present in New York at the time of 9/11. I learned through hard experience how important it is at these moments to remain aware of one's own thoughts and memories. I thought of members of my own family who had spent years in public education and how in the present era they might find themselves in the line of fire and how repulsed they would be at the suggestion that schools and school teachers need guns on sight to protect them. I also found myself remembering something that had been carefully tucked away in repression for many years. It was an event that took place early on in my ordained life when I was parish minister in Brooklyn, New York. At that time, I conducted the funeral for a 15-year-old African-American young man who had been killed when he was at the site of a drug deal gone wrong. I recall staring for a moment into the coffin before it was closed for the service and wondering to myself about whether this was an event signaling the years ahead and was if I up to it. In my brief homily, I did not offer simple, cheap answers to the "why did it happen" question because I knew both intellectually and intuitively that religious bromides and clichés, no matter how well meaning, are not much help at this point. Comfort, ritual, community and touch are the most immediate and best resources to rely at such moments. This lesson about

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helping others facing gun violence and senseless killing was one I saw enacted again and again in the aftermath of the Newtown shootings.

I am in a different position now than the one I found myself in at the time of the funeral for that young man. I have been graced with life, health, family and a career that has grown in its challenges and rewards with each succeeding decade. That richness includes at present the Editorship of this *Journal*. From this position, I have come to think that this publication can be a place where persons of differing backgrounds might offer spiritual perspectives on gun violence and its impact upon children in the forms of philosophical reflection, meditation, psychological theory, and quantitative and qualitative analysis. All of these venues are appropriate places where thoughtful and passionate voices can be raised to provide meaning and knowledge for the way forward.

Our readership, Editorial Board and contributors are well equipped to render this service. My thought is that in the next year and beyond, we at the *Journal* pay particular attention to matters related to gun violence and gun violence and children. While I may very well solicit articles for this purpose I want to make certain that we keep the opportunity open to all. I am not planning for a special issue but rather want to give precedence for articles on guns and gun violence in each issue along with our regular broad range of contributions. I also want to encourage our international contingent, contributors and readers alike, to spread the word regarding potential submissions as we make this a work in progress. I am altogether aware of how crucial it is to include voices from outside the United States. We have a tendency to cultural myopia and shortsightedness. And we have not demonstrated a lot of suitable responses to these issues, if the last 30 years or so is any indication.

Robert Kennedy, himself a victim of gun violence, in the last year of his life made use of the following quotation from an essay by Albert Camus in *Resistance, Rebellion, and Death* where Camus addresses a group of French clerics with these words

Perhaps we cannot prevent this from being a world in which children are tortured. But we can reduce the number of tortured children. And if you believers don't help us, who in the world can help us do this?

(*Robert Kennedy: His Life*, Evan Thomas, Simon & Schuster, New York, 2000, p, 320)

Camus' and Kennedy's question remains vital for us at the *Journal* today: "If you ... don't help us, who in the world can help us do this?"