

Demonizing Adam or Mobilizing for Action?

By Rev. Charles Mock
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They call it the Black Swan Theory. According to Wikipedia “Black swan events were introduced by Nassim Nicholas Taleb in his 2004 book *Foiled by Randomness*, which concerned financial events. His 2007 book (revised and completed in 2010) *The Black Swan* extended the metaphor to events outside of financial markets.” Specifically, Taleb asserts in the *New York Times*:



"What we call here a Black Swan (and capitalize it) is an event with the following three attributes. First, it is an outlier, as it lies outside the realm of regular expectations, because nothing in the past can convincingly point to its possibility. Second, it carries an extreme 'impact'. Third, in spite of its outlier status, human nature makes us concoct explanations for its occurrence after the fact, making it explainable and predictable." [Source: *The Black Swan: The Impact of the Highly Improbable*, by Nassim Nicholas Taleb, April 22, 2007.]

According to this theory the shooting that took place at Sandy Hook Elementary School was one of the rare tragedies that simply cannot not be predicted and therefore, anticipated.



The shooter, Adam Lanza, 20 years of age, supposedly had mental health issues that were diagnosed and dealt with by medication along with his mother’s loving care to best of her ability. He was brilliant any yet suffered from Asperger Syndrome which some pediatricians say is related to Autism. According to Dr. Attwood, an Austrian pediatrician,

"... the person with Asperger’s Syndrome can have difficulty with the management and expression of emotions. Children and adults with Asperger’s syndrome may have levels of anxiety, sadness or anger that indicate a secondary mood disorder. There may also be problems expressing the degree of love and affection expected by others. Fortunately, we now have successful psychological treatment programs to help manage and express emotions." [See: <http://aspergersyndrome.org/Articles/What-is-Asperger-Syndrome.aspx>]

Comments like these of Dr. Attwood causes grief upon grief. It grieves me that Adam is being demonized by some as a perpetrator of evil. One radio commentary called him “a piece of garbage.” How does one hold a young man who kills his own loving mother, 26 innocent people and then himself as someone evil or his acts as evil? To label someone or something evil is a moral judgment that deserves condemnation on the part of the perpetrator. Evil acts imply control and freedom of choice. Evil acts are committed by evil people who in their *so-called* right mind, commit evil acts intentionally and pre-meditatively. The Shoe bomber was evil. Charles Manson was evil. Hitler was evil. Idi Amin was evil. Stalin was evil. We know why these aforementioned terrorists killed. They killed with their eyes wide open for reasons having to do with power, privilege and politics—but Adam Lanza? Adam Lanza should not be named on this list of evil men who have gone down in history as diabolical terrorists who deserved to be found guilty in the international court of justice for crimes against humanity.



An autopsy of Adam Lanza will not reveal hidden demons or a brain filled with calculated evil intent. An autopsy will not reveal to what extent his peers may have contributed to his tragic decision. Certain mystery will forever surround this case and no amount of informed intelligence or religious, mystical speculation will provide airtight or acceptable answers.

Adam, though allegedly suffering some form of autism, was described as brilliant. He was a loner. He was uncomfortable in social settings: This could perhaps be one reason his mother home schooled him.

I know it is early in this tragic event, the wounds fresh and deep and the pain sharper than ever. However, we must not allow Adam Lanza to become the escape goat for the sins of our nation in relation to gun control issues. The unrelenting toll of America's gun violence epidemic leaves 100,000 people injured or killed every year in communities nationwide. But while the number of people affected by this crisis is staggering – 86 people die by guns every single day. According to the FBI's background checks, 154,000 guns sold on black Friday alone. There are more gun selling stores than McDonalds. Herein lays a major part of the problem which we all know more than enough about to act in a more responsible way [see: <http://smartgunlaws.org/gun-laws-matter-2012-understanding-the-link-between-weak-laws-and-gun-violence/>].



Sally Cox's understandable and reasonable actions remind us ironically of our own unreasonable incomprehensible actions in the face of far too many massacres. Sally Cox, the Sandy Hooks Elementary School Nurse, according to a number of interviews stated she took cover under her desk "frozen in fear" as she beheld the legs and feet of Adam Lanza. She later found refuge in a supply closet where she remained for 4 hours. Swat team officers found her and told her to come out, and to close her eyes as she was led out the building pass the 26 dead bodies. We can understand her actions and fear but what about our own non-action in the face of fear?



We Americans should no longer be "frozen with fear" at the feet of the National Rifle Association. We can fight hard against the National Rifle Association in its resistance to commonsense gun control legislation. There is a way forward that protects the right to individual and family safety, as well as, honors hunting and other recreational usage of guns. There is a way forward without the right to own military style assault weapons that belong on battlefields, not in closets in houses.

President Obama stated in his address to the survivors, "Surely we can do better than this." What is the "better" we are challenged to do? We can come out of the closets of refuge we have been in far too long.

We must stop closing our eyes at the X-rated carnage of innocent children and adults victimized by deaths which by certain action on our part may be prevented or reduced.

We should stop doing things that shield us from the ultimate horrors of gun violence by way of Afghanistan-typed assault weapons.

We should push back against the inner voice that is telling us to just close our eyes, hold our breath and place our hands over our ears to keep from seeing, smelling and hearing the weeping voices of survivors?

We can do better in our peer to peer relations when it comes to persons that act differently than us.

We can protect against budget cutbacks from vital social and mental services that are desperately needed by many children to normalize their emotional, mental or behavioral states.

We can be more intentional as communities of faith about our religious curriculum. We can have conversations around on violence from such enlightening scriptures as Matthew 26:51-54 which records Jesus' arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane. Peter drew a sword (equivalent to the gun in our day) and cut off a soldier's ear. Jesus' response was, "Put up again thy sword into his place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword." Jesus went on to tell all within hearing distance that the use of sword is not an acceptable response in the fulfillment of the written Will of God.

We can connect and partner with experts in the behavioral and social science fields who can assist us in instruction that promotes respect for others and values their differences. Their expertise can shed light on how to relate to children diagnosed with various emotional or behavioral challenges.

As entire communities we can declaration against poverty. We can engage in a concerted effort to declare war on "violence" in its many manifestations, and replace it with acceptable forms of behavior that exalt dignity and respect for all people.

We can solicit the support of the Mayor and the County Executive as well as media in community conversations that lead to commitments toward an all-out war on senseless violence.

We can close the gun show loopholes that make it possible for the wrong people to easily purchase the wrong kinds of guns for the wrong reasons. We must make it unprofitable and painful for gun shops and gun show owners to continue business as usual. Plenty of widely supported policies can reduce gun violence, but, in many states, they aren't being adopted [see: http://smartgunlaws.org/gun-laws-matter-2012-understanding-the-link-between-weak-laws-and-gun-violence/#footnote_1_20960]. In fact, a number of states have chosen to pass measures that actually make it *more* difficult for law enforcement, doctors, and local officials to work to reduce gun deaths and injuries [see <http://smartgunlaws.org/gun-laws-matter-2012-understanding-the-link-between-weak-laws-and-gun-violence/>].

We must not permit axe-cutting state Senators and state Houses of Representatives and the federal government to cut funds that are needed for greater enforcement of the laws on the books dedicated to crime reduction and the prevention of tragic events through weapons of mass destruction.

It is up to us to assure that the 26 innocent children, teachers and other school officials that died in Sandy Hooks Elementary School, were "redemptive sacrifices," in other words life-producing. Most if not all religious traditions believe that out of death comes life under the right circumstances, ethical decisions and courageous action.



"What choice do we have?" President Obama asked. "Are we really prepared to say that we're powerless in the face of such carnage, that the politics are too hard?" No we aren't! The Second Amendment to the U.S. Constitution 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." A 2008 decision by the U.S. Supreme Court gives us reason to believe we are not powerless to change things. Four years ago, the U.S. Supreme Court singlehandedly inserted the judicial system into the ongoing national debate over gun laws in America. In a 5-4

decision in 2008's *District of Columbia v. Heller*, the Court invalidated the District of Columbia's handgun ban and firearm storage law, stating for the first time that the Second Amendment protects a responsible, law-abiding citizen's right to possess an operable handgun in the home for self-defense. *Heller* was unquestionably a radical decision, overturning the Court's previous ruling that the Second Amendment was tied to state militia service. For almost seventy years, lower federal and state courts nationwide had relied on that pronouncement to reject hundreds of Second Amendment challenges [see <http://smartgunlaws.org/second-amendment-basics/>].

So let us not demonize Adam or use him as our escape goat from present accountability and future responsibility. We must replace the demonization of the problem with the mobilization of commonsense solutions. We owe it to our children and other peoples' children that are still with us to love and hug into fruition their hopes and dreams.



President Obama with Children in Newtown, CT.