

► on faith

Can we carry a cross in one hand and a gun in the other?

By Marrton Dormish

Last week, a motorcycle backfired in New York City's Times Square, causing panicked passersby to run for cover. Only later did authorities confirm the distinct sound not to be a gunshot fired by an "active shooter." Recent mass shootings in El Paso, Texas; Dayton, Ohio; Gilroy, Calif., and Virginia Beach, Va., have reminded us that even municipal centers and garlic festivals and entertainment districts and Wal-Marts can become real-life shooting galleries. It's no wonder that, according to USA Today, Amnesty Interna-



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tional and the governments of Japan, Venezuela and Uruguay, have issued travel warnings for potential visitors to the United

States. new American revolution. Their book — *Beating Guns: Hope for People Who are Weary of Violence* — which I highly recommend, echoes the Hebrew prophet Isaiah, who pointed toward a time when "swords would be beaten into plowshares."

Clearly, we have a problem, and despite the obvious disconnects and divisions of our current U.S. political, social and religious life, we at least seem to agree on that point. As to our answers for why these shootings happen, who's most to blame for them, and what should be done to prevent them in the future, we clearly do not agree. (See the many threads in ALL CAPS on your favorite social media platform.)

On their March 2019 book tour stop at Trinity Lutheran Church in Fort Collins, Martin brought along an anvil and a volunteer blacksmith to chop up donated firearms for later conversion into garden tools. (I'm still waiting on mine).

For my part, I believe three past-present movements characterized by nonviolence offer a hopeful path forward for our shooting-fatigued psyches and communities.

This practical, grassroots solution to our national epidemic of violence calls us to trust Jesus' way of nonviolence and beloved community instead of what theologian Walter Wink called "the myth of redemptive violence." The stars of this myth are weapons of all kinds, but specifically in this context, guns. (See most of U.S. history, and many current TV crime-dramas, action movies and video games for examples).

The rabbi Jesus lived a few thousand years ago and taught his followers to "turn the other cheek" and to love their enemies. Then he disarmed the "powers that be" by refusing to answer violence with violence even to the point of his own death on an imperial cross.

"Can we carry a cross in one hand and a gun in the other? Can we love our enemies and simultaneously prepare to kill them?" Claiborne asks. "... the early Christians were unequivocally clear on this, that for Christ we can die but we cannot kill... Peace doesn't begin with the politicians and presidents and kings it begins with 'the people of God' as they begin to transform their weapons and hearts... [and to] repurpose the metal designed to kill into tools that can cultivate life."

Many centuries later, civil rights activists eschewed (and continue to eschew) violence as the answer to gross injustice and generations of legitimate grievance in this country.

Recently, Shane Claiborne, an evangelical from Tennessee, and Michael Martin, a Mennonite from Colorado Springs, have helped spark what I hope will become a

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