

Lessons from Dunblane; Letter to a Friend

We began our study of the “*Right to Bear Arms*” back on Thursday, January 23rd, with lesson CWL408. As an introduction I quoted from an e-mail sent to me by a friend in London who discussed the circumstances in England following the mass murder of schoolchildren in Dunblane, Scotland, March 13, 1996. The assailant was armed with two Browning 9-mm automatics and two .357 magnum revolvers.

Trevor indicated the general revulsion in England over this tragedy and the question of whether there should even be private ownership of weapons at all. He went on to describe action being considered in Parliament on the subject of handgun control. Subsequently, the British government voted to ban all handguns in Great Britain with the lone exception of .22s which were to be kept at authorized gun clubs.

Trevor then posed the question to me as to why England would see fit to ban all handguns while Americans fight tooth and nail to retain the right to own them. His query, plus an event which occurred along our trip down the Santa Fé Trail, inspired me to take up the “*right to keep and bear arms*,” as it is phrased in our Constitution's Second Amendment.

My mission was three-fold:

1. To analyze the original intent of our Founding Fathers for placing the right to keep and bear arms into the text of the Bill of Rights.
2. To determine if there is a biblical justification, in the form of a divine mandate, for the citizen to keep and bear arms. And, finally,
3. To try and determine if there is a logical rationale for keeping and bearing arms.

Our study has revealed that our Founders intended for the private citizen to own weapons and to retain the right to use them in defense against tyranny, external aggression, and the encroachments of the criminal element.

Other applications included the sports of hunting and target shooting and the hobby of gun collecting.

We learned from Scripture that self-defense is a moral obligation and civic duty to be accepted by the individual. He is not only to arm himself for the purpose of personal defense but also for the defense of his fellow citizens, his family, his wife, and his home.

We examined quite a number of passages to develop our conclusion that the right to keep and bear arms is a divine principle and therefore a natural birthright of the individual.

In our attempt to establish a logical justification for being armed, we emphasized the essay of Jeff Snyder entitled Gun Rights in which he sharpened the differences between the philosophy of “*preventing crime before it occurs*” and our constitutional right to be presumed innocent until our deeds convict us. In the former case, guilt must be presumed. In the latter, innocence is assumed.

Therefore, I believe that we have examined the issue of keeping and bearing arms from the three most important approaches: constitutionally, biblically, and logically. Having done so, we may conclude our study by discussing the anecdote which inspired Trevor's original missive and my prolonged response.

The catalyst for our exchange was the aftermath of the Dunblane massacre. In view of our studies, I believe, as a matter of historical, biblical, and logical fact, that the people of Great Britain have not only overreacted to the Dunblane affair but that the authorities who have chosen to abolish the freedoms of the law-abiding were negligent in the enforcement of laws which could have removed the assailant from society before his bloody rampage. And further, now that the matter is fatally “after the fact,” the process by which future incidences of this sort can be reduced to a minimum certainly does not include the control of weapons, much less their prohibition.

I will now present two articles on the Dunblane story, both of which are written by psychiatrists who specialize in the care, analysis, and treatment of the criminally deranged.

Daniels, Anthony. “A Case of Grievance.” *National Review*. 8 Apr. 1996, pp. 28-29.

Methvin, Eugene H. “The Paranoid Mind: Bloody Murderers.” *National Review*. 3 June 1996, pp. 40-43.

Both these doctors verify Mr. Snyder’s claim: society cannot prevent crime. It can only seek to control it through strict law enforcement with zero tolerance for capital offenses. This results in the people being presumed innocent as long as they are law-abiding resulting in an open and free society with the greatest possible security.

Efforts to prevent crime before it occurs presumes guilt and imposes totalitarian measures which limit freedom while providing no additional security to the people.

Our study, combined with these articles seem sufficient, I think, to answer Trevor’s questions about our countries’ differing views toward the subject of private gun ownership. I have been asked by some of you exactly what I wrote back to Trevor in response to his inquires. Here's the text of that reply, dated, Wednesday, October 16, 1996. I entitled it, “*And This is Just for Starters*”:

Dear Trevor:

O my! You have set the stage to challenge our friendship’s objectivity and the future tranquility of our new cyberspace connection. Your query on guns is of Gordian proportions and I must give some thought as to how I should reply.

I will be up front and tell you that I would be horrified to be without a weapon in my home. But the presence of my weapon is not nearly so important as the knowledge that I MAY have one if I want it. As long as the criminal elements in this country don’t know whether I do or not, I have some measure of safety. It’s a guessing game the criminal is not willing to play. Once he KNOWS that I don’t, then my household is at the mercy of the draw as to whether it is the next victim to be burgled or robbed or worse.

All of this requires analysis and justification which will follow later. It is my desire to show the logic for the view. Decisions must be made based on an analysis of the circumstances plus an objective understanding of the consequences of each choice available.

My decision to own a gun is not radical or emotional. The United States has come to the decision that it needs a well-armed and highly-trained military to protect its citizens from the adventures of predator nations. Its very existence has, for over 200 years, protected our shores from any invasion (save a brief encounter with the Crown in 1812). Likewise, the home. Knowledge that I MAY have a weapon with which to defend myself and my family offers the same kind of protection from the criminal.

The argument over hunters' rights is a distraction. Hunters use long guns and they are, by and large, unaffected by gun laws here. I've never been hunting in my life and if God continues to be gracious to me, I'll never have to go. The issue is not hunters' rights. The issue is, "Do I have a constitutional right to arm myself for the protection of my life, family, freedom, and property from criminals?" The answer is yes. Amendment II of the Constitution guarantees me that right. I am opposed to any rationale that says because law enforcement and jurisprudence is unable to control the criminal elements in some areas of the country that I should be made an easy target for them in mine.

I will elaborate on all these issues later. In the meantime, you'll have the opportunity to e-mail a desire that I keep my "right-wing" opinions to myself. I mean that jokingly, of course, but you are right when you say that even though we both emerged from the same Anglo-Saxon culture, we do have differing views on certain volatile issues of the day. A hint: yes, but we do not disagree as much as you might think. The problem we have in this country is not as issue in England. You have one culture and it is a millennium old. As the dominance of our inherited Anglo-Saxon culture has been diminished by the onslaught of multiculturalism, we have become Balkanized and it shows. The major problems we face today involve culture clash. Once all this reaches critical point I do not want to be unarmed. While you're putting all this in your pipe to smoke, I'll be preparing a more detailed defense of my views.

That detailed defense has been the subject of our attention over the past 20-plus lessons. I shall forward to Trevor the essay by Jeff Snyder and mention our study here at Grace Doctrine. If he should inquire about more details, I'll e-mail him the church's Media Ministries address.

Just this past weekend I ran across two articles. The first presents an analysis of the right to bear arms which is amazingly parallel to our now completed study. The second addresses the difference between passive and aggressive civil disobedience. I'll put an exclamation point to the subject by quoting excerpts from each.