

Editorial: Contempt: Stop violence against others where it starts

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In the wake of mass shootings in Atlanta, Ga., and Boulder, Colo., renewed calls for gun control are echoing again.

It's easy to understand why many are calling for gun control when, as *Texas Tribune* Executive Editor [Ross Ramsey points out](#), "In 2019 and 2020, 110 people were killed in mass [shootings in Texas](#) and another 266 were injured." Questioning priorities of the 87th Texas Legislature, Ramsey compares those numbers to "two substantiated cases of [election fraud in Texas](#) during those two years."

Given these and other statistics, Ramsey questions the priority placed on securing elections over securing electors. He does note the 87th Texas Legislature is considering numerous bills related to guns. So, it's not as if guns are being ignored, though a bill to create "an annual sales tax holiday for gun sales" may not be the kind of attention some would want guns to get.

Gun control may reduce gun violence, but it won't solve the problem. Only part of the problem is the ability to own weapons that can kill a large number of people quickly. Every assault rifle could be swept up and destroyed, and deadly violence would continue.

The real problem is contempt—considering a person beneath ourselves. A little contempt goes a long way, and always in the wrong direction.

We aren't likely to agree on gun control. We can agree, however, that

despising another human being is at the root of violence against others.

Contempt corrupts early

Contempt is like a drop of food coloring. Just a little drop affects the whole batch. The more drops added, the more drastic the affect. And try removing it. Good luck.

Contempt begins its steady drips into our lives when we are young. As we learn to walk and talk, we learn—as if by osmosis—what to think about and how to treat people who don't look like us, talk like us, eat like us, value like us.

We learn who the “idiots” are as we ride in the car with parents or other adults. We learn almost our first time on the playground which kids we can't play with and why, and it's not always adults doing the teaching.

This early education comes at us from every direction, shaping how we see the world and the people in it. It is like a steady drip of stain that mixes with hurt, disappointment, fear, jealousy, anger and so much else in life. The stain of contempt is seen in the names we call people, the stereotypes we perpetuate, the jokes we tell about others, the people we won't let our children date.

And when enough disdain for people collects in a person, when it is harbored and nurtured, it all too easily can erupt in violence.

Contempt corrupts completely

Contempt doesn't affect only single individuals; it affects whole groups of people—neighborhoods, communities, nations, ethnicities, races. And it doesn't stay confined to physical characteristics. We turn up our nose in disgust at even the thought of those who differ from us intellectually,

politically, financially, religiously and other ways.

Contempt also isn't turned only outward; contempt can be turned inward. While contempt usually leads us to look down on others, contempt turned inward leads some to look down on themselves. Here again, contempt is like drops of food coloring, affecting everything it touches.

Contempt recasts human beings—created in and bearing God's image—into caricatures. Caricatures, by their nature, can't be fully human, but only partial, less than human. They're easier to deal with—box in or out—than real people.

Once we caricature a person or a people, we assign thoughts and motives to explain why they are wrong and we are right, why we deserve more and they deserve less.

Caricatures become scapegoats on which we place blame and mete out punishment.

Until we come to terms with the contempt we harbor against others, trying to curb violence with gun laws and regulations will have limited effect. Sure, fewer mass shootings may occur with fewer assault rifles in circulation, but when we despise others, we don't need guns to hurt them.

Contempt is conquerable

Jesus tells us what we already know: "You've heard, 'You shall not murder,' but I tell you if you hold anger in your heart toward a sister or brother, you're just as guilty." He went on to say, "If you consider your brother or sister a good-for-nothing or a fool, you're in danger of hell" (Matthew 5:21-22, paraphrase).

Elsewhere, he tells us the words from our mouths spring from the substance of our hearts (Luke 6:45). The same surely is true for the actions

of our hands, as with Cain, whose angry countenance after God favored his brother over him evidenced sin crouching at Cain's door (Genesis 4:7). "It desires to have you, but you must rule over it," God said to him. Alas, Cain gave in and killed his brother.

Contempt is the rot inside us that led Cain to kill Abel, Sarah to torment Hagar, Jacob to cheat Esau, Judas to betray Jesus, Ananias and Sapphira to lie to God, and so on.

The antidote is as Jesus demonstrated and Paul echoed: "Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility consider one another as more important than yourselves," looking out for others interests just as you look out for your own (Philippians 2:3-4).

To defeat contempt and the violence it breeds, we must teach our children to do likewise. We must harbor and nurture the sacredness of each life, holding it as equally valuable to our own.

Legislation and regulation might help reduce some violence, but to stop it, we need what no law can do. We need to surrender our disdain for others and be transformed to see people as Jesus does.

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