

Chaplain's Bulletin August 24, 2025



Thoughts for a More Peaceful, Less Violent World

I do not think we can get there by passing laws or instituting government programs. I think there is better hope through building virtue and changing culture. Culture makes a big difference in how people behave, and we naturally pick up behaviors and attitudes from the people around us. Some cultures emphasize cleanliness, and others throw garbage in the streets. Some cultures embody great emotional expressiveness, while others are very reserved (when those people come together it can get awkward). I think the growth in violence in our society is not because guns have been suddenly introduced, but because the culture has shifted, and encourages attitudes and behaviors that feed a violent society.

I think a great deal of the problem is our culture does not do a good enough job nurturing peaceful people. If we build certain kinds of habits, and encourage each other in these habits, I think that can make a more profound difference, and there are things we can all do to help shift things. We can strive to grow in these virtues ourselves and encourage and support others in doing so as well. We can elevate celebrities that embody these virtues and chose to give no attention to those who undermine them.

So what are these virtues? I think there needs to be a lot of conversations about that, but I have some initial offerings.

Boundaries, principles, and virtues: There is right and there is wrong, and it is bigger than we are. The goodness of our cause does not eliminate but increases our responsibility for staying in bounds. We need an objective sense of right and wrong and need the same standards to hold for ourselves and our opponents. We need to send clear, consistent messages that we value and admire growing in virtue more than following desire. It is essential and more effective that we put more effort in holding ourselves accountable and calling out our allies more than calling out our opponents. I recommend C.S. Lewis' "The Abolition of Man." "Eighty years ago he warned about a society in which "we laugh at honor and are shocked to find traitors in our midst. William Kilpatrick's "Why Johnny Can't Tell Right from Wrong" talks about the importance of teaching clear right and wrong to children and explains the power of stories to shape our moral imaginations.

Connections: Family, friends, Church or civic organizations that encourage personal virtue and diversity of thought. How can we strengthen these precious institutions? I recommend David Brooks' "How to Know a Person." The more we see each other as connected to us, the harder to decide to commit violence against them. This is connected to:

Growing in empathy: Not allow our anger or disagreement to make us objectify others. Working hard to see things from others' point of view. The tendency of sinful humans is to see others as objects, focusing only on how they affect us. Pornography is intense training in objectifying other people. See Fightthenewdrug.org. It would help to keep smart phones out of children's hands until they reach a certain age. I recommend Jonathan Haight's book "The Anxious Generation."

Support the vocation of family, the foundation of civilizing influences. Many have made a case that a case that the union of one man and one woman, joined for life, ordered toward generating and nurturing children is most effective, and a society that privileges and encourages such unions does better. Prioritize what makes the best environment for the children over what these two people want. I recommend "Getting the Marriage Conversation Right" by William B. May, "Defending Marriage" by Anthony Esolen, and "What is Marriage?" by Sherif Girgis et al. to reflect on what marriage is (a society that is not clear on what marriage is will be on shaky ground indeed). John G. Gottman's "Making Marriage Work" brings scientific data around practices that help couples to succeed.

More on this later.

Blessings,
Fr. Jim