

Gun madness

by [John Buchanan](#) in the [August 22, 2012](#) issue



Edward Hicks, *The Peaceable Kingdom*

A print of *The Peaceable Kingdom* hangs in many clergy offices. Painter Edward Hicks, a Quaker who lived from 1780 to 1849, loved the beautiful vision in Isaiah 11 of the wolf dwelling with the lamb, the leopard lying down with the kid, the calf and lion and fatling together with a little child leading them. The painting pricks my conscience every time I see it because of the enormous gap between its lovely vision of a peaceable kingdom and the reality of our world. In the world as we know it, as Woody Allen once quipped, when the lion and the lamb lie down together, only the lion is going to get back up.

In recent weeks Americans have contemplated yet another mass killing. James Holmes, a 24-year-old dropout from the University of Colorado Medical School, walked into a crowded movie theater in Colorado, opened fire with three weapons—one of them an assault-style rifle—and killed 12 people, wounding dozens more. This type of disaster happens with such regularity in our country that we have almost become accustomed to it. The unthinkable has become commonplace.

Gun control activists suggest that we need a national conversation about the fact that we have more firearms per capita and more firearm-related deaths than any other country. But they are a voice crying in the wilderness. Few leaders seem interested. President Obama and Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney expressed condolences for the families of the victims, but neither offered specific plans for controlling the plethora of guns among us—guns that are designed not for hunting and recreational target shooting, which I happen to enjoy, but for killing as

many people as possible quickly and efficiently.

We decided long ago that it was not in the interests of the community for someone to be able to drive 200 miles an hour on any street; that speed is restricted to the race track. Why doesn't that same logic apply to a military-style assault rifle? The statistics are appalling: 9,484 Americans died last year as a result of gun violence—many more if suicides by gun are counted. Last year's combined figure for England, Germany, Canada and Australia: 468 deaths from gun violence. As Roger Ebert noted in the *Chicago Sun Times*, there are surely as many mentally disturbed and potentially violent people in England, Germany, Canada and Australia as there are in the United States. The difference is that people in those countries can't get their hands on guns as easily, and assault weapons aren't sold over the counter.

Much of the responsibility for the unthinkable becoming commonplace belongs to the National Rifle Association, the most powerful political lobby in the nation. The NRA opposes any kind of gun control—any restriction on the type or number of weapons that can be purchased, nearly every effort at sensible registration, licensing and background checks, and any limits on the amount of ammunition an individual can purchase. The NRA has managed to convince millions of Americans that any restriction on gun ownership is the first step toward the abolition of private ownership. But we need to pursue gun control with the same diligence we demonstrated in establishing regulations for driving an automobile. There are reasonable, commonsense proposals to limit the purchase of firearms and ammunition. Let's talk about them.