

All the bad people

By [David Heim](#)

August 9, 2012

This *New York Times* [story](#) would make for a good spot quiz in a Lutheran confirmation class. Identify the theological problem in the following report:

In the wake of mass shootings in Colorado and Wisconsin and an uptick in gun violence in New York City, lawmakers are planning a new push in Albany to win approval of tighter gun laws in New York State.

One measure introduced last week would require background checks of anyone buying ammunition. Another, being drafted this week, would limit the purchase of firearms to one per person per month.

. . . . But Jacob J. Rieper, the vice president for legislative and political affairs of the New York State Rifle and Pistol Association, said lawmakers are trying to capitalize on the mass shootings to push their own agendas. . . “Since when has taking guns from decent people prevented bad people from committing crime?”

Confirmation students are likely to know that you can’t so easily separate the decent people from the bad people, for they look alarmingly alike. In fact, they turn out to be the same people. Or as the Lutherans like to teach: Christians are entirely sinners and entirely saints.

Get that straight and you begin to understand the human heart and how the world works. It explains why a struggling youth with a mental health problem is not a bad person, but he may be a murderer. And how you could be a saint in the eyes of God but still do some awfully bad things—especially if you have a gun in your hand.

Speaking of such catechetical basics, Nadia Bolz-Weber offered a lively first-person tutorial on Lutheran theology at the recent ELCA youth gathering, which you can watch [here](#).