

A different kind of power

by [John Buchanan](#) in the [July 22, 2015](#) issue



Emanuel AME Church, Charleston, South Carolina. [Some rights reserved](#) by [Cal Sr.](#)

The shooting of the innocent happens regularly in this country. But what happened at Charleston's Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church feels uniquely evil. Nine African Americans attending a Wednesday evening prayer meeting were systematically executed by a 20-year-old white man.

Why would anyone do such a thing? President Obama sounded weary and resigned as he reminded us, once again, that "every country has violent, hateful, or mentally unstable people," but only the United States allows easy access to guns. There have been 14 mass killings during his presidency, but President Obama's effort to galvanize public opinion after the Sandy Hook school killings in Newtown, Connecticut, produced nothing but a national yawn, and Senate efforts to come up

with meaningful gun controls produced absolutely nothing.

What is it about us that is causing the unthinkable to happen regularly? Why are so many white males so obsessed with guns and gun ownership that lawmakers are allowing them to buy, carry, and display firearms almost everywhere? Some suggest that in this time of economic turmoil, male self-esteem is the issue. Yet we survived the Great Depression and massive unemployment without anything like this kind of violence.

There are too many guns in our nation—300 million of them. This plethora of firearms, along with a latent racism brought to the surface by the election of a black president, and paranoia about governmental authority generate a lethal condition. The National Rifle Association exploits people's fears by translating the constitutional right to bear arms into a political defiance requiring heroic determination and commitment.

Ninety percent of the American people are in favor of gun control: thorough background checks, digital records that law enforcement agencies can share, prohibition of multiple gun purchases. Yet state legislatures are making it easier to acquire and carry a firearm. The Texas state legislature recently voted to allow open carry of firearms on college and university campuses—one of the worst ideas ever.

It is time for a renaissance of common sense and political courage. Senators, congressional representatives, and state legislators must somehow summon the courage and political will to defy the power of the gun lobby and respond to their constituents who want meaningful gun control.

In the meantime we are blessed by the Christian witness of the nine Charleston martyrs and a Christian community that is teaching the power, not of guns, but of vulnerable love. Pat Buchanan has suggested that the tragedy would have been averted if Pastor Clementa Pinckney had been carrying a gun and had shot the killer. The victims' families and the people of Mother Emmanuel are showing us a different kind of power—the power of forgiveness and love, which is to say the power of the cross.