

## GUN CULTURES AND GUN VIOLENCE – INTEREST GROUP

Convener: SimonMary Asele Ahiokhai, University of Portland  
 Michael R. Grigoni, Wake Forest University  
 Moderator: SimonMary Asele Ahiokhai, University of Portland  
 Presenters: Michael R. Grigoni, Wake Forest University  
 Luis Vera, Mount St. Mary's University  
 Anna Floerke Scheid, Duquesne University

The first session of the three-year Gun Cultures and Gun Violence Interest Group focused on the following questions: How do we make sense of gun cultures in the United States? What role has Christianity played in forming and sustaining such cultures? How do gun cultures relate to gun violence? What is the impact of gun cultures and gun violence on our political life? What vision of the human do gun cultures and gun violence produce in our society? In exploring these questions, this year's papers addressed the cultural conditions that sustain, and the social consequences that emerge from, gun prevalence and gun violence in the United States, laying the groundwork for discussion in the second and third years of the Interest Group.

Michael Grigoni's paper, "American Gun Cultures as Signs of the Times: Historical and Sociological Perspectives," opened by arguing that Catholic theological treatment of guns in the United States cannot proceed in abstraction from the historical and sociological dynamics that characterize this issue. He provided an overview of gun-related statistics, with special attention to how rates of gun ownership and firearm-caused death increased during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, and how the vast presence of guns negatively impacts social and political life in the United States. Guns are certainly among the signs of the times, he argued, but to "scrutinize and interpret them in light of the Gospel" (*Gaudium et Spes* 4), we must see them not simply as practical tools but as cultural objects resonant with meaning for those that use them.

Grigoni elaborated further by presenting David Yamane's typology of American gun cultures, distinguishing between Gun Culture 1.0 which centers long guns for hunting and recreation and Gun Culture 2.0 which centers handguns for armed self-defense. This latter expression of American gun culture has become dominant from the late twentieth century onward in the United States. Grigoni continued by reviewing ethnographic accounts of Gun Culture 2.0, drawing from the work of Harel Shapira, Jennifer Carlson, and his own research with evangelical Christian handgun owners for whom handgun ownership is understood to be consistent with Christian discipleship. He concluded by inviting us, as we begin a three-year deliberation on this issue, to center the truisms that guns are always situated within particular forms of life; that guns are cultural objects pregnant with significance and meaning for their users; and that our responses to this issue must attend to matters of context in dialogue with literatures bringing such dimensions of American gun cultures to light.

Luis Vera, who was scheduled to present a paper titled, "Concealed Carry Culture and the Technocratic Paradigm," was unable to attend the convention due to personal extenuating circumstances.

Anna Floerke Scheid's paper, "Christian Nationalism, Extremist Violence, and Guns in the US," called attention to the growing impact of Christian nationalism in the United States and explored its significance for understanding the place of guns in America. Drawing from sociological research, she shed light on the demographics of Christian nationalism as well as its historical and theological trajectories. She elaborated upon three key themes that characterize the relationship between Christian nationalism and American gun cultures. First, Christian nationalists view the right to bear arms as a right that is bestowed on American citizens by God. Further, this belief connects to the Christian nationalist conviction that the founding fathers and the founding documents of the United States were divinely inspired, including the Second Amendment. Second, among Christian nationalists there is strong correlation between gun ownership as a means of carrying out a felt responsibility to protect others and a belief in supernatural evil, which is reinforced by a premillennialist belief that the world must descend into chaos, lawlessness, and violence in order to usher in the Second Coming of Christ. Third, Christian nationalists view gun violence, including mass shootings, as a moral and religious problem that can be fixed only through moral and religious strictures. They believe that the nation will only experience peace if we "turn back to God" and embrace the nation's "Christian heritage." Gun violence is driven by a "breakdown in Christian values," in other words, not access to firearms. Scheid concluded by calling biblical theologians to become more involved in countering interpretations of scripture that are used by Christian nationalists to support their views on guns, and to exegete passages that support reducing gun ownership and critique the views articulated above.

After their presentations, Grigoni and Scheid addressed questions and comments raised by the audience in the context of a lively discussion.

SIMONMARY ASESE AIHIOKHAI  
*University of Portland  
Portland, Oregon*

MICHAEL R. GRIGONI  
*Wake Forest University  
Winston-Salem, North Carolina*