

# America in Crisis:

## THE WORSHIP OF VIOLENCE

By Tarcisio Beal

The present conditions of American society and politics are ultimately being shaped by **many forms of violence**, some **quite obvious**, many as part of the socio-economic setup which privileges the wealthy elites, and others disguised as normal and even applauded as religious behavior. Gun violence, included frequent mass killings, often caused by the abundance of deadly weapons, which magnify the profits of gun manufacturers and dealers, are easily detectable. As David Morton reported in *Foreign Policy* ("Gunning for the World," February 26, 2006, p. 1), the **National Rifle Association** has become a savvy **global lobby** that "equates loving freedom with loving guns." The US is the only nation which has facilitated and legalized the widespread purchase of deadly weapons that have led to tens of thousands of mass killings. Several States controlled by the republicans have even legalized the carrying of unlicensed weapons in public. The gun lovers and proponents of the "Stand your Ground" policy place property ahead of human life. The *Freedom Caucus* interprets the Constitution's 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment as an absolute, contrary to the intentions of the Founding Fathers and outside of the present socio-political reality. Already in 1983, a pastoral letter of the US Bishops Conference warned the nation about the increasing spread and use of guns: "The possibility of taking even one human life is a prospect we should consider in fear and troubling." For Pope Francis, "the possibility of taking one human life is a perspective we should consider in fear and troubling."

Yet, the one major threat, which has been hanging over the human race since World War II, is **nuclear annihilation**. Given the constant confrontations between the major powers that possess an arsenal of nuclear weapons, there must be a worldwide effort to do away with the threat of using them, a possibility which has surfaced recently in Russia's war against Ukraine. Given the limitless killing power of modern weapons, we can no longer agree with **St. Augustine's doctrine of the "just war,"** which he, as Bishop of Hippo (early 4<sup>th</sup> century) developed to justify eliminating the

North African heresy of Donatism. At the time, there were no mass-killing guns, and lethal force was authorized for magistrates and soldiers only as self-defense (cf. Tobias Winright, "What does Catholic teaching say using guns for self-defense," *National Catholic Reporter*, August 18-31, 2023, p. 20).

Pope Francis and some American bishops have been constantly speaking against the barbaric threat of nuclear war and have visited Hiroshima and Nagasaki to highlight the cities' atrocious and irresponsible mass destruction at the end of World War II. On September 12, during a prayer service at New York's church of the Holy Trinity, New Mexico's Santa Fé **Archbishop John Wester**, a neighbor of the Los Alamos Nuclear Laboratory, spoke to UN diplomats about **the danger of developing and stocking nuclear weapons**. The possession of such weapons by China, North

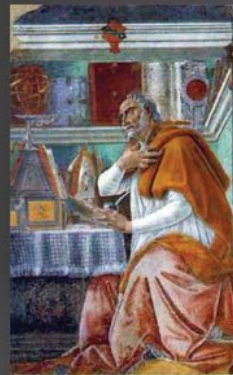
Korea, and Russia highlights **the pressing need to eliminate nuclear arsenals**. In 2022, Wester wrote the pastoral letter "Loving the Light of Christ's Peace: A Conversation Toward Nuclear Disarmament," and on August 2-9, 2023, he joined Seattle's Archbishop Paul Etienne in the "Pilgrimage of Peace" to Japan's cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, which were wiped out by the Americans at the end of World War II.

The other growing form of violence against all living creatures across the universe is the **assault on the environment**, on the gifts and wonders of nature, through unceasingly pollution

and the destruction of the earth's resources by major corporations, with carbon and oil as two of their main profit targets. The ever-increasing destruction of the natural environment has resulted in deadly volcano eruptions, hurricanes, and deadly floods of rivers and oceans, already killing more than one million people across the world and resulting in an increasing warming of the planet. The heat wave engulfing some sections of the US is now threatening New Orleans' supply of drinking water. Most of the victims of the worsening of the earth's living conditions are the poor in overcrowded countries while the oil-producing nations hastened the pollution of the planet. After Pope Francis, in 2015, published

### Just War: Origins of Thought

- St Augustine of Hippo (4<sup>th</sup> C.) distinguished between
  - Private retaliation (not justified in Christianity)
  - War pursued against those who are a threat to peace (sometimes justified)
- His time saw the birth of a brand new notion: **Christendom**
- Christendom=Christ's domains
- The notion of a greater whole that was sacred and may be threatened internally or externally



St Augustine of Hippo, 354-430. He lived right at the end of the Roman Empire in the West.

*Laudato Si*, his encyclical on the environment, the delegates of 200 nations gathered at the CPO21 Paris Conference agreed to work towards reducing carbon emissions. As journalist Spencer Ackerman notes, **the problems of the climate worldwide should become the central concern of the Big Powers**, not their usual disagreements of the Cold War, because **the very existence of humankind is at stake** (“The Extinction Agenda,” *The Nation*, 9-18-25, 2023, p. 7).

In April of 2022, the **International Panel on Climate Change (CPO21)** issued the warning that, unless **green-house emissions** stop rising soon, the world will become increasingly inhabitable. Yet the big corporations keep on enriching themselves by preying on the earth’s resources. In early September, **the State of California sued the major oil firms** (Exxon-Mobil, Chevron, BP, Conoco Philips, and the American Petroleum Institute) for decades of lies and deception as if they were unaware of the environmental damage caused by their hunting for fossil fuels. In fact, since the 1950s, these corporations were quite aware that the burning of fossil oil would warm the planet, yet they covered it all up. Now **Ron DeSantis**, Florida’s Governor and republican presidential candidate, even promises to continue his support of the fossil fuel industry and, if elected, he will bring the price of gasoline down to \$2 dollars. Republican presidential candidate Vivek Ramaswamy says that the environmental crisis is nothing but “a hoax.” Then we have 19 American bishops who still refuse to order their dioceses to discontinue the use of fossil fuels.

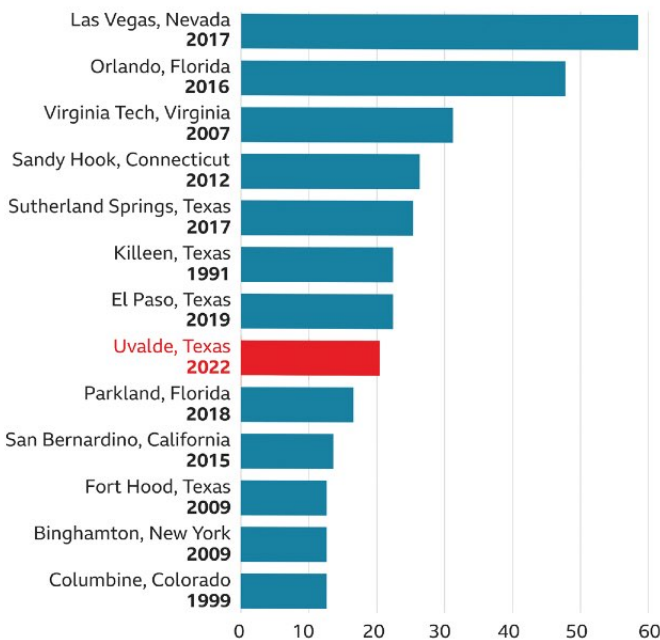
The usual tactic that the MAGA leaders who oppose Pope Francis and the new Church of

Vatican II is the same one employed by the worshippers of unrestrained capitalism: they pile up the lies and distortions, negate that their exploitation of the earth’s resources is wrecking the environment, and accuse their critics of being leftist or socialist. **Paul Gosar**, republican congressman from Arizona, thus justified his absence from Pope Francis’ address to the US Congress:

**“Media reports indicate His Holiness intends to focus the brunt of his speech on climate change... The possibility of the Pope discussing climate change talk as adopted by socialist thinking points, wrapped false science and ideology into ‘climate justice’ and is being presented to guilt people into leftist policies. If the Pope chooses to act and talk like a leftist politician, then he can expect to be treated like one.”**

## Worst mass shootings in the US since 1991

### Victims killed



Source: FBI

BBC

The environmental crisis and the multiplication of all sorts of diseases since the 2018 spread of Covid-19 have been worsened by the **violence of partisan politics** poisoned by all sorts of lies, distortions, the refusal of dialogue, and constant infringement of constitutional rights. The constant **denial of the wrongs and sins of the American past** is now typified by the banning of books in republican-controlled States, notably in Florida, Texas, and Missouri, plus the attempt to write the kind of history that glorifies white supremacy and institutionalizes violence. The violence of the KKK, a permanent feature of the Confederacy, is now magnified by hundreds of white supremacist groups that wish to “cleanse” America from non-whites. In the old Confederacy, the killing of black people was such a weekly routine that the authorities did not even bother to count the number of victims. In 1898, for example, the

**massacre of blacks in Wilmington**, North Carolina, was reported as being between 60 and 300, period. Today mass killings, which have risen alarmingly since 2015, are carried out by people indoctrinated by the racist poison of white supremacy that glorifies Hitler and spread their hatred through the Internet. Ex-President Trump himself found a way to praise Hitler. **In 2022, 21 of the 25 mass killings were carried out by white supremacists**, including the murder of 10 black shoppers in a grocery store of Buffalo, New York.

Now, the most obvious, **most despicable, and widespread form of violence against basic human rights and even the very humanity of millions of Americans is being justified by many leaders and members of Christian organizations, including Catholic bishops, is the current treatment of the LGBTQ people**. These hatemongers of the transgenders **betray the very essence of Christianity**. As usual, they try to justify their hatred by refusing to accept the findings of science and medicine and by manipulating the Bible. They argue, for example, that “God created man and woman” (Gen 1: 27), but not transgenders. In Florida, Governor Ron DeSantis and his republican majority have even legalized the denial of the basic right of transgenders. A totally **outdated Catholic Catechism** still reads that homosexual acts are “intrinsically disordered acts of great depravity.” The policies of some Catholic dioceses prohibit LGBTQs to be identified by their own gender, and also deny them the Eucharist. No wonder, then, that 50% of transgender youngsters between the ages of 13 to 24 commit suicide. As Pope Francis notes, the attack on the transgenders is “focusing on sins below the waist” and denying the goodness of God’s creation. In fact, he has met with them several times and welcomes them into the Church, as have the German bishops.

One area which thrives on violence, is glorified by the crowds all over the country, and is carried into all homes by television



is that of **sports**, specifically of boxing, **wrestling**, and even of **football**. Especially brutal, yet quite popular, are the current TV programs **Monday Night Raw** and Tuesday's nights **NEW NXT**. The body-to-body fights have practically no rules that could prevent serious injuries, and the goal is to render the opponent motionless by whatever means, including by hitting him/her with chairs and wooden bars while the large crowd of spectators that includes many youngsters roars approval of it all. The fighters dress practically naked, with the women highlighting their sexuality and the referee's role is just to declare who's the winner. In fact, even the rules of traditional boxing matches are dropped so that the referees can allow any form of violence. Then we have **American football**, probably the most popular of the nation's sports from elementary school to the NFL, **a violent sport** which is costing serious body injuries. In professional football, the serious injuries have been so widespread that now the NFL is planning to modify the rules. Brain injuries to quarterbacks are especially dangerous. Medical records of deceased professional quarterbacks reveal that 96% of them were victimized by brain injuries. Children and young men should not be playing such a dangerous sport, yet it thrives all over the nation's schools.

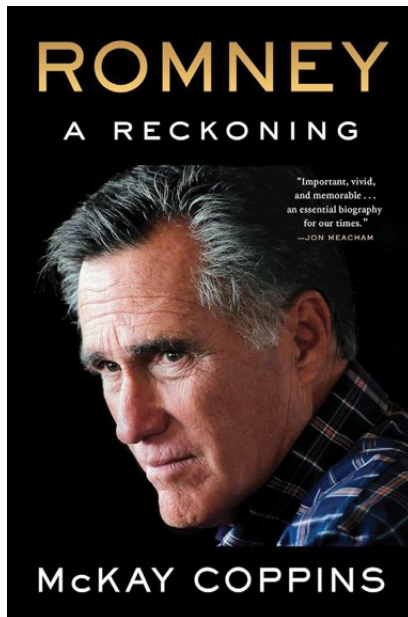
Violence, disguised in multiple forms, has, since 2015, become a major feature of American socio-politics. The treatment of immigrants by States such as Texas and Florida is anything but humane or Christian. Utah's Senator **Mitt Romney** recently published a book detailing how political violence has become a defining threat of the "Trump Era" and how it has negatively impacted upon the minds of children and youngsters. Threats of violence have also multiplied against the judges and jurors who are investigating the many illegal actions of Trump and his allies. Between 2017 and 2022 there was a 400% increase in threats against federal judges and jurors, and now against them in the State of Georgia **Rico Trial** of Trump and his associates for their attempt to overthrow

the 2020 election. **The US also leads the world in incarceration**, with blacks jailed five times more than whites, compounded by the fact those imprisoned seldom can afford lawyers to defend them.

Yet, despite all the violence that is hurting American society and the whole world, our hope never dies, for many good and Christian people, especially the women of many religious Orders and a legion of other truly Christian women are engaged in helping the poor and the victims of politicians who dare to call themselves Christian, even Catholic. On October 4, when Catholics celebrate the feast of St. Francis of Assisi, Pope Francis will issue a follow-up to his *Laudato Si'* encyclical with an apostolic exhortation for us to follow the example of the *Poverello of Assisi* (1182-1260), a city which honors its sun by preserving its many beautiful trees and flower gardens to this day. No other saint dedicated his whole to caring for the poor, especially the many victims of leprosy, and for the preservation of God's creation. He traveled across Europe and dialoguing with people on how to follow Jesus by caring for one another and preserving the beauty of nature. After a visit to the Holy Land, he stopped in Egypt and engaged in a dialogue with the Muslim Sultan about what the example

of Jesus meant for all humankind. Today we have the leadership of Pope Francis, a Jesuit who follows the example of the *Poverello of Assisi* of caring for the poor and for God's nature because we all are "*fratelli tutti*."

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Romney was the first senator in history to vote to remove from office a president of his own party. When that president's supporters went on to storm the US Capitol, Romney delivered a thundering speech from the Senate floor accusing his fellow Republicans of stoking insurrection.

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