

Who Trust in God

st. 1: *Joachim Magdeburg (c1525–c1587); sts. 2–2: anon.; trans. Benjamin H. Kennedy (1804–1889)*

Who trusts in God, a strong abode
in heav'n and earth possesses;
who looks in love to Christ above,
no fear his heart oppresses.
In you alone, dear Lord, we own
sweet hope and consolation;
our shield from foes, our balm for woes,
our great and sure salvation.

Though Satan's wrath beset our path,
and worldly scorn assail us,
while you are near we will not fear,
your strength shall never fail us:
your rod and staff shall keep us safe,
and guide our steps forever;
nor shades of death, nor hell beneath,
our souls from you shall sever.

In all the strife of mortal life
our feet shall stand securely;
temptation's hour shall lose its pow'r,
for you shall guard us surely.
O God, renew, with heav'nly dew,
our body, soul, and spirit,
until we stand at your right hand,
through Jesus' saving merit.



In the Nick of Time is published by Central Baptist Theological Seminary.

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ΤΩ ΧΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ

In the Nick of Time

Legitimate Uses

Kevin T. Bauder

I grew up around firearms. My father kept a single-shot .22 and a bolt action 12 gauge in the closet. I learned that those were for grownups and children must not touch them. Still, when Dad got them out, we were allowed to inspect them. And he showed us what they could do.

Later, Dad added a magazine-fed .22 bolt action. Then came a double-barreled 12 gauge. When I was in about 5th grade he bought an old 1917 Enfield, the kind of rifle that Sergeant York used in the Great War. Day after day he carried it with him to his job at the airport (the airline was on strike), slowly remodeling it into a first-rate deer rifle. When it was finished, it was a better rifle than any Remington or Winchester at the department store.

Along the way, I learned important lessons in gun safety. I learned to treat every gun as if it were loaded. I learned to open the action and check to see whether it had a round in the chamber. I learned to keep my finger off the trigger until I was ready to fire. I learned never, ever to point any gun (loaded or not) at a person, and never to let the muzzle stray across something I wouldn't want to shoot.

When I was ten years old, I was given a Daisy BB gun. It became a constant companion around the farmstead, and it gave me a chance to practice safe gun handling. It was a great way to develop sound habits.

The most important lesson that I learned during those years is that a firearm has three legitimate uses. The first use is for tagging targets. These might be targets of opportunity during plinking. They might also be more deliberate targets, though still often improvised. For example, Necco wafers make inexpensive small-bore targets that are both frangible and (during breaks) edible. For many shooters, the highlight of their hobby is sitting or standing at a firing line and squeezing round after round at paper targets.

Every firearm smaller than a cannon can be enjoyed for target practice. Even cannons can be fun if the range is long enough. For me, the most relaxing activity in the world is sitting at a shooting bench, sending bullet after bullet downrange, and trying to make each one go through the same hole. That activity takes so much of my concentration that the cares of the day just melt

away. I suppose that it's basically the same effect as trying to hit a golf ball into a hole that's hundreds of yards away, or trying to swish a basketball through a hoop from the top of the circle. Incidentally, target shooting is still a more popular activity than golfing.

The second legitimate use of firearms is to harvest meat for the table. True, guns are not the only tool for hunting. Many people hunt with bows. Some hunt with slingshots, blowguns, or boomerangs. Some hunt with rocks and pointy sticks. Undoubtedly, firearms are the most useful tool for this activity, mainly because they extend the hunter's effective range.

Do guns give hunters an unfair advantage over game? If you think so, then you really ought to try hunting. You'll be quickly disabused of the notion. Most game animals will regularly outsmart all but the most savvy hunters. The hunters themselves will endure early mornings, cramped postures, laborious trekking, blistering heat, and savage cold for the privilege. Having a gun gives you a tool, but it doesn't come close to making you a success. If you do shoot game, you still have to track it, clean it, and butcher it. I haven't hunted anything for over a decade for one simple reason: it's a lot of work with no guaranteed result.

About twenty years ago I began to tinker with Modern Sporting Rifles (MSRs). MSRs look like military rifles: they may have pistol grips, muzzle brakes, collapsible stocks, and detachable magazines. They differ from military assault rifles, however, in that they have no selector switch. They cannot be fired automatically. What I have found is that MSRs are enjoyable and useful for both target shooting and for hunting. By the way, if you want to display profound ignorance, all you have to do is to refer to an MSR as an "assault rifle." You'll earn instant contempt from anybody who knows anything about guns.

I do know people who shoot assault rifles—real ones. Some of them do it for a living. I even know people who shoot full-sized machine guns. While I think it's fine, automatic fire is inherently inaccurate, so it doesn't appeal to me. Besides, I hate to think of what all that ammunition must cost.

The third legitimate use of a firearm is for defense. Obviously, nations rely on armed forces for their defense. Officers of the law usually carry firearms to defend themselves and others. But personal defense is also a legitimate way to use guns.

Since God's law forbids murder, no one has a duty to submit to being murdered. Similarly, no one has a duty to submit to being maimed, raped, or robbed. People who are threatened in life or limb have a God-given right to defend themselves. They also have a duty to defend those who are under their care. If stopping a threat to life or limb requires taking the life of the attacker, then taking that life is fully justifiable.

Defense of self and others (such as family members) requires adequate means. An adequate means is one that is sufficient to turn aside or terminate the threat. We live in a world in which criminals carry guns. I live in a city in which elements of the population occasionally riot, sometimes within blocks of my house. An adequate means of defense must include guns, including MSRs. Laws that deny or impede such a means of defense legislate against duty. A law that requires an immoral act, or a law that hampers the fulfillment of a duty, is a law that may legitimately be ignored.

It is a sad fact that evil people can turn any good thing toward bad uses. Robbers can drive getaway cars. Pens and paper can be used for slander. Ropes can be used for lynchings. Airplanes can be flown into buildings. And guns can be used for predatory and evil acts.

In all these cases, the evil remains with the perpetrator and not with the tool. Wicked people can do heinous things with guns, just as they can by throwing rocks. The solution is not to restrict the objects, whether rocks or ropes or firearms. Of course, one can pass laws against the wrongful use of any object, but criminals do not pay attention to those laws. Ultimately, the solution to the evil use of any object is to restrict or remove the people who use it in evil ways.



This essay is by Kevin T. Bauder, Research Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.
