

My New Church – The NRA?

By Steve Richards
Managing Director, TheoEco Institute

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I've read some thought provoking Facebook posts from friends, family, and acquaintances recently. One even equated assault rifles to hammers as weapons used in killings (496 in 2011) and implied we need to control hammers if we are going to control rifles. Another said he packed a handgun in line at grocery stores so he could protect himself and his neighbors in case a shooter attacked. Another said he's a lion because he carries a gun while the rest of us are lambs.

Well, certainly being a lion sounds better than being a lamb, notwithstanding of course the Christian doctrine I've been following with its images of Jesus as shepherd, lamb, us as His flock, etc. These are crazy times after all, and Christianity seems a bit deficient, especially when one goes to a typical church nowadays where pews are plenty empty.

So I figure maybe the National Rifle Association (NRA) is a reasonable facsimile for church; especially since the passion it engenders seems so intense. But can it pass for a church? Let's see.

First of all, what does the Church of the NRA worship? It appears to worship the 2nd Amendment of the United States Constitution which gives "the right of the people to keep and bear arms." The NRA is not particularly good at protecting this right as we regular citizens don't seem to be able to get our hands on: machine guns, silencers, sawed-off shotguns, hand grenades, or Tommy-guns (#1 on my personal wish list), let alone the weapons we will really need if an authoritarian U.S. government comes at us; weapons like mortars, howitzers, missiles, poisonous gas, biological weapons, tanks, F-22's, stealth bombers, aircraft carriers, hydrogen bombs, etc. I mean, did the founding fathers really think we could protect ourselves with just AR-15's, SIG Sauers, and Glocks?

It appears the 2nd Amendment is quite ambiguous and therefore ideal for worship.

Surely repeal of the National Firearms Act of 1934, written in the days of Al Capone as police were out-gunned and gangs murdered innocent bystanders indiscriminately, has to be high on the list of the episcopate or presbyters in this faith-based group.

Recently moving back to Miami from Connecticut has me in a surreal position—from a gun control haven to gun rights fanatics. Which is really interesting since Connecticut is the original home to so many gun manufacturers. Something about Sandy Hook really turned those folks. But down here there seems to be nary a thought about gun control—a real gun-rights asylum. Even with Orlando so close by such empathy with gun victims seems very faraway, at least when it comes to the "Experts in the Law" that lead our state which is a great place to worship the 2nd Amendment.

The NRA also seems to have a fine "High Priest" in Wayne LaPierre and clear dogma. It really seems to come down to "more guns are good" and catechisms like "An armed society is a polite society" from a NRA theologian Robert A. Heinlein; at least I think so as I am all very new to this religion.

Of course, another advantage of worshipping the 2nd Amendment is how little one has to go to church. Apparently there are a few gun shows a year that one can attend locally but it is not required, leaving Sundays free though they are increasingly filled with news of mass-shootings which is a bit of a downer.

The costs of membership are far less than tithing so that seems another advantage. I don't even own a gun and can apparently join the NRA for \$25 (a discount from the going rate of \$40) which includes a free duffel bag! Of course, buying guns and ammo can add up but a fully loaded AR-15 can apparently be had for under a thousand dollars, though shooting it can become habit forming I'm sure.

Like all good religions this one is under attack and the "anti-gun rights in chief" is always spouting off. He's even on his way to Dallas to talk and will be tempted to talk about gun control. How dare he! Apparently it is a slap in the face of the dead and wounded police officer's families – and the Dallas citizenry - to even talk about such things so soon, and it really needs to wait until the news moves on. Everyone knows the only time to talk about gun control is between mass shootings during the run-of-the-mill daily shootings, thank you! I wonder if Reverend LaPierre will be invited to speak for the 2nd Amendment worshipers in attendance. After all, one must keep the faith, even at a mass funeral for police officers.

One problem the NRA church has to work on is its logo. It's just too complicated with the eagle, rifle, American flag shield, etc. Here Christianity would seem to have an advantage: the simple cross. An image Christians associate with forgiveness, love, and everlasting life. Perhaps I can talk the NRA into switching its logo for something much more recognizable and identified with its purpose: an assault rifle. An image most associate with violence, killing and mass shootings. But in the end, the Church of the NRA seems to be about strength and power, and most of all, money. Which is kind of nice in that few want to go to a poor church.

The NRA Church does have many of the other attributes of a religion including ceremonial clothes/vestments like camo, places of worship like gun/shooting ranges and gun shops, icons including old muskets and museum pieces, saints and martyrs in the form of heroes and military figures and even notorious figures like Billy the Kid and anti-government crusaders. Its liturgy is filled with books and movies of the Wild-West, gangsters and gangstas, the gun-culture in general, and the mythology that surrounds it all.

In short, worshipping guns is nothing new. Plus, given its millions of adherents (NRA membership would make many mainline denominations jealous) certainly means the 2nd Amendment religion is no cult.

The NRA faithful also have many myths to live by, but are shown to be of questionable voracity, though like most zealots, proof otherwise means little. Some of these myths include:

- 1) Having a gun outside the house will allow members to protect themselves and those around them. Dallas has shown that even the entire Dallas police force needed a robot bomb to get just one shooter with a rifle. How would my friend in line at the grocery store have fared? And the fleeing mass in Dallas was probably the most well-armed scurrying crowd ever caught on camera.
- 2) Having a concealed weapon (and permit) will protect me. Actually, it appears to have resulted in just the opposite in Minneapolis.

3) Having a citizenry armed to the teeth will defend against a tyrannical gov't and foreign invasion. Unlikely, given the list of weapons we would need as listed previously.

4) More guns make us more safe. Apparently not. This is also proven to be statistically inaccurate in studies.

5) Gun control just doesn't work. Not so. Imagine if we didn't have the gun control we already have? One can only imagine the slaughter if Americans had unfettered access to fully automatic machine guns and hand grenades; or the type of military weapons listed previously. Just a full auto conversion kit for the AR-15 increases their lethality to heights few would reasonably want to see on America's streets. Existing triggers can already put the readily available semi-automatic versions up to close to 500 rounds per minute if the user is practiced.

So all in all, it appears that 2nd Amendment worshiping seems like a religion in almost all respects...but with a significant gap. No Messiah/prophet/divine figure. Reverend LaPierre is no Christ-like figure I'm afraid. And even though a form of animism it already is with guns taking on a kind of divine status, Americans are used to a divine figure, especially with Christmas being such a big money-maker for the NRA's prime benefactors, a traditional time for giving guns to kids and all.

So perhaps the NRA can co-opt Jesus, or Buddha, or someone like that. Actually, the Epistle to the Ephesians is already used to market weapons to "Soldiers of Christ" and so forth.

But the NRA Church needs to take Jesus to another level it would seem.

He needs to be packing.

Steve Richards can be contacted at:

Email: stever@theoeco.org

Phone: 475-238-6647wk

Website: www.TheoEco.org

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/TheoEcoOrg/>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/theoecoorg>