

Salvation by AR15: Serving God and Guns

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A year ago, at a Christian conference at a church in Colorado Springs, Lauren Boebert asked, “How many AR15s do you think Jesus would have had?” It wasn’t a joke. She was 100% serious, and her audience cheered as she answered her own question, “Well, he didn’t have enough to keep his government from killing him.”

Boebert is an American Congresswoman from Colorado, and a member of the far-right MAGA crowd. She has made a career of making outrageous statements.

Like too many others, Boebert is a devotee of the God-and-guns cult. The question she posed at that conference was a theological dog-whistle to her audience, and to the millions of others like them in the US. They passionately believe that faith in Jesus Christ and the freedom to use automatic guns like AR15s are two sides of the same coin.

Full disclosure: I don’t get this kind of attitude at all. I don’t own a gun. I have never shot a gun. I have never even handled a gun. It is a complete foreign culture to me, and I can’t see a single reason why anyone ought to be free to own a semiautomatic rifle.

After seeing the effects of this gun and violence culture in mass murders in schools, theatres, shopping malls, and on the streets, I can’t help but think that there is a deep sickness in the US. Even worse, too many leaders say there is nothing we can do to stop the spread of this violence.

They blame it on mental health. But that is not true. There are common sense ways to regulate the purchase of guns. The sad truth is that many of these so-called leaders have been bought and paid for by the gun lobby. They are not willing to do anything because it would cut deeply into funding for their re-election campaigns.

I can’t think of a single valid reason why a person should be able to purchase a weapon which has no purpose other than the ability to shoot as many people as quickly as possible. An AR15 rips a human body apart, disfigures it in such a way that in some cases only DNA testing can identify the child lying dead on a classroom floor.

And Boebert, like so many others, advocates that anyone should be allowed to purchase this kind of weapon freely, without limit, without constraint. It is their “God-given right.”

Of course, her comments about Jesus and the AR15 are sheer nonsense. It shows a complete ignorance of Biblical faith. It makes a mockery of the teachings of Jesus, the Prince of Peace.

In Matthew 26, when the Romans were arresting Jesus, one of his disciples takes out a sword and hacks off the ear of a member of the arrest party. Jesus rejected this act of violence. He rebukes his follower, “Put your sword back in its place; for all who take up the sword will perish by the sword.”

This is a basic element of his whole life and teaching. When he was born, angels proclaimed peace on earth. He taught, “blessed are the peacemakers.” To paraphrase another one of his aphorisms, “You cannot serve both God and guns.” His whole life modelled a way of forgiveness and reconciliation.

Yet here we see an audience of churchgoers, people who claim to follow Jesus, laughing and cheering when Boebert suggested that all that Jesus needed was a few more AR15s to take out the government and avoid being killed.

It’s not just an off-the-cuff comment. It embodies a full-blown theology which reinterprets the meaning of God and guns and obscures the whole message of Jesus. It is part of a movement known as “Christian nationalism” which is pervading not only the US, but also our own country. In my mind, this is nothing short of a Christian version of sharia law in which Christians impose

their belief systems on everyone else by any and all means. It is the same kind of attitude which lies behind the notion that we live in a Christian country.

In 2017, Presbyterian minister James Atwood warned of this very thing. He called the phenomenon “gundamentalism.” He named it accurately as a belief system for those mainly straight, white, mostly male, Christians who fear losing their privilege. He noted that this gun and violence culture has a profound theological dimension to it. As he insists in his book, “guns are no longer tools for people to use; they have become idols of trust and power.” Indeed, guns have replaced faith in Jesus with a faith of self-protection by extreme violence.

He writes, “Many modern-day religious gun enthusiasts proclaim that God wants all citizens well armed so they can protect our values, even our faith. These religious cults have become an integral part of the religion of the Gun Empire that gives the idols of power and deadly force what they most need: a divine status. For these people, the command to love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and your neighbour as yourself is placed right alongside the new commandment to be ready at all times to defend yourself against your neighbour. Millions worship at this shrine.”

The further irony is that many of these people are among the most vocal proponents of a narrowly defined “pro-life” movement. They celebrate that women are losing the right to make their own reproductive choices, since it “saves lives of children.” Yet when a classroom of children is murdered, their tune changes dramatically and the “right to bear arms” supersedes children’s “right to life.”

We have seen this theology play out repeatedly with lethal and tragic results. We must speak out again this rank hypocrisy more forcefully and be more vigilant against this culture of violence.