



To Bucket or Not to Bucket?

By The Rev. Jarrett Kerbel (1/23/26)

A few churches ago, I had the following exchange with a church member. The church member was irate because our Diocese had passed a resolution supporting increased Gun Safety regulations in Pennsylvania.

“Fr. Jarrett, I am really angry and I think it is totally wrong for the church to get involved in politics!”

“Oh dear, thank you for sharing your concern. What in particular is distressing to you?”

“The church should have nothing to say about my right to own guns. There is a division between church and state, you know that!”

“OK, if I am following you, the church is not allowed to take a stand or send a message on matters of public policy because of the separation of church and state. I hear that principle is important to you. Where does it come from?”

“It’s in the First Amendment.”

“Are you sure? The Establishment Clause of the First Amendment prohibits the **government** from making any **law** ‘respecting an establishment of religion.’ There can be no official national religion and the government cannot favor one religion over another, or no religion over religion. The words ‘separation of church do not appear in it.’”

“Well, religion is not supposed to tell us what to do or have power over us.”

“I agree that religion should not have dominating power in the conduct of our public affairs, but I do believe we have a moral perspective to share and an obligation to share it as outlined in Romans 13. We may be one voice among many, but we have a voice, if not a vote.”

“I just don’t see it that way. What does the church have to do with gun rights? I am free to do what I choose with my rights.”

“Yes, you are very clear. I am wondering, can you tell me which teachings of Jesus support your opinions on unfettered gun ownership?”

“Jesus has nothing to do with it. Politics is one bucket, business is another, and church is another bucket.”

“Hmmm, so Jesus only has authority in the Church bucket? I disagree with that. If Jesus is Lord of All, if we lead our lives under God’s authority, then no area of our life is exempt from accountability to the Gospel.”

We went around in circles a few more times with no resolution.

However, I want to be clear; the church is never involved in Partisan Politics or Electoral Politics. The church cannot tell you how to vote. Our only role is to make clear our moral vision for right relationships between people, between nations, between people and our fellow creatures, and the environment God gave us to steward. Politics simply means the public process of ordering our life together in community. We can pretend that Jesus is only relevant to one portion of our life, but that is not the Jesus of the Bible or of church tradition or of reason. Furthermore, this idea of compartments or buckets is a secular intrusion into our theology.

In my view, loving God and loving our neighbor means engaging in all aspects of life, including public policy, which bear on our individual and communal well-being and flourishing. My morality, my character, and my virtues are all formed by my Discipleship so of course I carry that formation into any question I address whether it be in my home or at a town meeting.

I hope to offer a session after church where we can discuss the role of the church in the public square in the future.