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USA

# Trump, Pope Leo, Jesus, and the Bible

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**For the last two weeks, President Donald Trump and Pope Leo have been arguing about the U.S.-Israeli war on Iran, and about Jesus and the Bible. Trump's words have been accompanied by A.I images he posted on social media, one of himself as Jesus. And now the rightwing evangelical Christians have put together a national program of Bible reading. American politics is at the moment awash in religion.**

The debate between the president and the first American-born pope began after Trump said that if Iran didn't give in to his demands "a whole civilization will die tonight, never to be brought back again." While he did not initially mention Trump, there was no doubt who Leo was talking about: "Enough of the idolatry of self and money! Enough of the display of power! Enough of war!" Leo criticized the "delusion of omnipotence" that was driving the war, another clear reference to Trump. God "does not listen to the prayers of those who wage war", the pope said at mass in St Peter's Square.

Trump responded by calling the pope "WEAK on Crime, and terrible for Foreign Policy." The president then posted on social media an A.I. generated image of himself as Jesus healing the sick. When the image of Trump as Jesus provoked criticism, he took it down and posted another of Jesus embracing him. Earlier he had posted an image of himself as pope.

The constitutional separation of state and church seems to be dead as Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth quotes the Bible at Pentagon briefings and vice-president J.D. Vance, a Catholic, criticizes the pope for saying Christ is "never on the side of those who once wielded the sword and today drop bombs." "Was God on the side of the Americans who liberated France from the Nazis?" Vance asked. "I certainly think the answer is yes." Vance told the pope to be careful with his theology.

Leo has called upon all people of good will to pray for peace but also to demand that their political leaders end the war, his words aiming directly at Donald Trump's political power. There are somewhere between 50 and 75 million American Catholics who make up about 20 percent of U.S. voters. Over half of all Catholics voted for Trump in the last election, though his support among them now seems to be falling some. Still most Catholic Trump supporters are sticking with him.

Pope Leo, now 70, was born in Chicago into a family of Spanish, Italian, French Canadian, and African American ethnicity. He studied mathematics at Villanova College near Philadelphia and canon Law at the Pontifical College of St. Thomas Aquinas in Rome. He became an Augustinian friar and spent twenty years in Peru where he was influenced by the Latin American theology of liberation with its "preferential option for the poor." When he came under attack from Trump, U.S. bishops spoke out strongly in Leo's defense.

Trump's evangelical Protestant supporters, an important part of the Make American Great Again (MAGA) movement, have now organized "America Reads the Bible," a week-long national Scripture-reading event held April 19–25 at the Museum of the Bible in Washington, D.C. Some 500 politicians, pundits and entertainers will read aloud the entire Bible to celebrate America's 250th anniversary. Evangelicals back Trump because he opposes abortion and homosexuality. They also support his war on Iran as a defense of Israel, which is important for their prophecies of the coming apocalypse.

A lot of this religious fervor on the part of the rightwing white, Christian, nationalists is about mobilizing voters for the midterm elections in November. Religion of all stripes plays a big role in American political life. Progressive

Christians, Catholic and Protestant, have participated in the No Kings protests. And some of those who march against Trump are Christian socialists.

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