



**He wears the armor of God':
evangelicals greet the picture of the
church of Trump**

The Guardian

Photo above: Donald Trump holds a Bible outside St. John's Church in front of Lafayette Park in the White House on Monday.

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The president's call to his base amid protests was ridiculed by some Christians. Others saw a victory in a world of evil.

No Donald Trump accuses of subtlety. When the president of the United States raised a Bible on Monday night in front of St. John's Episcopal church in Washington DC, the sign was unmistakable: an appeal to his white evangelical base of loyalty as protests and riots roared across America.

Not every Christian answered the call. Rev. Gini Gerbasi, an Episcopal priest, said the police used tear gas to drive her and others out of St. John before Trump appeared. "They turned the sacred ground into a battlefield," she told the Religion News Service.

But many of Trump's evangelical supporters, far from Washington's political stage, saw the change as a victory in a world filled with evil.

"My whole family was stunned," said Benjamin Horbowy, 37.

The Horbowys gathered in Tallahassee, Florida, to watch live as Trump walked from the White House to St. John's. "My mother cried out, 'God give him strength! He's taking a walk in Jericho!'"

A walk from Jericho, in some evangelical circles, refers to the biblical book of Joshua, where God commanded the Israelites to walk seven times through the opposite city of Jericho, whose walls then collapsed.

Horbowy has supported Trump politically - he leads the local chapter of a pro-Trump motorcycle club and is campaigning for a seat in the Florida state senate-but when Trump raised the Bible, Horbowy and his family felt spiritually overcome.

"My mother began to cry. She is of Pentecostal origin and began speaking in tongues. I haven't heard her speak in tongues in years," he said. "I thought, look at my president! He is establishing the kingdom of the Lord in the world. "

Did he feel this in conflict with the Gospel of John, where Jesus said "my kingdom is not of this world"?

"Well," Horbowy said, "that's a philosophical question."

After watching Trump's gesture, Horbowy changed his Facebook profile picture to one of Trump's on the outskirts of St. John's, with additional rays of light emanating from the Bible, "It was the coolest thing he could do. What else could he do, wear blue jeans and ride? he said.

The catalyst for the protests was the death of George Floyd, 46, by Minneapolis police. Asked about it, Horbowy said, "There's a verse in the Bible that says we shouldn't talk about bad things. We can just say, 'There is evil' and move on. "

He couldn't remember the exact verse, he said.

So how did devotees like Horbowy become such a force that Trump signaled them in their hour of need? One answer lies in their relationship with Trump. They gave him their fervent support at the polls and, in turn, saw a conservative takeover of the courts and an attack on reproductive rights and LGBTQ+ .

Their power and worldview are the culmination of trends that began decades ago, according to John Fea, a history professor at Messiah College and himself an evangelical Christian. "It's rooted in fear," he said.

In the 1980s, Fea said, several forces converged to alarm white Christians: the removal of official prayers and Bible readings from schools, the influx of immigrants from Asia and the Middle East, and the final breakdown of schools like Bob Jones University.

"Then came the rise of the Christian right," said Fea.

Figures such as Jerry Falwell and James Dobson began exercising political influence in a new way, followed today by a new generation that includes Franklin Graham and Dallas pastor Robert Jeffress, one of Trump's leading evangelical advocates.

"What seems to be missing in much of the coverage is that a group of protesters tried to burn the church to the ground 24 hours earlier," Jeffress said.

Jeffress sees no conflict between Trump's behavior and the Bible he held on Monday night. "You mean, he pretends to be perfectly godly?" he said. "No."

Fea calls religious leaders like Jeffress "court evangelists."

"Trump has these people around him," Fea said. "They're telling him, 'You need to have your evangelical base on board."

People who once cared about godliness, Fea said, now long for "an exercise of pure political power," and the Bible is no longer a spiritual weapon, but an earthly one.

When Trump describes himself as a president of "law and order" and keeps a Bible high, he confuses which law he will apply and whose order he will follow. In a brief speech before the walk to St. John's, Trump said he would "rule the streets. This is the "kingdom of the world" that Horbowy refers to.

"I believe it's like Ephesians 6:10 to 19," said Horbowy of Florida. "I believe this is a president who wears the full armor of God."

But one of those verses-verse 12-explicitly says, "We do not fight against flesh and blood," but against spiritual enemies.

"Well," said Horbowy. "He is fearless."

<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/jun/03/donald-trump-church-photo-op-evangelicals>