

# [***The Christian reaction to Trump's Bible endorsement goes deeper than you think***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BND-T851-JBSS-S00W-00000-00&context=1516831)

CNN Wire

March 28, 2024 Thursday 5:20 PM GMT

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**Length:** 1508 words

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**Dateline:** (CNN)

**Body**

(CNN) &#8212; Former President Donald Trump is [*officially selling*](https://www.cnn.com/videos/politics/2024/03/26/trump-selling-bibles-fundraising-truth-social-vpx.cnn) a patriotic copy of the Christian Bible themed to Lee Greenwood's famous song, "God Bless the USA."

"Happy Holy Week!" Trump [*announced on social media*](https://twitter.com/TrumpDailyPosts/status/1772658279908253974) Tuesday, during the most solemn period of the Christian calendar, the last week of the Lenten season marking the suffering and death of Jesus. "As we lead into Good Friday and Easter, I encourage you to get a copy of the God Bless The USA Bible."

The concept of a Bible covered in the American flag, as well as a former president's endorsement of a text Christians consider to be sacred, has raised concern among religious circles. It's also raised questions about Trump's motivations, as the former president finds himself in the middle of several expensive legal battles.

'Sacrilege,' theology, and the shadow of Christian nationalism

The $59.99 Bible, which was first published in 2021, features an American flag and the words "God Bless the USA" printed on the cover. Inside, it has the words to "God Bless the USA" and the text of The Declaration of Independence, the Pledge of Allegiance and other historic American documents. Promotional material for the Bible shows the former president alongside country singer Lee Greenwood.

Responses to Trump's social media announcement called the endorsement "[*sacrilege*](https://twitter.com/MsSuzieQ3/status/1772793813901119495)," "[*heresy*](https://twitter.com/HPD_307/status/1773002306998440044)" and "[*borderline offensive*](https://twitter.com/StanRMitchell/status/1773001023893721214)" and [*cite lessons*](https://twitter.com/theduanebrown/status/1772687597019533464) directly from the Bible that suggest taking advantage of people's faith for money should be condemned.

"It is a bankrupt Christianity that sees a demagogue co-opting our faith and even our holy scriptures for the sake of his own pursuit of power and praise him for it rather than insist that we refuse to allow our sacred faith and scriptures to become a mouthpiece for an empire," said [*Rev. Benjamin Cremer*](https://twitter.com/Brcremer) on X.

Jason Cornwall, [*a pastor from South Carolina*](https://twitter.com/TheCornDog/status/1772972203404914915), said on X that Trump's Bible endorsement was a violation of one of the Ten Commandments of the Hebrew Testament that forbids taking God's name in vain.

However, the criticism doesn't end with whether or not Trump's endorsement is un-Christian or not. In fact, it's just the beginning.

Historian and author [*Jemar Tisby*](https://jemartisby.com/) says the whole project echoes the values of [*Christian nationalism*](https://www.cnn.com/2022/07/24/us/white-christian-nationalism-blake-cec/index.html) - the idea that America was founded as a Christian nation and the government should work to sanction Christianity on a national scale. The [*tenets of Christian nationalism*](https://www.cnn.com/2023/01/21/us/william-barber-christian-nationalism-blake-cec/index.html) are historically tied to prejudice, nativism and white supremacy.

"There's a very long tradition of what is included and what is not included in the Bible," Tisby told CNN.

"What has caused outrage with this Bible is that it includes the Declaration of Independence, US Constitution, and even the lyrics to a Lee Greenwood song. So it's adding to the Bible, and it's adding specific political documents to the Bible that completely erase the separation of church and state."

Tisby, who holds a Master of Divinity Degree from Reformed Theological Seminary in Jackson, Mississippi, has written about the dangers of Christian nationalism - both for the country and the Christian faith.

"What's so pernicious about this is it plays on people's devotion to God and their love of country, either of which by themselves could be innocuous or even good," he said.

"But in this effort, it is blending the two. And with Trump as the spokesperson, is conveying a very clear message about what kind of Christianity and what kind of love of nation (he is) promoting."

When Guthrie Graves-Fitzsimmons, [*communications director*](https://bjconline.org/guthrie-graves-fitzsimmons/) for the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty, saw Trump's Bible endorsement, he said he saw a politician using fears rooted in racism and prejudice to promote a specific Christian ideology.

"When I hear 'Make America Pray Again,' I hear Christian nationalist promises that we are going to somehow 'restore' Christianity in this country. And if authoritarianism does come to the United States, it's all but guaranteed it will be done in the name of Christianity, which is a very scary thought."

Graves-Fitzsimmons holds a Master of Divinity degree from Union Theological Seminary in New York City and also works with the group [*Christians Against Christian Nationalism*](https://www.christiansagainstchristiannationalism.org/). He says things like the "God Bless America" Bible overlook the many, many Christians who do not agree with Trump's ***politics*** or the blending of patriotism with faith.

"There is a diversity within American Christianity that gets overlooked whenever ***politics*** and religion intersect," he told CNN. "There's this false notion that most American Christians are pushing for [*anti-abortion restrictions*](https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/religious-landscape-study/views-about-abortion/), and are anti-LGBTQ, and the [*opposite is actually true*](https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/religious-landscape-study/christians/christian/views-about-homosexuality/). Christians, I would argue, are the ones who are most concerned about the effects of Christian nationalism in this country."

This version of the Bible has drawn controversy before

The "God Bless the USA" Bible drew [*controversy from community members*](https://www.news-journal.com/features/religion/a-new-bible-that-includes-the-u-s-constitution-attracts-critics-and-customers/article_3a813a90-bfc2-11eb-9ace-6ba9e31baf27.html) and publishers when it was published in 2021. It was originally supposed to be published by HarperCollins Christian Publishing, but the company passed on the deal.

HarperCollins [*said in 2021*](https://www.tennessean.com/story/news/religion/2021/05/27/god-bless-usa-bible-lee-greenwood-publisher-harper-collins-passes/7450858002/) that pushback to the concept was not a factor in their decision. (Eagle-eyed Bible buffs will note this is why the Trump-backed tome uses the King James Version of the text, which is in the public domain. ([*HarperCollins holds US publishing rights*](https://www.biblica.com/permissions/) to the bestselling [*New International Version*](https://churchanswers.com/blog/the-top-ten-best-selling-bibles-compared-to-ten-years-ago/) translation of the Bible.)

Tisby has published three books under Zondervan, the HarperCollins imprint specializing in religious publications. He was among the imprint's writers who tried to discourage them from publishing the "God Bless the USA" Bible when the idea was first introduced.

"We did not want to be associated with a publisher who's going to publish a Bible like this," he said. "And I think it took on an elevated sense of urgency because we're not just talking about someone's book. We're talking about the sacred text of the Bible."

While there are innumerable versions of the Bible - ranging widely in price, theme, and additions like indices, references, maps and graphs - this particular combination of the Bible and a beloved patriotic song is especially potent.

Such a notion doesn't come as a surprise to [*David W. Peters*](https://twitter.com/dvdpeters), an Anglican vicar in Pflugerville, Texas. Peters served as an enlisted Marine Corps and Army Chaplain and was deployed to Iraq in 2005.

"I am reminded of how we closed every Marine Corps boot camp chapel service with Lee Greenwood's 'God Bless the USA'," he told CNN. "We'd all sing and cry. The only emotional release in the week."

He says the range of reactions to something like a patriotic Bible shows just how different American Christianity can be, depending on the denomination or community.

"I think the essence of liberal progressive faith is compassion, so it is mind boggling (to such people) how someone could say they were a Christian and follow a guy who is very much not compassionate."

For people who view Christianity differently, or who are already unshakeable supporters of Trump, Peters says he doubts this latest incident will do anything to shake their faith.

"I think it will confirm(to them) that their critics are out of touch," he said. "Why would anyone object to a Bible?"

It's not clear where proceeds from the Bible's sales will go

In addition to the multitude of theological questions it raises, Trump's endorsement of the "God Bless the USA" Bible coincides with [*several legal battles*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/03/25/politics/takeaways-trump-legal-drama-hush-money-trial-fraud-bond) that could put the presumptive Republican nominee for president on the line for hundreds of millions of dollars.

The FAQ section of the [*"God Bless America" Bible website*](https://godblesstheusabible.com/?sld=trump) clarifies that no proceeds from the sales of the Bible will go towards Trump's presidential campaign. However, there is no mention of whether any proceeds could be put toward his personal legal troubles.

"No, GodBlessTheUSABible.com is not political and has nothing to do with any political campaign. GodBlessTheUSABible.com is not owned, managed or controlled by Donald J. Trump, The Trump Organization, CIC Ventures LLC or any of their respective principals or affiliates," the site reads.

However, it goes on to say Trump's name, likeness and image are under "paid license from CIC Ventures LLC." CIC Ventures is [*directly linked to Trump*](https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/23876912-donald-trump-oge-public-financial-disclosure-report-2023-part-1) in his 2023 public financial disclosures.

CNN has reached out to EliteSource Pro, the marketing company behind the "God Bless the USA" Bible, for more information.

Trump has been criticized before for his use of the Bible in public settings. In 2020, religious leaders from several Christian denominations [*condemned his display of the Bible*](https://www.cnn.com/2020/06/03/politics/trump-evangelicals-church-protests/index.html) in a "photo-op" in front of an Episcopal church near the White House as racial justice protests raged around the country.

"You just don't do that, Mr. President," televangelist and [*vocal Trump supporter*](https://www.cnn.com/2020/06/03/politics/trump-evangelicals-church-protests/index.html) Pat Robertson said of the incident. "It isn't cool!"

In 2015, Trump also called the Bible his favorite book, but [*famously declined*](https://www.cnn.com/2015/08/27/politics/donald-trump-favorite-bible-verses/index.html) to share a favorite verse.

By AJ Willingham, CNN

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**Load-Date:** May 14, 2024

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