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A New Breed of Evangelical Finds a Defender in Trump

A Christianity Defined by Politics, Not Churchgoing

By RUTH GRAHAM and CHARLES HOMANS

CORALVILLE, Iowa — Karen Johnson went to her Lutheran church so regularly as a child that she won a perfect attendance award. As an adult, she taught Sunday school. But these days, Ms. Johnson, a 67-year-old counter attendant at a slot-machine parlor, no longer goes to church.

She still identifies as an evangelical Christian, but she doesn't believe going to church is necessary to commune with God. “I have my own little thing with the Lord,” she says.

Ms. Johnson's thing includes frequent prayer, she said, as well as podcasts and YouTube channels that discuss politics and “what's going on in the world” from a right-wing, and sometimes Christian, worldview. No one plays a more central role in her perspective than Donald J. Trump, the man she believes can defeat the Democrats who, she is certain, are destroying the country and bound for hell.



RACHEL MUMME FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

A gathering to hear Donald J. Trump in Waterloo, Iowa.

“Trump is our David and our Goliath,” Ms. Johnson said recently as she waited outside a hotel in eastern Iowa to hear the former president speak.

White evangelical Christian voters have lined up behind Republican candidates for decades, driving conservative cultural issues into the heart of the party's politics and making nominees and presidents of Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush.

But no Republican has had a closer — or more counterintuitive — relationship with evangelicals than Mr. Trump.

The twice-divorced casino magnate made little pretense of being particularly religious before his presidency. The ardent support he received from evangelical voters in 2016 and 2020 is often described as largely transactional: an investment in his appointment of Supreme Court justices who would abolish the federal right to abortion and advance the group's other top priorities. Evangelical supporters themselves often compare Mr. Trump to the ancient Persian king Cyrus the Great, who freed a population of Jews even though he was not one of them.

But religion scholars, drawing on a growing body of data, suggest another explanation: Evangelicals are not exactly who they used to be.

Being evangelical once suggested regular church attendance, a focus on salvation and conversion and strongly held views

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TOP: AVISHAG SHAAAR-YASHUV FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES; ABOVE: IMAGE FROM VIDEO BY TREEDIS

The Day Hamas Came

No Israeli town suffered more bloodshed than Be’eri in the Oct. 7 attacks. A New York Times investigation outlines what happened during a rampage that traumatized a nation. The Bachar family hid in a safe room, above, for 13 hours that day; Hadar and her father, Avida, survived. Pages A6-8.

Trump Rebuts Himself in Bid For Immunity

By ALAN FEUER and CHARLIE SAVAGE

When former President Donald J. Trump appeared before an appeals court in Washington this week to claim he was immune from prosecution for his efforts to overturn the 2020 election, one of his lawyers argued that he should not face criminal charges because the Senate had failed to convict him of similar offenses at an impeachment trial three years ago.

But at that February 2021 trial, Mr. Trump, through a different set of lawyers, made the opposite claim: He argued that the Senate could not convict him because he was already out of office, while pointing to the criminal justice system as the legitimate remaining way to seek accountability.

“After he is out of office,” Bruce Castor, one of the impeachment lawyers, said, “you go and arrest him.”

This seeming contradiction was among the complexities about Mr. Trump's immunity claims that caught the eye of the judges on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit on Tuesday. A three-judge panel hearing his challenge to the election subversion case charges seemed skeptical of the argument.

The judges explored the apparent disconnect with D. John Sauer, a lawyer who handled the appeal for Mr. Trump. They pressed him to explain why the former president appeared to have reversed himself so drastically.

“You took the position — or your client did — during the impeachment proceedings that there would be an option for criminal prosecution later, and it's in the Congressional Record,” said Judge Florence Y. Pan.

Mr. Sauer pushed back on the idea that Mr. Trump had admitted during the impeachment trial that he could be criminally prosecuted

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Elixirs Peddled At Gas Stations Provoke Alarm

By JAN HOFFMAN

The young father headed across the parking lot to join the other parents meeting their children's new preschool teachers. After a few steps, he began sweating and twitching. As the sky reeled, he staggered back to the car, desperate to lie down in the back seat and breathe, hidden by tinted windows.

“Did you take something?” his wife, Anne, shouted at him while dialing 911. Eric, 26, had completed rehab earlier in the summer.

“The shot! The shot!” he groaned, just before he hit the ground and blacked out.

In the emergency room of a nearby hospital in southern New Jersey, doctors tried to revive him with a defibrillator.

“What's he on?” they yelled at Anne.

She showed them a shot-size bottle of the cherry-flavored elixir she had fished out of the car. It was labeled Neptune's Fix, which Eric had bought at a local smoke shop.

“What the hell is that?” a doctor asked.

Neptune's Fix features an ingredient called tianeptine — popularly known as gas-station heroin.

Often sold as a dietary supplement and promoted by retailers as a mood booster and focus aid, tianeptine is among a growing, unregulated class of potentially addictive products available in gas stations, convenience stores and smoke shops and across the internet. They typically include synthetic pharmaceuticals and plant-derived substances.

Some, like kratom and phenibut, can be addictive and, in rare cases, fatal. They often originate in other countries, including Indonesia and Russia, where they are commonly used, even prescribed, for mood management.

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Ecuador Buckles Under Gang Violence, and Fear

By ANNIE CORREAL and GENEVIEVE GLATSKY

BOGOTÁ, Colombia — A sense of dread took hold in Ecuador on Wednesday, with the streets empty, schools closed and many people afraid to leave their homes after the disappearance of two gang leaders set off prison riots, police kidnappings and the on-air storming of a TV station.

Even for a country accustomed to violence, the events that have

Division on President's Answer to the Unrest

rocked Ecuador this week were shocking.

“I feel like the world I knew before is gone,” said María Ortega, a schoolteacher in Guayaquil, a sprawling coastal city. “You can know how things start, but not how they'll end.”

It began with violence erupting in prisons across the South American country as soldiers surged into a penal compound in Guayaquil, after the disappearance of a powerful gang leader, Adolfo Macías, from his cell. Inmates at various prisons took prison guards captive, and dozens of detainees escaped, including another prominent gang leader.

The violence soon spilled over into cities and towns, where drug

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RODRIGO BUENDIA/AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE — GETTY IMAGES

Troops at the presidential palace in Quito, Ecuador, on Wednesday. At least 11 people have died.

Power Shift Jolts ESPN as a Shouting Star Derides an Executive

By KEVIN DRAPER

As it morphs from a television company into a streaming company, ESPN is undergoing rapid transformation. But if the extraordinary events of the past week are any indication, the transformation of its corporate culture is just as seismic.

For decades, the biggest star at ESPN was ESPN. A long list of its best-known employees — like Keith Olbermann, Bill Simmons and Dan Le Batard — clashed with executives, and the story always ended the same way: Those employees left, and ESPN kept right on rolling.

But last week Pat McAfee, the Indianapolis Colts punter turned new-media shock jock and ESPN star, directly criticized a powerful

Deal for ‘McAfee Show’ Puts Network in Bind

executive at the Disney-owned network by name, calling him a “rat.” Not only was Mr. McAfee not fired, he seemingly was not punished at all, shocking current and

THE WEATHER
Today, mix of sunshine and clouds, high 48. **Tonight**, clear, low 36. **Tomorrow**, a mix of clouds and sun, turning windy, heavy rain at night, high 45. Weather map, Page B8.

ISRAEL TO FIGHT GENOCIDE CLAIMS AT WORLD COURT

CASE BY SOUTH AFRICA

Argues That Term Dating to Holocaust Applies More to Hamas

By ISABEL KERSHNER and JOHN ELIGON

JERUSALEM — The International Court of Justice, the United Nations' highest judicial body, will begin hearings this week in a case brought by South Africa that accuses Israel of committing genocide in Gaza.

The hearings, the first step in a lengthy process should the case go forward, will be the first time that Israel has chosen to defend itself, in person, in such a setting, attesting to the gravity of the indictment and the high stakes for its international reputation and standing.

Genocide, the term first employed by a Polish lawyer of Jewish descent in 1944 to describe the Nazis' systematic murder of about six million Jews and others based on their ethnicity, is among the most serious crimes of which a country can be accused.

In its submission to the court, South Africa cited that lawyer, Raphael Lemkin, to expand the definition of genocide. South Africa, whose post-apartheid government has long supported the Palestinian cause, accused Israel of actions in Gaza against Hamas that are “genocidal in character.” It says Israel has killed Palestinian civilians, inflicted serious bodily and mental harm, and created for the residents of Gaza “conditions of life calculated to bring about their physical destruction.”

More than 23,000 Palestinians have been killed over the past three months, a majority of them women and children, according to health officials in Gaza. And most of the enclave's 2.2 million residents have been displaced since the war began, increasing the danger of disease and hunger, according to international organizations.

The allegation, which Israel categorically denies, is laden with a particular significance in Israel, a country founded in the wake of the near wholesale destruction of European Jewry and that soon after became a haven for Jews expelled by the hundreds of thousands from Arab lands.

Israel, a signatory to the 1948 international Convention against Genocide, is keeping the details of its defense for the court. But Israeli leaders say South Africa's allegations pervert the meaning of genocide and the purpose of the convention. A more fitting case, they say, could be brought against Hamas, an internationally labeled terrorist organization that is the target of Israel's military campaign in Gaza.

“There's nothing more atrocious and preposterous than this claim,” President Isaac Herzog of Israel said on Tuesday. “Actually,

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OCT. 7 INQUIRY A U.N. official will look into claims of sexual violence by Hamas attackers. PAGE A9



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Europe's Split on Aid for Kyiv
Ukraine's president may find strong backing on a trip to the Baltic States, but other nations are wary. PAGE A4

New Light on a British Scandal
Victims of one of the country's worst miscarriages of justice are finally seeing justice, thanks to a TV drama. PAGE A12

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Christie Ends His 2024 Bid
Chris Christie's departure leaves the Republican primary field without its most vocal critic of the front-runner, Donald J. Trump. PAGE A18

Church Abuse Case Suspended
Theodore McCarrick, a former cardinal and the highest-ranking U.S. Catholic leader to be accused of sexual abuse, was deemed unfit for trial. PAGE A14

Secret Tunnel Sets Off Melee
Videos showed a tumultuous scene as young Hasidic men clashed with the police at the Chabad-Lubavitcher global headquarters in Brooklyn. PAGE A14



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Warming Up to Ice Skating
From 100 stories high in New York to the balmy shores of Florida, rinks have been popping up all over America. PAGE D4

‘Trippy’ Breathing
To prepare the way for psychedelic therapy, clinicians are breathing their way into altered states. PAGE D5

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The commission authorized financial firms to offer a Bitcoin investment product, a landmark moment for the cryptocurrency industry. PAGE B1

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Saban Retiring From Alabama
Nick Saban, 72, is the only coach to win seven national titles in the poll era of college football. Six of them came in his 17 years with the Crimson Tide. PAGE B7

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Zeynep Tufekci PAGE A22



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A Star's Big Garage Sale
Nine hundred items from Elton John's Atlanta home are being auctioned off, including platform boots, above, that could fetch \$10,000 or so. PAGE C1

