

EARLY AND OFTEN | 6:00 A.M.

For MAGA, the Line Between God and Trump Has Blurred



By Sarah Jones, senior writer for Intelligencer who covers politics and labor

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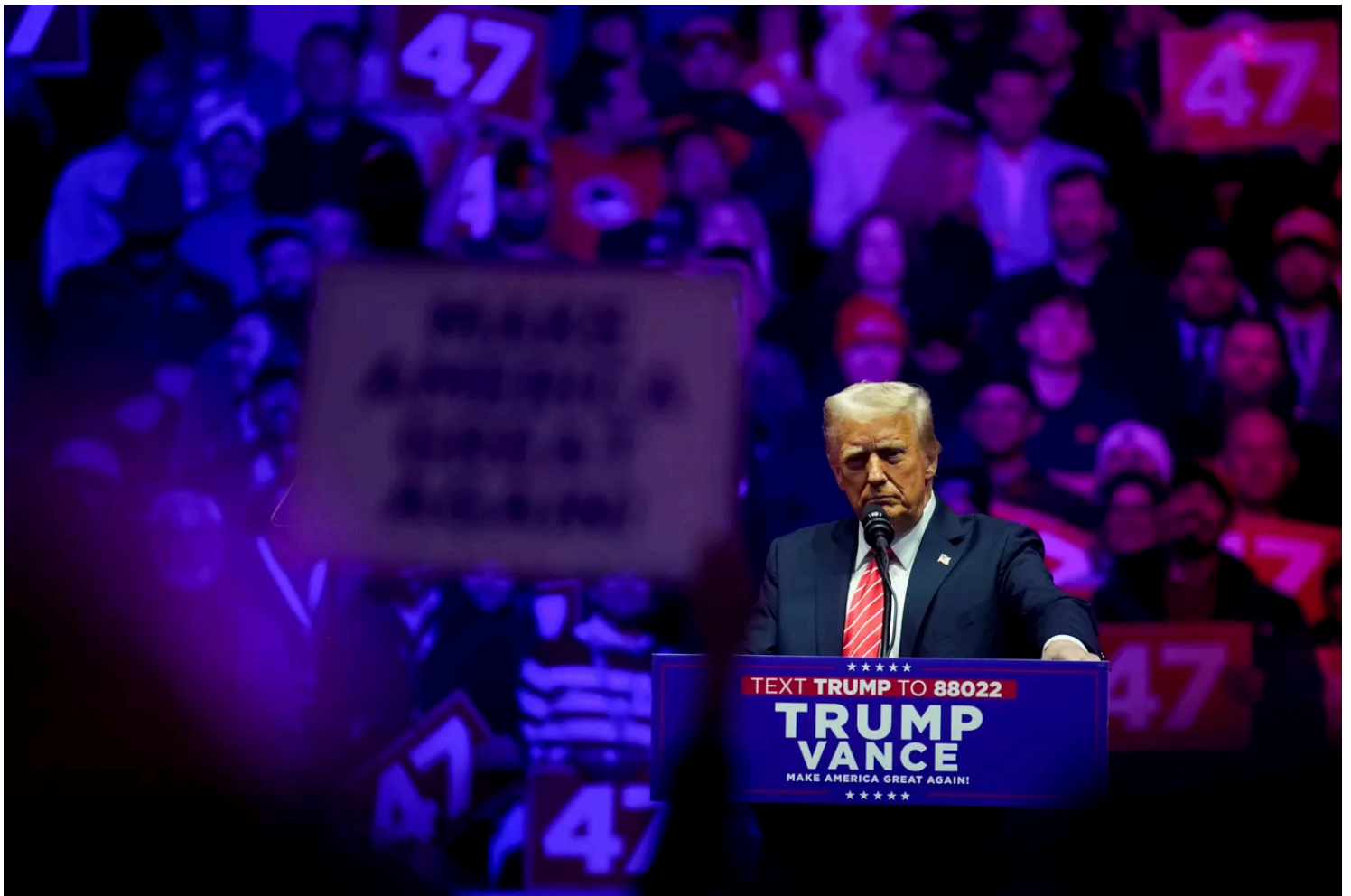


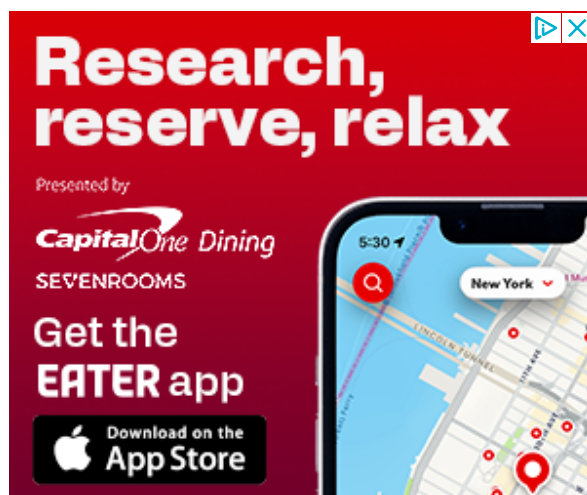
Photo: Al Drago/Bloomberg/Getty Images

If you want to work for the Trump administration, you must first prove your loyalty to the president. “Those seeking jobs have been told they will have to prove their ‘enthusiasm’ to enact Trump’s agenda and have been asked when their moment of ‘MAGA revelation’ occurred,” the Associated Press reported on Saturday, sparking an obvious religious parallel. Any true believer

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appeared to him in a heavenly light and questioned his activities. “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads,” said the Voice, and Saul, trembling, became a believer, known as the apostle Paul.

These days Donald Trump can boast his own apostles, and some, like Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth, describe their loyalties in those precise terms. In *American Crusade*, Hegseth’s 2020 book, he writes, “I was mugged on my own road to Damascus; it was a conversion moment many years in the making — but hastened by the fury of the political climate.” In Trump, Hegseth saw the “Crusader in Chief” that America had long required, and he embraced his new leader with all the fervor of the newly converted. Hegseth is a conservative Christian, and during his Senate confirmation hearing he said often that he had been redeemed by Jesus Christ. For Hegseth, who cheated on his wives and faces accusations of alcohol abuse and rape, Trump offered another, parallel form of salvation. Before Jesus elevates his soul to heaven, Trump will elevate him on Earth.



Like any good apostle, Hegseth carries out his savior’s mission. Now that he is Defense secretary, he has said that he will end diversity programs at the Pentagon and promised a renewed focus on “lethality and readiness and warfighting.” Trump is poised to strike a similar bargain with candidates for other, lesser positions: a soul in exchange for a role in his regime. To enter heaven on Earth, jobseekers must first believe.

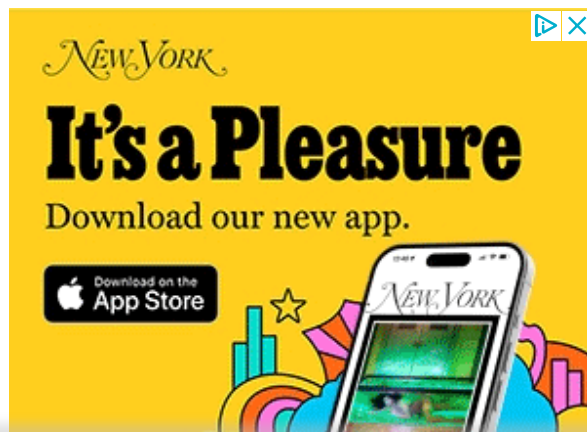
Trump owes his initial rise in part to Christian nationalists, who once considered him a modern Cyrus, or a flawed vessel for God’s will. In the years since he first came to power, he has become

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phenomenon. A strain of Christianity embraced conservative politics — and reactionary figures — a long time ago, and Trump fulfilled its yearning for a ruthless father. In doing so, he reoriented that version of Christianity around himself until it became a cult of personality, bent on power and domination.

The conflation of Trump and God was apparent last week, when conservatives erupted with outrage over a sermon by Bishop Mariann Budde, the clerical leader of the National Cathedral in Washington, D.C. Budde, who is the first woman to lead the Episcopal Diocese of Washington, urged Trump to show mercy and compassion to immigrants and anyone else who might fear his power. “I ask you to have mercy, Mr. President, on those in our communities whose children fear that their parents will be taken away,” she preached, a message that repulsed Trump and his supporters. “This is not a church and she is not a pastor,” tweeted Sean Feucht, a popular preacher and worship leader. “Do not commit the sin of empathy,” urged a far-right Christian podcaster on X. “This snake is God’s enemy and yours too. She hates God and His people. You need to properly hate in response. She is not merely deceived but is a deceiver. Your eye shall not pity.” On Truth Social, Trump attacked Budde for bringing “her church into the World of politics in a very ungracious way” and added, “She and her church owe the public an apology!”

Christian nationalism is but one tendency under the broad MAGA umbrella, but even the movement’s more secular adherents betray near-religious convictions — in their own superiority and the certainty of their triumph, in the rightness and might of Trump above all. They search for transcendence in brutality and find redemption at the feet of a man who offers earthly power if not spiritual redemption. Some can sound quite a lot like their Evangelical brothers and sisters, even if they don’t share certain metaphysical beliefs.



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Bill Ackman  

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Other than the almighty, who has accomplished more in seven days than [@POTUS](#) Trump?

To be fair, we have to keep in mind that Trump didn't rest on the seventh day.

 Last edited 5:50 PM · Jan 26, 2025



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MAGA has chosen its god-king. As the object of a new American mysticism, Trump can inspire revelation, devotion, even sacrifice. He is a source of absolution and of comfort to his followers, who number in the tens of millions. He can reshape society in ways that may be permanent, but the long-term viability of “America First” is not assured. Heresy still exists, and Trump has yet to stamp it out. The god-king is human, fallible, and frail, and his worship distorts the world. There are no saviors on Earth, no easy salvation. Trump will fail, and though his most fervent supporters will excuse him, everyone else must live with the truth.

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THE **Intelligencer** FEED

8:45 P.M. EARLY AND OFTEN

Trump's Blatantly Illegal Funding Freeze Causes Nationwide Chaos

By ED KILGORE

But a judge put a temporary halt to the freeze until constitutional questions about its legality can be resolved.



4:30 P.M. TREMENDOUS CONTENT

Why Does Trump Want Greenland? His Imperialistic Threats, Explained.

By MARGARET HARTMANN



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2:45 P.M. POLITICS

Caroline Kennedy Calls RFK Jr. a 'Predator' Ahead of Hearing



By NIA PRATER

In a letter and video, the former ambassador urged lawmakers to oppose her cousin's nomination, warning that he is "addicted to attention and power."

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By MADISON MALONE KIRCHER

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12:16 P.M. PIVOT

DeepSeek May Be the Walmart of AI

By INTELLIGENCER STAFF

In the most recent episode of *Pivot*, Kara Swisher and Scott Galloway discuss the Chinese AI firm and its cost-effective new model.



11:58 A.M. EARLY AND OFTEN

Why a Divided America Needs a ‘Deep State’

By ED KILGORE

An electorate that can’t make up its mind on which party to entrust with power makes those faceless, despised bureaucrats our only hope for stability.



11:56 A.M. CONSPIRACY THEORIES

Barack and Michelle Obama Quash Divorce Rumors via Subtweet

By MARGARET HARTMANN

The former First Couple made it clear they are still very much in love ... or very committed to needlessly lying about their relationship status!



9:00 A.M. ROUNDUP

7 Ways to Think About the DeepSeek AI Freak-out

By CHAS DANNER

The Chinese AI firm’s new model is rattling the tech industry and the stock market. Here’s some of the smart commentary on why.



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City workers and celebrities, teachers and tycoons talk about what they lost in the Los Angeles fires — and how they'll rebuild.



5:00 A.M. LOS ANGELES WILDFIRES

Pictures of a Ruined City

Photographs By DEVIN OKTAR YALKIN

Los Angeles after the fires.



1/27/2025 CONSPIRACY

When Will the Declassified JFK Files Be Released Publicly?

By MATT STIEB

The president has ordered their disclosure with a timeline that suggests it might actually happen this time.



1/27/2025 POLITICS

Will Tulsi Gabbard Be Confirmed to Top Intelligence Role?



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1/27/2025 EARLY AND OFTEN

J.D. Vance Goes After His Own Church on Immigration

By ED KILGORE

In a harsh attack on Catholic bishops for criticizing mass deportation, the veep is intensifying his administration's feud with Christian clergy.



1/27/2025 POLITICS

Adams Vague About Health Problems Keeping Him Out All Week

By NIA PRATER

The mayor will have a limited public schedule this week as he undergoes medical tests and attends doctors' appointments after feeling unwell.



1/27/2025 JUST ASKING QUESTIONS

Could the Supreme Court Back Trump on Birthright Citizenship?

By NIA PRATER

Law professor Gerard Magliocca on the multiple reasons Trump's executive order will likely fail.



1/27/2025 ENCOUNTER

Chris Hayes Made a Chamber of His Own

By RYU SPAETH

How Kierkegaard and a book contract saved the MSNBC host from smartphone addiction.



1/27/2025 SOCIAL STUDIES

The Cultural Ascendancy of the New Young Right

By BROCK COLYAR

Among the gleeful, confident, and casually cruel Trumpers who, after conquering



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The Bills' Misery Has Reached a Torturous New Level



By WILL LEITCH

Buffalo and its long-suffering fans just cannot catch a break. It's starting to feel like ill fate.

1/26/2025 POLITICS

A Brief Trade War and Other Weekend Political News



By INTELLIGENCER STAFF

Trump won a spat with Colombia, suggested a Gaza "clean out," and purged 15 inspectors general.

1/26/2025 THE DISCOURSE

Donald Trump's Fake Imperialism



By ROSS BARKAN

The Gulf of America is embarrassing. But it could be worse.

1/25/2025 SCREEN TIME

What Are AI 'Agents' For?



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1/25/2025 EARLY AND OFTEN

All That Glitters

By DAVID FREEDLANDER

Historical greatness and a MAGA crack-up both seemed possible in Trump's first week back in the White House.



1/24/2025 POLITICS

Pete Hegseth Narrowly Confirmed by Senate as Defense Secretary

By NIA PRATER AND CHAS DANNER

Three GOP senators, including Mitch McConnell, voted against Trump's embattled nominee, forcing J.D. Vance to break the tie.



1/24/2025 POLITICS

ICE Agents Detain American Citizens in Newark Raid

By NIA PRATER

In a statement, Newark mayor Ras Baraka said ICE agents detained lawful citizens during a raid on a local business, calling it an "egregious act."



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