

The President Who Prays: Trump Wants to Do What's Right

The president and first lady Melania recently did something no other president has done—they honored the evangelical community by hosting a state dinner in August 2018 “for all the good work they do,” Religion News Service reported at the time. Calling America “a nation of believers,” President Trump said he hosted the event to “celebrate America’s heritage of faith, family and freedom.”

When someone in the room asked Trump what he wanted to be remembered for, Kenneth Copeland said the president responded, “I want to be remembered as the president who prayed more than any other.” Of course, that’s not the stereotype we see in the press. In fact, the press likes to play up everything in his past that was irreligious.

“I’m telling you, the anointing was there,” Copeland said. “It was like being in a really anointed church service. Just the flow of the Spirit of God was just all over that.”

Copeland told me another story about something Trump did long before he ran for president. In 2011 Trump called Paula White Cain and asked her to gather several preachers to pray about whether he should run for president or not. “They prayed for over six hours—just stayed on their knees and stayed before God for six hours,” Copeland told me.

At the end of the prayer session Trump asked Paula what she thought. She replied that she and the pastors praying with her didn’t believe it was the right time for him to run for president. Of course, he waited until the 2016 election to run, and won. “This is the Donald Trump people don’t know anything about,” Copeland said.

Pastor Mark Burns, the black pastor from South Carolina we met in chapter 3, also sees character traits in Trump that his opponents can't see. "I believe he's getting some real things done because the president truly loves all Americans," Burns said. "He hasn't changed. And this is why he's going to win reelection."

Burns said he's told other black pastors that it doesn't matter if people hate Trump, because people hated Jesus. "It doesn't matter how many people in your congregation are Democrats. You are not a neutral place. How in the world can anyone support the killing of babies when God said in Jeremiah, 'I knew you before I formed you in your mother's womb'? That alone should turn off every Christian in this nation [to the Democratic Party]."

Burns believes Trump has accepted Christ as his Savior: "I'm telling from what I know from firsthand experience—not from what I've read. God's hand is upon his life. I'm saying he loves Jesus. And he loves the Holy Spirit. And he knows that he can't do this job without having the voice of God close to him," Burns said. "He is growing every day in his faith."

Coming from the world of business and real estate development, Donald Trump was not familiar with the language and customs of the evangelical community when he entered the White House. Although he had been a close friend and supporter of the late Dr. Norman Vincent Peale in New York and attended services at the historic Marble Collegiate Church, he was suddenly being exposed to a different perspective and a different kind of religious experience as he hobnobbed with evangelicals. But through his friendships with evangelical leaders such as Paula White Cain, James Robison, Dr. Robert Jeffress and a few others, he also was gaining a deeper appreciation for the concerns of the millions of evangelical voters who, when faced with a choice between Trump and Hillary Clinton, gave him the critical margin he needed for victory.

That appreciation turned into action. During the campaign Trump began assembling an advisory board of faith leaders with whom he could meet from time to time and who would be available by telephone to offer insight on issues of concern to the churches. Then, in mid-July 2017, he invited a group of two dozen evangelical leaders to meet with him for a few minutes in the Oval Office before a daylong listening session with the Office of Public Liaison (OPL).

At the state dinner for evangelical leaders, evangelical leader Jim Garlow marveled at how Trump seemed to know what to say and what policies and Christian principles were important to evangelicals, adding, “He seems to figure it out intuitively. I think he wants to do what’s right.” {eo}

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