

American God

a 10-minute audio documentary about the influence of evangelical Christianity on the Trump administration and their policies toward women

A series of quotes from recognisable voices cut in. Urgent music pulses underneath and rises before ducking under the narration.

NARRATOR

As the second Trump administration plunges the geopolitical world order into confusion and disarray with its erratic and baffling pronouncement, many are left wondering how to understand just what's going on with one of the world's superpowers.

Music continues under quote from minister preaching about how the government should reflect the government of heaven

NARRATOR

Look no further than the administration's close ties to the Heritage Foundation and its Project 2025. What is at once surprising and foreseeable is that the current US administration is driven by a specific type of Christianity that teaches about an omniscient, omnipresent, and omni-powerful god who commands his followers to dominate society and establish his kingdom on earth.

Music continues under a Seven Mountains Mandate quote

NARRATOR

This type of Christianity believes that once society is dominated by believers, Jesus will return and begin a reign of heaven on earth, where the wicked will be punished and the righteous will have their reward.

Music continues under another Seven Mountains quote

NARRATOR

For adherents to this type of Christianity, the righteousness of their actions toward this goal justifies nearly any means. And I should know. Because I was raised as one. To understand

the initiatives and realignments of this administration, we'll walk through some key beliefs espoused by people who are advising Donald Trump and sitting in some of the most powerful positions in America. Today, we're lifting the veil on evangelical Christianity and how it views the role of women in society.

Congregational Singing: Are You Washed in the Blood, ducking under the narration.

NARRATOR

In the bible belt of the American South, my family were in church three times a week: Sunday morning, Sunday night, and Wednesday night. And that wasn't unusual in my hometown. You might say we were the buckle of the Bible belt.

Swinging my stockinged legs from the red velvet pews, my dangling feet fitted with shiny black patent leather Mary Jane shoes, these thrice weekly meetings imbued in me the edicts and ideals for life according to evangelical Christianity. Chief among those precepts and admonitions were exacting expectations about how to be a good little church girl.

Congregational singing fades out

DAN MILLER

Wives are women, Wives are married to men, and men and women are what there are in terms of gender.

NARRATOR

This is Dan Miller, professor of religion and social thought at Landmark College in the American state of Vermont.

DAN

Maybe if it's before the service starts, they're sipping on their coffees, whatever. And the wife is on her husband's arm, smiling.

NARRATOR

Dan also happens to be a former evangelical preacher.

DAN

And in my imagination, she's just smiling. She's not talking, she's not contributing. She's just smiling. And what I hear or what I feel when I read this image, is this woman standing, or

maybe she's sitting in the pew and she's smiling, but just this image of smiling. And it's this image where she is there to accompany her husband. She is there to play her role and to be content in playing that role. ... this also implies that a wife's source of satisfaction and happiness should be her domestic relationships. It should be her husband. It should be her kids.-- ...And I think that this communicates some really well worn Christian and cultural stereotypes about women. First, I find an allusion to Paul's injunction in First Corinthians 14.

PASTOR CHUCK SMITH

So when he is saying here let the women keep silence in the churches it's not permitted for them to speak

NARRATOR

This is Pastor Chuck Smith, founder of the Calvary Chapel movement in California which started in the 1960s, preaching on First Corinthians 14.

PASTOR CHUCK

But they are commanded to be in obedience as also saith the law and now we understand what Paul is talking about if they will learn anything let them ask their husbands at home for it is a shame for a woman to speak in the church. Now evidently, as the instruction was being given, sometimes a wife would call across the room to her husband and say 'honey what's he talking about, what's he mean by that? is he talking about us?

NARRATOR

Although Pastor Chuck Smith died in 2013, the church movement he founded continues today in over eighteen hundred congregations worldwide. This preaching style is very common in the evangelical church, shifting back and forth between reading the passage and commentary on it.

PREACHER

Verse 40 says let all things be done decently and in order in an orderly manner. Well if one person is speaking at a time, is that an orderly manner? If two or three people are speaking at the same, time is that an orderly manner? You ever sat at a dinner table where there were multiple conversations going on at the same time and you try you try to follow all of those conversations I will guarantee that there's not a single male in here who can follow all of those conversations. I will also guarantee that most of the ladies in here have no problem following every one, and and knowing everything, and can jump in between those conversations just as easy as can be.

NARRATOR

It's not just the explicit directives about the right and proper place for girls and women that can be harmful, but the subtle, coded messages can undermine self-confidence, the development of a sense of self.

PREACHER

But it is an imperative, the word keep, which indicates this is a command from God let your women keep silent in the churches in the churches...

NARRATOR

By the way, this sermon was delivered at Palm Beach Lakes Church of Christ, in Florida.

PREACHER

...for they are not permitted to speak. But they are to be submissive as the law also says and if they want to learn, let them ask their own husbands at home rather than in the in the assembly for it is shameful for women to speak in the church.

NARRATOR

The way in which girls and women are talked to and talked about in evangelical churches has impact beyond the church walls. The congregants go out from their church meetings and live according to these beliefs. They run businesses according to these beliefs. They work in their local communities according to these beliefs.

Hobby Lobby court decision audio clip

Kim Davis clip

Masterpiece Cake Shop clip

NARRATOR

Because the church is often seen as a societal good, it's difficult to explain how church can hurt, or be a source of malfeasance. While those who adhere to these beliefs tend to shake off any critical analysis by claiming the authority of the Bible and of 'God,' what they fail to acknowledge in their resolute guardianship of theirs as the only right and proper moral code, is the right of others to live according to their own beliefs and moral code. And nowhere is this borne out more clearly than the role they expect women to fulfil in society, in the church, and in the family.

DAN MILLER

A smiling wife is a submissive wife. She's a wife who stands by her husband and she accepts that role. She accepts her submission. This is within a certain kind of Christian context. The idealised vision of what a woman ought to be submissive to her husband, serving her husband happy in that role, knowing that that is her true role of submission.

Series of quotes from Trump and Vance about women having more babies.

Vance – I want more babies in the United States of America...

Trump – Fertilisation President...

Trump – Whether they like it or not ...

Music rises underneath, then continues under the narration.

Congregational singing: Onward Christian Soldiers

NARRATOR

The Trump administration marches onward. The worldview shaping many of its policies, and those who are crafting and promoting these policies believe it is their religious and civic duty to establish god's law within the government and the wider American society. Or, to name it for what it is, the Trump administration is being guided by principles of Christian nationalism.

Music up and out.