

Ex-pastor at Pete Hegseth's church calls for public executions and says Bible backs Ice raids

Jason Wilson

The US defense secretary, Pete Hegseth, has repeatedly endorsed the Reformation Red Pill podcast, and has appeared on four episodes. But the former pastor who hosts the show, and who attends Hegseth's [theocratic](#) church, has voiced a range of extreme positions in recent months on issues including Ice raids, capital punishment, the racist "great replacement" theory, adultery and neo-Nazism.

The revelations come on top of recent media reports focused on Hegseth also boosting a video of Douglas Wilson and other Communion of Reformed Evangelical Churches (CREC) pastors arguing that women should lose the vote in the United States. They also follow previous revelations about Hegseth's [links to or apparent sympathies](#) for Christian nationalist positions.

Joshua Haymes is a member of the CREC-aligned Pilgrim Hill Reformed Fellowship (PHRF), and his podcasts advocate for the CREC's moral and theological positions. As the Guardian [previously reported](#), he once served as a pastoral intern at the church. Online he has claimed that liberalism is a greater threat to the US than neo-Nazism, and that the Bible is "pro-Ice raids". On X, he has also advocated for capital punishment for adultery and abortion, and appeared to call for the drowning of LGBTQ+ Pride marchers.

In an emailed comment, Haymes clarified his current professional role. "I am not a pastoral intern. I have gone full-time into media and content creation. I am not employed by Pilgrim Hill Reformed Fellowship," he said.

Despite distancing himself from the PHRF, Haymes regularly hosts Brooks Pottenger, the congregation's pastor and Hegseth's closest spiritual adviser. Pottenger's [most recent appearance](#) was just over a week ago. Pottenger appears alongside Haymes in the profile image for the podcast's channel on YouTube, whose description reads: "We created this podcast as a resource to serve you in your reformation red pill journey."

These materials, mostly published since Hegseth was confirmed as secretary of defense, underline the extreme Christian nationalist positions at Pilgrim Hill, in Goodlettsville, Tennessee, the community within which Hegseth acquired an 8,800 sq ft, \$3.4m mansion in 2022.

The Guardian repeatedly sent requests for comment to Hegseth via the Pentagon's centralized communications office. A Pentagon spokesman offered a link to a [transcript](#) of a 14 August press conference in which Pentagon press secretary Kingsley Wilson told reporters Hegseth "is a proud member of a church that is affiliated with the Congregation of Reformed Evangelical Churches which was founded by Pastor Doug Wilson. He is a very proud Christian and has those traditional Christian viewpoints."

Heidi Beirich, co-founder and chief strategy officer of the Global Project Against Hate and Extremism, told the Guardian in an email: "It is completely unacceptable, and frankly terrifying, that our defense secretary, [Pete Hegseth](#),

has appeared on Joshua Haymes’s podcasts.”

She added: “The leader of the Pentagon is in league with white supremacists, Confederacy lovers, people who want to take away women’s right to vote and slavery apologists. In earlier eras, a person with ties like that would never have reached the heights of federal power or been acceptable to the GOP.”

Joshua Haymes

The Guardian [previously reported](#) that Hegseth appeared on four consecutive episodes of the Reformation Red Pill podcast, which Haymes hosts, in which he appeared to endorse the radical doctrine of “sphere sovereignty”, which sees all aspects of human life, including government, as being bound by a vision of biblical law that includes Old Testament precepts of morality and punishment.

In those podcasts, Hegseth also explains that he and his wife moved to the area initially to enroll their children in a “classical Christian” school associated with the church, and that the move had shaped his world view.

“We thought we were moving to a school, but we moved to a church and a community and a whole view of the world that has changed the way we think too,” he told Haymes.

Haymes has also supported Hegseth. After Hegseth’s nomination for defense secretary triggered a wave of reporting about allegations against him of sexual assault and public drunkenness, Haymes began a 15 November X [post](#) with “[@PeteHegseth](#) is a sinner saved by grace ... Pete is a member in good standing in our church.”

By his own account in posts and podcasts, Haymes tried and failed to establish a church in Los Angeles, a failure he has attributed to his own conversion to theological postmillennialism partway through the attempt.

[Postmillennialism](#) holds that Christ will return after a golden age in which Christianity dominates the world, a belief that often fuels Christian nationalist movements seeking to transform society through religious and political means.

The [same theological framework](#) undergirds the positions of CREC churches [and Douglas Wilson](#), who advocate for implementing Old Testament civil law in modern governance.

Since 2023, according to data brokers and Sumner county property records, Haymes, 33, has lived in Hendersonville, Tennessee. His home is located just 15 minutes’ drive from Hegseth’s Goodlettsville estate, but is on a far more modest scale than the defense secretary’s four-bed, seven-bathroom pile, which sits on almost 80 acres, according to property records and realtor advertisements.

Hegseth has repeatedly boosted Haymes’s X account and podcasts. On 4 October 2024, Hegseth [quote-posted](#) Haymes’s own link to a Reformation Red Pill episode entitled “Should you join a CREC church?” with the comment “Great discussion 🙌”.

‘The Bible is ... pro-Ice raids’

In a 17 July podcast, Haymes reacted to a podcast by the New Evangelicals, a Christian non-profit critical of Christian nationalism, in order to argue the case that Ice immigration raids have a biblical basis, and went on to link

his claims with a version of the “great replacement” conspiracy theories.

“Is the Bible in favor of these Ice raids?” he asked listeners near the start of the recording. “The answer is yes.”

He added: “The Bible does not require wealthy Christian nations to self-immolate for the horrible crime of having a flourishing economy and way of life, all right? [The Bible](#) does not permit the civil magistrate to steal money from its citizens to pay for foreign nationals to come destroy our culture.”

He then joined these remarks up with the idea of white replacement, saying: “And make no mistake, mass immigration is designed by liberal globalists to destroy, to destroy our culture ... Anglo-Protestant culture.”

The same “liberal globalists”, he warned, “they want open borders and they didn’t hide it, right? They, and specifically, they want more non-Christian, non-white people to come [to] supplant and replace the white voting population.”

Tim Whitaker, a co-host of the New Evangelicals podcast, told the Guardian: “This idea that mass immigration is designed by liberal globalists to destroy Anglo-Protestant culture? This is literally what the KKK preached.”

He said that on immigration, Haymes had adduced “classic white supremacist talking points”, adding: “As a Christian, I reject such claims.”

Whitaker said: “They call themselves followers of Christ, but then when Jesus says to welcome the stranger, and that word’s really better translated as immigrant or refugee, that is ignored.”

In an email, Haymes reaffirmed his comments in the podcast recording.

He said: “I believe that it is indisputable that the left is bribing the third world to come to America, primarily to try and gain a permanent electoral majority. And they have no problem destroying American culture to accomplish their ends. You can call that whatever you want.”

In the podcast, Haymes also appeared to regret the demise of the slaveholding US Confederacy, depicting it as a constitutional matter during which the south simply wanted to secede, and “Lincoln and the north, the federal government said: no, you may not, you may not secede, and we’ll kill you if you try.”

He added: “The south was conquered, in a sense, which is sad. And yeah, we really did lose that federalism, that localism in that and [then] the federal government blew up. I mean, expanded in a way that it was never meant to. And we’ve never recovered from that. I pray that we can recover from that, but we haven’t.”

‘Terms like “antisemitic” don’t mean anything any more’

In a 10 July podcast, Haymes discussed the incident that month that saw Elon Musk’s Grok AI spout neo-Nazi and antisemitic talking points on X, at one point describing itself as “MechaHitler”.

Near the beginning of the recording, Haymes said: “I used to use the term ‘antisemitic’. I used to think that it was a helpful term, but I’ve since come to believe that that term is not helpful, maybe at all.”

He said the word was “left-coded”, and that it could be applied in criticisms of the Bible, saying: “This book says

that the Jews killed Christ, which they did. There's no question about that. That's literally what the Bible says. So that [critics say] verses like that are antisemitic."

He added: "So whenever Hitler can be antisemitic and all Christians who believe the Bible are also antisemitic, I've just come to believe that it's not a useful word."

He instead uses the term "Jew-hatred", and acknowledged that "a lot of guys really are going that way", but immediately said: "I think we can laugh about it because it's not an existential threat like the media wants to make out."

He added that "the real existential threat is not coming from neo-Nazis" and "liberalism, that's the existential threat that we face".

"I know they're gonna call me antisemitic, but that's OK," adding: "I'm not concerned about being called that because I know that I actually don't hate Jews."

"I love all people that truly Christ calls us to love people. And I genuinely want them all to repent and come to Christ."

The idea that Jews who refuse to convert to Christianity are sinful is one aspect of what scholars of religion and Jewish advocates [have called supersessionism](#), which can itself be antisemitic, depending on the context.

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Haymes has aired the same sentiment on X in recent weeks, writing in a 13 August post: "One Day EVERY Jew Muslim Hindu Buddhist Atheist & Agnostic Will bow before King Jesus and call Him Lord."

In the podcast, Haymes then characterized rising neo-Nazi and far-right sentiment on X as "the price of free speech", saying: "You're either gonna have free speech or you're not. I mean, if you're gonna have free speech, you're gonna have people saying deplorable things."

On those venting neo-Nazi sentiment online, Haymes said: "I think a lot of it is guys who ... don't actually believe that Jews should be exterminated. They don't actually believe that Hitler was some great guy."

Rather, he said: "A lot of young men in particular, they've seen the media, they've seen all of our institutions, all our liberal institutions, completely beclown themselves and totally discredit themselves."

In an emailed comment, Haymes underlined his claims about the relative threats posed by neo-Nazism and liberalism.

"Liberalism is the greatest threat to the flourishing of our nation at the moment. Neo-Nazi ideology ... it's basically non-existent in the west today."

Haymes also said: "No one should be hated simply because of their race. I am totally against Jew-hatred. I have made it very clear publicly on multiple occasions."

On X

Recently on X, Haymes has expressed views that are, if anything, more extreme than those he has expressed in podcasts.

In a 1 August post, Haymes flatly endorsed the views of the white nationalist founder of the American Renaissance journal and conference, Jared Taylor.

[Reposting](#) a video of a 2017 interview of Taylor by broadcast journalist Amna Nawaz in which Taylor recited a version of the “great replacement” conspiracy theory, Haymes wrote: “Correct. Diversity is not our strength ... It is good to love your people & your place and seek to preserve it from destruction. This is a Christian impulse.”

In an emailed comment, Haymes wrote: “I am not a white nationalist or white supremacist. My cousin is black, and my brother-in-law is Chinese, and I’m glad they’re here. I have no idea who that white nationalist is.”

On 27 July, reacting to a controversial appearance by Mehdi Hasan on the Jubilee broadcast in which Hasan faced down self-confessed “far-right” adherents and “fascists”, Haymes [posted](#): “White People Are Native Americans.”

In X posts, Haymes has recently called for [bans on the adoption of children](#) by LGBTQ+ parents.

Commenting on a clip of his own podcast on 12 August, in which he had discussed the apprehension of an alleged child sexual abuser, Haymes wrote: “Public executions are Biblical. Therefore public executions are good. Therefore we should bring back public executions.”

He has also called for capital punishment for a wide range of other perceived infractions such as adultery and abortion.

In an emailed comment, Haymes qualified his support for executions on moral grounds. He wrote: “I believe that murdering a baby should receive capital punishment. I believe that would effectively end child sacrifice in our nation.”

He added: “I am not in favor of rushing to capital punishment for adultery. Though in principle I am not against it. I am certainly in favor of completely overturning no-fault divorce and outlawing adultery, and enforcing serious penalties for it.”

In a 28 June post, Haymes appeared to hint that Nashville Pride marchers should be drowned.

Reposting footage of the parade, he wrote: “We’re short on millstones at the Nashville Pride parade. This is sick. This is child abuse.”

In [Matthew 18:6](#), [Mark 9:42](#) and [Luke 17:42](#), Jesus purportedly says words to the effect that for those who cause children to stumble or sin, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the sea.

In an emailed comment on this post, Haymes wrote: “I do not advocate for violence against Pride marchers. I do not advocate for violence of any kind.”

He added: “I do not believe that anyone should be drowning anyone in this scenario. I am simply stating the fact that Christ says that drowning is better than causing little ones to sin.”

Haymes continued: “My role is simply to give that warning. Pride marchers who are sexualizing children are in for a very, very harsh judgment when they stand before their maker.”

On 5 August, Haymes [posted](#) that homosexuality is “uniquely evil”.

Haymes has habitually portrayed non-Christian faiths and non-Christian immigrants as sinister.

On 9 August, he [posted](#): “You guys remember the Muhammadan travel ban from Trump 1? That was awesome.” On 5 August, [reacting](#) to [news](#) of the erection of a statue of the Hindu deity Rama in Mississauga, Ontario, he posted: “This is what a conquered nations [sic] looks like.”

On 2 August, he [posted](#) a screenshot of a link to a listicle entitled “Ten Hindu deities to know as a yoga teacher” with the comment: “I’m pretty positive yoga is demonic.”

In a post characterizing his political views, Haymes put himself to the right of “far right” on a diagram, characterizing his own position as “God’s law”.

Along with adultery, Haymes has posted that [gender-affirming surgeries](#) and [abortion](#) should be capital crimes.

On execution methods, in a [17 November post](#) Haymes wrote that he was “not yet sold on the idea that all capitol [sic] punishment must be a public stoning where the community partakes”, and said his preference was a “death by a public firing squad wherein the accuser and witnesses partake in the firing”.

On 29 July, he [straightforwardly outlined](#) his own preferred political program: “Republican Platform 2032 – Abolish Abortion & IVF – Ban Pornography – Bring Back Public Executions For Violent Offenders – Outlaw No Fault Divorce – Overturn Obergefell – Ban Gay Adoption – Ban public indecency (Which would ban pride parades). What did I miss?”

In a 9 August post, Haymes hinted he believes not all citizens should be allowed to vote when he [reiterated](#) the position of other CREC pastors: “Voting is not a sacred right granted by God.”

Beirich, the extremism expert, said: “Haymes is a white supremacist who endorses the racist ‘great replacement’ conspiracy theory and talks of American culture as ‘Anglo-Protestant’.”

She added: “He is pro-Confederate, calls the LGBTQ+ community ‘uniquely evil’, endorses the ideas of Jared Taylor, one of our country’s most prominent white nationalists, and calls for insane things like public executions. This is what the Trump era has brought us.”