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Bishop Joseph E. Strickland of Tyler, Texas, speaks from the floor during the fall general asser

Bishop Joseph E. Strickland of Tyler, Texas, speaks from the floor during the fall general assembly of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops in Baltimore Nov. 11, 2019. (CNS photo/Bob Roller)

Jack Jenkins

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A conservative Catholic bishop in Texas praised a speech by actor Jim Caviezel this week, lauding remarks that included criticism of Pope Francis and were delivered at a conference connected to QAnon.

Bishop Joseph Strickland, who heads the Diocese of Tyler and is known for his controversial brand of conservatism, tweeted out a link to a website praising Caviezel's speech on Monday (Oct. 25), with the prelate insisting "all need to listen" to its message. By then a clip of the speech had already been widely shared on social media in which the actor recites a line from Mel Gibson's 1995 movie "Braveheart."

“You can take our lives, but you can never take our freedom,” shouted Caviezel, who portrayed Jesus in Gibson’s 2004 film “The Passion of the Christ.”

Caviezel then added a faith-fueled addendum that appeared to be at least partly of his own design.

“Every man dies. Not every many truly lives,” he said. “We must fight for that authentic freedom and live, my friends. By God we must live. And with the Holy Spirit as your shield and Christ as your sword, may you join St. Michael and all the angels in defending God and sending Lucifer and his henchman straight right back to hell where they belong.”

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The speech took place at the “For God & Country: Patriot Double Down” conference convened in Las Vegas over the weekend. According to the Las Vegas Sun, the gathering featured an array of controversial conservative speakers, including those who have spread misinformation about COVID-19 and conspiracy theories associated with the QAnon movement.

The speakers also included Couy Griffin, a pastor and founder of Cowboys for Trump who has said he believes former President Donald Trump was “ordained by God." Griffin led a prayer at the insurrection on Jan. 6 and was later arrested upon his return to the Washington, D.C., area. Clips of Griffin from the conference show him declaring participation in the insurrection as a “badge of honor,” although he insisted he did not engage in violence that day. (He also expressed frustration he and people arrested for their role in the insurrection did not receive more support from Trump.)

The widely shared clip of Caviezel did not show his full speech, but a longer video suggests it was largely a recitation of President Ronald Reagan’s 1964 “A Time for Choosing” address — but with new religious references, anti-mask sentiment, modern-day conservative causes and QAnon conspiracy theories inserted into Reagan’s lines.

Whereas Reagan said “we cannot buy our security, our freedom from the threat of the bomb,” Caviezel declared “we cannot buy our security as ‘one nation under God,’ our freedoms in Christ our Savior from the threat of the devil any longer.”

Similarly, whereas Reagan used the term “Iron Curtain” to refer to Soviet Russia, Caviezel adapted the speech to say “millions and millions of little children now caught behind the iron curtain of sex-trafficking and abortion” — a possible homage to the conspiratorial QAnon belief in widespread child sex trafficking perpetrated by a secret cabal of Democratic Satan worshippers.

Caviezel, a Catholic, also inserted an implicit condemnation of his religious opponents — including the pope. Where Reagan insisted "every lesson of history tells us that the greater risk lies in appeasement, and this is the specter our well-meaning liberal friends refuse to face," Caviezel amended the line slightly to specify, “Christian liberal friends.”

He further added he was referring to “our priests, our pastors and now, sadly, even our pope” before returning to Reagan’s suggestion that appeasement “gives no choice between peace and war, only between fight or surrender.”

Caviezel’s closing remarks also appeared to make reference to “the storm,” a belief popular among QAnon devotees that Trump would cast out evil forces from positions of power.

“We are headed into the storm of all storms,“ he said. “Yes, the storm is upon us.”