News
Analysis



A man kneels during a vigil for Charlie Kirk, Sept. 11, 2025, in Orem, Utah. (AP/Lindsey Wasson)

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Washington, D.C. — September 17, 2025
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As he sat behind a microphone for nearly two hours in the White House complex on Monday (Sept. 15), Vice President JD Vance's face hung with visible emotion. As the guest host of Charlie Kirk's podcast, he talked with a series of White House officials as they told stories about Kirk, the right-wing activist who was killed by an assassin's bullet last week while speaking at a college in Utah.

But as the vice president began to draw the episode to a close, the tone shifted from mournful reflection to righteous indignation. Vance recited a version of the Apostle's Creed, saying it was the "most important truth" Kirk uttered during his career. Vance then spent several minutes railing against the "far left," suggesting it was a source of political violence, even as the motive for Kirk's shooting remains unknown. The vice president encouraged listeners, who numbered at least in the hundreds of thousands over the course of the broadcast, to complain to the employers of anyone they saw "celebrating Charlie's murder."

As he concluded, Vance turned to a passage from Scripture about spiritual warfare. "St. Paul tells us in the Book of Ephesians to put on the full armor of God," said Vance, a Catholic who credited Kirk during the podcast with cementing his status as President Donald Trump's running mate in the 2024 presidential campaign. "Let all of us put on that armor and commit ourselves to that cause for which Charlie gave his life: to rebuild a United States of America, and to do it by telling the truth."

Remembrances for Kirk, including at the U.S. Capitol and the White House, have similarly mixed religion with a bellicose brand of right-wing politics, as Kirk, an evangelical Christian who aligned himself with forms of Christian nationalism, often did. As family members, elected officials, faith leaders and fans of Kirk mourned him over the past week, many were defiant — and some, angry.

At Sunday worship at Dream City Church in Phoenix, close to one of Kirk's homes and the headquarters of his campus organization, Turning Point USA , the service was titled "Freedom Day in America," an apparent echo of the "Freedom Night in

America" events Kirk frequently hosted at the church.

The church's pastor, Luke Barnett, played an audio clip for the congregation in which a version of Kirk's voice, cloned by artificial intelligence, responded to a prompt asking what he would say in the wake of his own death. "America is worth it," the AI Kirk said in the clip, which has gone viral online. "Free speech is worth it. Fighting for the unborn, for families, for sanity in a culture gone mad. It is all worth it. So dry your tears, pick up your cross, and get back in the fight."

Earlier in the service, Barnett compared Kirk to the Apostle Paul, saying the activist "lived his life" like the biblical figure. Later, Tommy Barnett, Luke's father and co-pastor, responded to a question about people criticizing Kirk by likening the activist to Jesus Christ himself. "They did the same thing to Jesus," Tommy Barnett said. "Just imagine what they called him. Just imagine what they did to him."

Other AI-generated images and videos that have circulated widely show Kirk posed in a heavenly vista with Presidents Abraham Lincoln and John F. Kennedy as well as the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., all of whom died by assassination.

At a memorial for Kirk at the Kennedy Center over the weekend, Director of National Intelligence Tulsi Gabbard invoked King in a well-known quote, "Darkness cannot drive out darkness, only light can do that," adding that Kirk "lived his life" by that line.

The religious allusions were a recognition of the personal and professional shift Kirk underwent in the final years of his life. While Turning Point USA was founded primarily as an organization oriented toward college students, Kirk, who was raised mainline Presbyterian, began to embrace evangelical Christianity as part of his public persona around 2019. Since then, faith has become a focus of TPUSA, with the organization launching a project known as TPUSA Faith and hosting conferences for pastors.

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Even so, critics of Kirk noted that he publicly denigrated King, a civil rights icon, and criticized the Civil Rights Act of 1964, legislation that was passed partly in answer to King's campaign for equal rights for Black Americans. The Rev. Bernice King, King's daughter, posted a tweet criticizing a widely shared image of Kirk alongside King

and other assassinated leaders by adding the caption, "there are so many things wrong with this."

The Rev. Howard-John Wesley, pastor of Alfred Street Baptist Church in Alexandria, Virginia, lamented Kirk's killing but took umbrage at Trump's directive to fly U.S. flags at half-staff. "Charlie Kirk did not deserve to be assassinated," Wesley said, according to ALXnow. "But I am overwhelmed seeing the flags of the United States of America at half-staff, calling this nation to honor and venerate a man who was an unapologetic racist and spent all of his life sowing seeds of division and hate into this land."

Wesley, who was named a Martin Luther King Jr. Scholar on his graduation from Boston University School of Theology, told his congregation: "How you die does not redeem how you lived. You do not become a hero in your death when you are a weapon of the enemy in your life."

But among supporters of Kirk, much of the rhetoric has portrayed him precisely as a martyr.

"Charlie always said that, when he was gone, he wanted to be remembered for his courage and his faith," Kirk's widow, Erika Kirk, said last week in a speech delivered from the studio where her husband recorded his podcast. "One of the final conversations that he had on this earth, my husband witnesses for his Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."

She added: "Now, and for all eternity, he will stand at his savior's side wearing the glorious crown of the martyr."

Those who framed Kirk's death this way urged his fans to honor Kirk by deepening their Christian faith.

"It's been said that the blood of the martyrs is the seeds of the church and we're going to see great faith rise up across the country from this — I believe it — and in the world," Andrew Kolvet, a TPUSA staffer who produces "The Charlie Kirk Show" podcast, told Fox News. "My request is, if you want to honor Charlie to, it is Sunday … Go back to church. Open your Bible. Pray. That's what he wanted."

Some said Kirk has already made an impact on people's faith. At the Kennedy Center on Sunday evening, Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. said

that while his niece was packing for college in recent days, her mother noticed her placing a Bible in her suitcase. Asked why she was bringing it along, Kennedy said, the niece replied: "I want to live like Charlie Kirk."

Media personality Benny Johnson claimed he has seen "Satanists" convert to Christianity after Kirk's death, and the controversial pastor Mark Driscoll, who lives in Arizona, shared screenshots of a text message exchange with Kirk on Instagram, in which the activist appears to be asking religious questions. "I didn't ask for it but I have become a high profile defender of the faith," Kirk says in the screenshot.

Driscoll added a caption that read: "I pray millions of young men would become defenders of the faith as a result of this demonic assassination."

But political figures seemed to make little separation between Kirk's faith and his political work. At the Kennedy Center vigil, White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt said Kirk "preached a message of faith to all who would listen," before praising the agenda of the Trump administration Kirk helped shape and bring to power.

Leavitt encouraged listeners to "take up Charlie's torch," adding, "We have to lean on our faith, dig in, and fight back harder than ever before." If Kirk's widow was able to speak about her husband just days after his death, Leavitt argued, "every person in this room can rededicate themselves to the righteous cause of keeping America the greatest country in the world."

The remembrances are expected to continue until at least this weekend, when TPUSA is planning what organizers hope will be a massive vigil at State Farm Stadium in Arizona. Trump is among those expected to appear.