News
Analysis



Donald Trump, at the time the Republican U.S. presidential candidate, embraces Carrie Prejean Boller, a Catholic, after a rally with supporters in San Diego May 27, 2016. (OSV News/Reuters/Jonathan Ernst)



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A major rift in the coalition that elected Donald Trump, split between traditionalist Catholics and evangelicals and prompted by purity tests around support for Israel, has spilled out from the deep recesses of online culture. It threatens a wider battle over the future of the Republican Party just months before midterm elections.

The firing of Carrie Prejean Boller from Trump's Religious Liberty Commission last month, coupled with a viral social media post shared by U.S. Sen. Ted Cruz, seems to have brought an already simmering pot of ideological tensions to a boil.

Prejean Boller, a former model and a political activist who became Catholic last year, has defended conspiratorial comments made by online influencer Candace Owens, who made claims without evidence that Israel was behind the September assassination of Charlie Kirk. During one hearing on the religious liberty commission, Prejean Boller argued that "Catholics do not embrace Zionism," comments that eventually brought to light an ongoing fight among Trump's supporters over the role Israel plays in U.S. foreign policy.

Prejean Boller has since claimed that the U.S. government is being "occupied by a foreign government named Israel," and that she herself was a victim of religious persecution. "As a new convert to Catholicism, I never recognized the hatred our government has for Catholics," she told LifeSiteNews.

At issue is disagreement about how strongly the U.S. should support the foreign policy goals of its ally, Israel, with some evangelical Trump supporters accusing conservative Catholics, including Boller Prejean, of antisemitism.

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After her firing was formalized on March 12, Boller accused the commission of asking her to violate Catholic teaching, and condemned Trump for betraying MAGA Catholics.

"Today, I struggle to recognize the movement you started. It appears to have been hijacked by a foreign government and religious zealots attempting to fulfill their heretical end times fantasy," she wrote.

"I have been unjustly removed and my religious freedom has been violated, and most Catholics who voted for you feel the exact same way. Why have you betrayed us?"

Shortly after Israel and the United States started a war with Iran, a viral post on X by user "Insurrection Barbie" amassed more than 5 million views, bringing the conflict into the mainstream — earning the endorsement of Cruz.

The lengthy testimony, titled "How a Network of Political Catholic Integralists, Russian Ideologues, and Media Provocateurs Are Systematically Dismantling the Evangelical Foundation of the American Right," also drew the attention of MAGA personalities Laura Loomer, Dana Loesch and Dan Bongino, but it was endorsement of a U.S. senator that raised eyebrows.

"READ every word of this. It's the best & most comprehensive explanation of what we're fighting," Cruz wrote on X.

In the article, the author painstakingly details an alleged scheme wherein she accuses traditionalist Catholics of attempting to undermine and remove the "evangelical base" of the Republican Party. The post includes the Heritage Foundation, Catholic Answers and the Society of St. Pius X as part of a group of traditionalist Catholic organizations that is engaged in a plot to essentially overthrow the Republican Party.

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It goes on to outline an alleged Catholic plan to replace "evangelical Protestant political theology with a Catholic integralist or ethnonationalist framework that views Jews, Israel and Protestants not as covenant partners but as adversaries of Christian civilization."

"Remove it, or transform it, and you have a different party. Not a party with different policies. A party with different gods," the post states.

Some traditionalist Catholics, many of whom are Trump supporters, responded to this broadside with indignation.

"Insinuating that Catholics who prefer a reverent liturgy like the Traditional Latin Mass (totally licit & mainstream) and who debate the merits of parts of Vatican II are — subversives plotting the downfall of America? Wow. Utter bigotry. Nasty stuff," posted podcaster Liz Wheeler.

"Senator Cruz. Please stop imposing your Zionist religion on me. It's un-American. I'm a Catholic. Please stop telling me how I'm allowed to practice my religion," wrote Catholic author E. Michael Jones. That post was retweeted by Prejean Boller.

Prejean Boller has become a celebrity for the Catholic right. She was announced as the recipient of Catholics for Catholics' "Catholic Champion Award," which she accepted at the Catholic Prayer for America Gala in Washington, D.C., on March 19. The group Catholics for Catholics endorsed Trump in 2024, but has stepped up its anti-war rhetoric in recent weeks. It has reached out to Catholics who have taken a stance against the bombing of Iran, including Joe Kent, who resigned his post as director of the National Counterterrorism Center on March 17.



Joe Kent, then director of the National Counterterrorism Center, interacts with Department of Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem during a House Committee Homeland Security Hearing on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C., Dec. 11, 2025. (Wikimedia Commons/DHSgov/Mikaela McGee)

"Iran posed no imminent threat to our nation, and it is clear that we started this war due to pressure from Israel and its powerful American lobby," Kent wrote in his resignation letter.

Hours after he resigned, Catholics for Catholics announced that Kent would join Prejean at its gala.

The split over Iran appears to be more than a slight disagreement in the MAGA universe.

In a now viral video clip, Prejean Boller announced: "MAGA is Dead. It is deader than dead, and Americans are furious. We do not recognize Donald J. Trump anymore."

With some high-profile Catholics in the MAGA world criticizing Israel, some Catholic leaders are worried about rising levels of antisemitism.

The day before the Catholics for Catholics gala, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops published a video featuring Archbishop Sample of Portland, Oregon, calling on Catholics to "reject the conspiracies and the lies that lead to harassment and even violence against our Jewish brothers and sisters."

Sample, a proponent of the Latin Mass, which is popular with traditionalist Catholics, said in the video that there is "a strong connection between religious freedom and working to counter anti-semitism."

Cruz shared the bishops' conference video on X.

Massimo Faggioli, professor in ecclesiology at the Loyola Institute at Trinity College Dublin, told NCR in an email that church leaders are faced with the daunting challenge of upholding the church's teaching against antisemitism while also being critical of Israel's actions in places such as Gaza.

"The leaders of the Catholic Church know that keeping together the narrative of Nostra aetate [Vatican II's 1965 Declaration on the Relation of the Church with Non-Christian Religions] against antisemitism AND the need to interpret what happened in Gaza as a 'sign of the times' has become more difficult and politically exposed to manipulations of all kinds," Faggioli said.

How MAGA Catholics will respond to such remains to be seen.

"This feels like a moment of reckoning for Catholics caught up in MAGA, especially for those desperate to reconcile obedience to church authority with support for Trump," Austen Ivereigh, a biographer of Pope Francis, wrote in an email to NCR.

"What has been unmasked by this appalling war are the pre-millenarian dispensationalism and hardcore Zionist fantasies of those who ordered it," Ivereigh continued. "Many are realizing that the soul of MAGA is viscerally anti-Catholic and racist, not to mention pagan in its pessimism, and it's time to jump off the bandwagon."

From the online exchanges, serious and significant anti-Catholic bigotry exists on the evangelical right. That anti-Catholic sentiment, coupled with the emergence of apocalyptic Zionism and the evangelical right's resolute fealty to Israel no matter what, has set them on a collision course with traditionalist Catholics.

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Yet the traditionalist Catholic position against the war in Iran feels disingenuous. The same people condemning the war in Iran were mostly silent during Trump's strike on Venezuela and have yet to call out the president's saber-rattling in Greenland, Mexico or Cuba.

It would appear that their anti-war stance has more to do with anti-Zionism and isolationism, and less to do with the Catholic Church's anti-war position and Pope Leo XIV's statements against the war. It is also worth noting that traditionalist Catholic groups have been epicenters of antisemitism in the past, and there has been a documented rise in antisemitism in Catholic circles.

If traditionalist Catholics do not have a political home in MAGA, where would they go? Experts say that's hard to predict.

Faggioli pointed not just to the rift between evangelicals and Catholics, but an internal rift "on the question of antisemitism and Israel (but not only) that makes it difficult to predict where this will go."

"Traditionalist Catholics do not have another political home where they can go, and I am not sure they are ready for a complete political homelessness. But it is true that Trumpism is a natural political home much more for evangelicals than for Catholics," he said.

As the dominos continue to fall and the Iran war continues, one thing is becoming clear: Traditionalist Catholics appear to be losing their place in the MAGA coalition.