

OPINION

# The Problem of the Christian Assassin

June 19, 2025, 5:04 a.m. ET

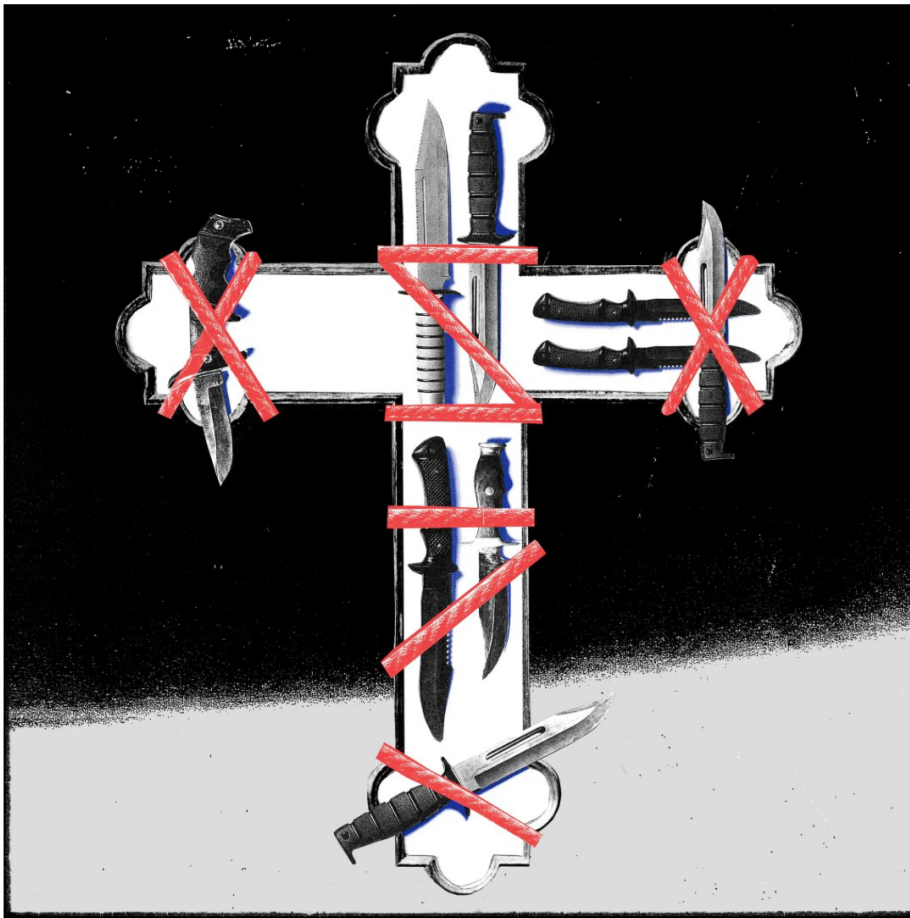



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By **David French**  
Opinion Columnist

On Saturday morning, Americans woke up to horrifying news. According to a [federal criminal complaint](#), a man named Vance Boelter had stalked four Minnesota lawmakers and then attacked two of them — State Senator John Hoffman and State Representative Melissa Hortman — killing Hortman and her husband and wounding Hoffman and his wife.

Boelter made lists of Democratic Party officials and abortion rights activists and purchased a high-quality silicone mask to shield his identity. He also disguised himself as a police officer to gain access to his targets.

When Boelter's identity was first made public, right-wing figures online tried to identify him as a Democrat, or even a radical leftist. Why? Because he'd been appointed to a nonpartisan board by Mark Dayton, a previous Democratic governor, and then reappointed by Gov. Tim Walz.

But a moment's [additional research](#) dispelled that notion. Boelter's roommate identified him as a Trump-supporting Republican, and Boelter [voted in the 2024 Republican primary](#). And he wasn't just a Republican. He was also a [1990 graduate](#) of the Dallas-based Christ for the Nations Institute and engaged in missionary activities in the Democratic Republic of Congo, where he delivered exuberant sermons that soon [appeared online](#).

In other words, Boelter wasn't just a political assassin; he was a Christian assassin — and a person deeply connected to one of America's most radical religious movements.

Christ for the Nations [isn't a staid, traditional seminary](#). It opened its doors in 1970. One of its founders was an extremist Pentecostal pastor named James Gordon Lindsay, who was part of a spiritual movement called the New Order of the Latter Rain. (Christ for the Nations has put out a strong statement [condemning the attack](#)).

As the Atlantic staff writer Stephanie McCrummen details in an [important piece](#) about Boelter, the Latter Rain movement was largely rejected by the more-established Pentecostal denominations. But elements of Latter Rain are now part of a movement called the New Apostolic Reformation, or N.A.R.

[I've written](#) about the N.A.R. before. It's a loose collection of churches and leaders who believe in restoring the offices of prophet and apostle to the church and place a great emphasis on miracles and on direct revelations from God.

The New Apostolic Reformation — and its close cousin, the independent charismatic movement — house the most radical Christian Trumpists. Deeply influenced by prophecy, they see Trump as divinely destined to save America from the godless left and its political party, the “demoncrats,” who are doing Satan's bidding here on earth.

**Many Americans** are familiar with the way in which evangelicals have rationalized their support for Trump, often comparing him with other flawed figures from scripture whom God used to accomplish his purposes, whether it's King David (who committed adultery and murder) or King Cyrus (the Persian king who allowed the people of Israel to return to Jerusalem after exile).

Most of us are not familiar, however, with the way in which the prophecies around Trump have taken a much darker turn. [As I wrote in April](#), Jonathan Cahn, one of the most popular independent charismatic prophets in America, has been sharing his [Jehu prophecy](#).

Jehu is an [obscure and vicious](#) ancient king of Israel whose chief claim to fame was overthrowing the house of Ahab, ordering the execution of the king's wife, Queen Jezebel, killing King Ahab's sons and piling their heads outside the city gates.

Cahn says that God "called Jehu to make his nation great again. Jehu came to the capital city with an agenda to drain the swamp." The vengeance of Jehu becomes the vengeance of Trump.

Allusions to the most violent passages of scripture are common in independent charismatic circles. Writing on his Substack, Jeff Sharlet, a writing professor at Dartmouth, [shared a photograph](#) he took last year in the lobby of Christ for the Nations of a sign that said, "Everyone ought to pray at least one violent prayer each day."

Our nation is relearning a lesson that it never should have forgotten. Extremist Christian rhetoric and theology can lead to extreme Christian violence in the same way that extreme rhetoric can lead to extreme violence in other faith traditions, and among people who have no faith at all.

Christians aren't better than anyone else. We're fashioned from the same human clay, and we're susceptible to the same temptations and failures.

And right now — at a time when the Christian message of grace and mercy should shine the brightest — America's Christian extremists are killing people, threatening and intimidating public servants and other public figures who oppose Donald Trump, and trying to drive their political opponents from the public square

**Defenders of** the New Apostolic Reformation and its allies will argue that the references to Jehu or to "violent prayer" are referring to spiritual warfare, not literal combat, but the language of spiritual warfare can become deeply dehumanizing. It can prepare the mind and heart for deadly violence.

Spiritual warfare is a broad concept with many meanings, from benign to malignant. At its best it refers mainly to intense prayer for suffering people. You may have seen people online who ask for "prayer warriors" to help them if they're suffering from sickness or facing a family or financial crisis.

But it can also mean using prayer as a weapon against demons and demonic influences, and at the outer edges of political Christianity, belonging to the Democratic Party is proof positive that you're under the influence of the devil; and when the Democrats win, that means Satan wins.

Given this level of extremism, it's hardly surprising that the mob that stormed the Capitol on Jan. 6 was [inspired in part](#) by independent charismatics and New Apostolic Reformation leaders who poured fuel on the religious fire.

I don't want to overstate the problem — there are millions of charismatic Christians (much less Christians from other traditions) who voted for Trump without either believing these bizarre prophecies or sometimes even hearing the extreme rhetoric. They live peaceful and godly lives, and you'd love to have them as your neighbors.

But it's also wrong to understate the problem, and the grandiose and even militant spiritualism of the New Apostolic Reformation is leaking into other evangelical traditions. On Tuesday, for example, [Trump published on Truth Social](#) a text from Mike Huckabee, his ambassador to Israel and a former Southern Baptist pastor.

That text began, "Mr. President, God spared you in Butler, PA to be the most consequential president in a century — maybe ever." While we should all be grateful that Trump survived the assassination attempt, Huckabee's making a rather bold declaration of divine purpose, one that he is thoroughly unqualified to make. But that's standard language in the New Apostolic Reformation, and now it's coming from a Baptist member of the government.

**Last election cycle** I helped create a [new Christian curriculum](#) for political engagement. The short course was designed to reframe Christian political theology, with much greater emphasis on how we interact with our neighbors than on which policies or candidates we support.

The Bible, after all, has much more to say about the way we treat people than it does about how we govern a nation. The New Testament is not a policy handbook, but its commands to love your enemy and to treat people with kindness are crystal clear.

As I talked about the curriculum in gatherings across the country, I was struck by the extent to which I was asked the same question time and again. "Sure," people would say, "we need to be kind, but what if that doesn't work?"

The implication was clear — victory was the imperative, and while kindness was desirable, it was the contingent value, to be discarded when it failed to deliver the desired political results.

But that was the opposite of Christ's message. Our kindness — much less our love or our humility — should be fixed, and no amount of political adversity should cause us to abandon those values.

When Christ and his apostles delivered that message to Christ's early followers, they were speaking to people suffering persecution that the modern American church can scarcely comprehend. Yet even in the face of crucifixion — or even when they were confronting lions in the Coliseum — Christ's commands to love our enemies still applied.

I do not think for a moment that only Trumpist Christians have a problem with political violence. One of the worst aspects of our modern political culture is that both the far left and the far right have run off the rails.

Weeks before Boelter's attack in Minnesota, a man gunned down [two Israeli Embassy staff members](#) in the streets of Washington, and a man threw Molotov cocktails at [a demonstration](#) in Boulder, Colo., for the release of Israeli hostages in Gaza.

Both of those incidents are the [tip of an iceberg](#) of political threats and political violence, but Christianity should stand as a bulwark against violence, and Christian churches should be a source of healing. They should be pouring water on our political fires (and many do), but powerful Christians with millions of followers choose to pour gasoline on the fires instead.

And given that terrible reality, it should surprise no one that some Christians will put down their Bibles, pick up their guns and choose to kill the people whom they believe defy the will of God.

Some other things I did

[On Sunday](#), I wrote about a remarkable CBS/YouGov poll that helped me understand why Trump is both politically resilient and politically vulnerable. In short, a majority of Americans like many of Trump's objectives, but they don't like his methods. Democrats win when they contest Trump's methods, but they lose when they contest at least some of his objectives:

This gap between approval for Trump's goals and disapproval of Trump's methods helps explain why he's been elected twice and [why his approval sagged so quickly](#) at the beginning of both terms. It also demonstrates why Democrats haven't been able to build an enduring majority in spite of Trump's relentless aggression and overreach.

If a majority of the American people believe that only one party shares their objectives, they'll keep giving it a chance even when its leaders fail, or when they're erratic or when they're corrupt.

This pattern extends well past immigration and trade. If you look at much of Trump's second term so far through this same lens, we've seen the same cycle rinse and repeat.

Take higher education. I'm not aware of any substantial constituency of Americans who are pleased with the way that [Jewish students were treated](#) on elite campuses after the Hamas terror attacks on Oct. 7. There was no excuse for campus failures, and the encampments, in particular, were [deeply unpopular](#) with American voters.

Yet that does not mean that majorities also believe that the administration should inflict punishment on universities without due process, stifle free speech, defund vital medical research and snatch foreign students off the streets for writing an essay in a student newspaper.

[On Saturday](#), I wrote about Israel's decision to attack Iran and try to destroy its nuclear program. The combination of Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the Oct. 7 massacre of Israeli civilians should only strengthen international resolve that Iran should not possess an atomic bomb:

Imagine Iran with even a modest nuclear arsenal. Even if it didn't try to obliterate Israeli cities, it could use its arsenal to grant it a freedom of action in conventional war that it currently lacks. Like Russia, it could be relentlessly aggressive at the same time that its nuclear weapons could maintain the regime, even in the face of military defeat. They would constrain Israel's ability to defend itself.

At the same time, Israel is living with the reality since Oct. 7, 2023, that its enemies will directly target civilians, massacre them on video and celebrate their deaths. Is there a sovereign nation on the planet that would then permit its chief adversary — the primary military backer of its terrorist enemies — to possess the ultimate weapon of mass destruction if it believes it can do so at a reasonable military cost?

In fact, Israel has a much better window of opportunity to stop Iran's race to a bomb than either India or Pakistan had to stop each other's nuclear program — or than the United States and South Korea had to stop North Korea. Each of those nations possessed enormous, intact conventional forces that would have made any military intervention extraordinarily costly.

Iran's military capabilities, by contrast, have been sharply degraded. It still retains the ability to strike Israel with its missiles (it hit Tel Aviv on Friday, causing some damage), but Israel has a capable missile defense. Its proxies in Gaza, Lebanon and Syria have suffered a series of catastrophic military defeats. And previous attacks from Israel damaged Iran's air defenses. Iran is weaker than it's been in years.

David French is an Opinion columnist, writing about law, culture, religion and armed conflict. He is a veteran of Operation Iraqi Freedom and a former constitutional litigator. His most recent book is [“Divided We Fall: America’s Secession Threat and How to Restore Our Nation.”](#) You can follow him on Threads ([@davidfrenchjag](#)).

<https://www.nytimes.com/2025/06/19/opinion/minnesota-killings-boelter.html>