

Mike Pence replaces Jesus with patriotic imagery in RNC speech

by [Jack Jenkins](#) and [Emily McFarlan Miller](#)

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(AP Photo/Andrew Harnik)

Speaking before a crowd at Fort McHenry National Monument in Baltimore on August 26, Vice President Mike Pence, a self-described “born-again, evangelical Catholic,” sprinkled his address to the Republican National Convention with references to God and prayer.

But Pence, who accepted his party’s nomination for vice president during the speech, sparked outcry in some Christian circles when he closed out his remarks. He combined at least two Bible verses—and replaced references to Jesus with patriotic imagery.

“Let’s run the race marked out for us. Let’s fix our eyes on Old Glory and all she represents. Let’s fix our eyes on this land of heroes and let their courage inspire,” Pence said. “And let’s fix our eyes on the author and perfecter of our faith and freedom and never forget that where the spirit of the Lord is there is freedom—and that means freedom always wins.”

Pence referenced two different Bible verses in his remarks.

One is 2 Corinthians 3:17: “Where the spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom” (New International Version). The other is Hebrews 12:1-2, the version of which he quoted most closely resembling the translation in the Berean Study Bible, with some notable changes.

First, Pence substituted “Old Glory” for “Jesus.” He took a similar approach in the next line, inserting an additional line: “Let’s fix our eyes on this land of heroes and let their courage inspire,” before returning to the biblical text.

He also described Jesus (or Old Glory) as “the author and perfecter of our faith and freedom,” adding the words “and freedom,” which do not appear in the Hebrews passage.

The inserted lines appeared to be references to the context Pence chose for his speech: the vice president delivered his address from Fort McHenry, where an 1814 battle inspired the national anthem, “The Star-Spangled Banner,” and he was speaking on the third night of the RNC, when the theme was “Land of Heroes.”

Some of President Donald Trump’s evangelical advisers lauded the speech, such as Texas pastor Jack Graham, who tweeted: “We can bend our knee to Christ in faith and stand for our flag in freedom. Thank you (Vice President Pence).”

But a number of Christian leaders publicly criticized Pence’s replacement of Jesus with the American flag in his speech, describing it as idolatrous and blasphemous.

“Glad Pence seems to know Scripture; grieved & appalled he’d believe substituting ‘Old Glory’ for ‘Jesus’ wasn’t blasphemous and equating the freedom Paul was referring to with civil liberties,” tweeted Greg Jao, senior assistant to the president of InterVarsity, an evangelical Christian organization.

“This is Babylon. This is idolatry,” tweeted Brian Zahnd, pastor of Word of Life Church. —Religion News Service

