

How Elon Musk became 'prophet-in-chief' of tech's Trump-leaning conservatism

by [Jack Jenkins](#)

December 4, 2024



Elon Musk speaks as part of a campaign town hall in support of Donald Trump in Folsom, Pennsylvania, October 17, 2024. (AP Photo/Matt Rourke)

In the waning days of October, several hundred people gathered at the Life Center, a megachurch in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, for a town hall organized by the Trump campaign. Attendees chatted excitedly as they filed into the church's cavernous sanctuary.

But when the event began, the speaker who strutted onstage wasn't former President Donald Trump, or one of his evangelical supporters. Instead, it was Elon Musk, the billionaire owner of SpaceX rocket company, Tesla electric cars, and the

social media platform once known as Twitter.

Musk, the richest man in the world, has long approached religion with suspicion, and some in the audience were skeptical: One asked what was “keeping” him from believing in God.

“I believe in the teachings of Christ,” replied Musk. “I believe in the Christian principles: Love thy neighbor, turn the other cheek—which is very important to have forgiveness. Because if you don’t have forgiveness, then you have an endless cycle of retribution.”

Musk then expounded, arguing that Christ’s edict should only apply if you are already “strong” and not if you are weak. “If you’re facing a sort of a predatory threat, and that threat is stronger than you and that threat doesn’t believe in Christian values, then you will just get, you know, executed,” he said, adding he does not believe the idea is prevalent “in the Middle East.”

The exchange signaled a new stage in Musk’s shift from insisting science and religion cannot coexist to describing himself as a “[cultural Christian](#),” which scholars and experts on the nonreligious say is part of a broader trend among secular thought leaders and Big Tech entrepreneurs.

Once seen as a bastion of liberalism, Silicon Valley leaders have increasingly echoed ideas from conservative Christianity on topics from family size to transgender rights. At times, their ideas have seemed to overtake traditional faith as a guiding force for conservatives. Since the election, Musk, who once [criticized Trump’s character](#), has become a regular at the president-elect’s Mar-a-Lago resort and will co-lead a nongovernmental advisory group tasked with cutting government spending.

Some critics argue his relationship with Trump is one of convenience, given that Musk’s businesses stand to benefit from a sympathetic administration. But scholars on the nonreligious argue that his rapprochement with Christianity goes deeper. Greg Epstein, a humanist chaplain at Harvard University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, sees Musk’s pivot as “the least surprising thing ever.”

“He’s the prophet-in-chief of this new wave of highly religious technology that is a dominant force in the current Republican coalition,” Epstein said. “I would say that traditional Christian preachers are still a pillar, of course, of [Trump’s] administration and what it stands for, but they’ve at least been joined, if not superseded, by a

different style of preacher.”

Epstein argues in a new book, *Tech Agnostic: How Technology Became the World’s Most Powerful Religion, and Why It Desperately Needs a Reformation*, that “the tech itself has become the object of worship” in Silicon Valley, particularly artificial intelligence, [venerated](#) in some minds for its potential to either destroy the human race or rid it of all its ills.

Musk has come to be a “kind of papal figure” among tech moguls, Epstein said. Though he has readily invested in AI, Musk has voiced concerns about its potentially cataclysmic dangers. Musk is also given to apocalyptic visions of ferrying humans to Mars, avoiding our “extinction” by being “bi-planetary.”

Apocalypse is also a prevailing concept in Christianity, and increasingly, our secular politics, according to Whitney Phillips, an assistant professor of media studies at the University of Oregon School of Journalism and Communication. In her new book, *The Shadow Gospel: How Anti-liberal Demonology Possessed U.S. Religion, Media, and Politics*, Phillips and co-author Mark Brockway describe evangelicals’ depictions of a cosmic battle between good and evil, the latter personified by “the liberal devil.”

Today’s politics, Phillips said, furnish “an apocalypse that you can take a bite out of now, because the liberal devil is already here.”

In Musk’s version, said Phillips, evil is “wokeness” or the “woke mind virus,” which the billionaire associates with liberal identity politics he insists is forwarded by [the New York Times](#), [National Public Radio](#), [higher education](#), [art and video games](#), and [X competitor Bluesky](#), among other targets. Wokeness, [according to Musk](#), is “absolutely the religion that occupies the space previously held by Christianity.”

Musk’s political “end times” vision was hard to imagine back in 2013, when he climbed into a 1970s-era Volkswagen van to record a podcast with actor Rainn Wilson, who played Dwight Schrute in *The Office*. Wilson, a Baha’i, asked a series of religion-related questions, pressing the tycoon on whether he had a “spiritual life.”

“I’m less convinced that there’s, say, some superconsciousness watching over our every movement and kind of evaluating it against some criteria, and deciding whether we’re going to go to one place or another when we die,” Musk said. “I think that’s unlikely.”

Can science and religion coexist?, Wilson asked. “Probably not,” Musk said. Do you pray? “I don’t. I didn’t even pray when I almost died of malaria.”

Eventually, Musk explained that he draws his philosophy from Douglas Adams’s comedic science fiction novel *The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy*, in which the meaning of life comes not from discerning answers, Musk said, but from finding the “right question.”

Eight years later he sat for another podcast interview, this time with the satirical conservative Christian website the Babylon Bee. Asked what book he would add to the Bible, Musk named Adams’s novel, but noted he was raised Anglican and attended Hebrew day school as a child.

Near the end of the interview, the co-hosts asked Musk to accept Jesus.

As soft piano music played in the background, Musk expressed respect for Jesus’ teachings and referred to Einstein, saying, “I believe in the God of Spinoza, but hey, if Jesus is saving people, I won’t stand in his way.”

“I think he just said yes,” a co-host replied. Another joked, “We got him.”

Last July, in an interview with Jordan Peterson, a Canadian psychologist, Peterson, asked Musk, “In what sense, then, are you not religious?”

“I would say that I’m probably a cultural Christian,” replied Musk. He also later agreed with Peterson, who has both [identified as a Christian](#) and called God “the ultimate fictional character,” that he preferred societies premised on “Christian axiomatic assumptions.”

Epstein said Musk likely finds common cause for his views on transgender rights in corners of Christianity that he otherwise may not agree with theologically. Conservative Christians may also support Musk’s embrace of “pronatalism”—his belief that people should have more children in order to stave off population collapse. (“I’m super pro-baby,” Musk, who has fathered of 12 children, told the crowd in Harrisburg.)

Conservative Christians, in turn, have increasingly embraced Musk as a fellow political believer if not a professed follower of Jesus. Franklin Graham, son of evangelist Billy Graham, has [repeatedly](#) praised Musk on X, and the pastor at Pilgrim Hill Reformed Fellowship in Tennessee, where Trump’s nominee for defense

secretary, Pete Hegseth, attends, [said](#) Musk's removal of "censorships" on X is a "huge blessing."

At the Trump event at Harrisburg, one audience member asked Musk whether he believed Jesus Christ was "a real person who was crucified and died, and is risen, and God is Jesus." Musk asked the questioner what he meant by "real person," and eventually acknowledged he believed Jesus "is real," but quickly moved on without addressing the man's theological points.

But Musk's answer seemed to be enough for the audience, and when it later cheered him after he called liberals "enemies of democracy," Musk appeared to be more comfortable conflating his form of cultural Christianity, however defined, with culture war. —Religion News Service