

Donald Trump's photo op: politics or faith? Ten days the Bible featured prominently in editorial cartoons in June 2020

Jacob De Bruyn

Independent researcher, South Africa
jjdebruyn@gmail.com

Abstract

On the 1st June 2020 US president Donald Trump posed in front of St. John's Episcopal Church holding up a Bible for a photo opportunity. This was widely publicised in various media, and caused reactions from Christians across the spectrum. It also did not escape the attention of political cartoonists, resulting in Bible depictions being featured in editorial cartoons in some form or another for a possibly unprecedented ten consecutive days. This study looks at how cartoons interpret and integrate the photo op with associated events such as the death of George Floyd and subsequent protests, and how these are linked to biblical ideas (or not). Various cartoons are analysed, with potential explications given. The article concludes that the cartoons are primarily about Trump, without whom the Bible would not have featured so prominently, but although the cartoons reveal mainly political objectives, the Bible nevertheless plays a role in questioning motives, cautioning uncritical thinking, and opposing untruths and violence.

Keywords: Donald Trump, photo op, Bible, political cartoons, George Floyd.

1. As it happened: Donald Trump's photo opportunity on 1 June 2020

Few photos captured this year [2020], or excited more divisive reactions than the image of US President Donald Trump raising a Bible while standing in front of a boarded-up St John's Church, opposite the White House in Washington DC (Grovier, 2020, December).

On the 25th May 2020, George Floyd died after he had been arrested and a police officer pinned him to the ground by kneeling on his neck for more than eight minutes (Baker et al., 2020, July). Protests ensued nationwide and in other countries.

On Friday 29th May, with protests raging outside the White House, President Trump was taken to an underground bunker for his protection, remaining there for about an hour (Beaumont, 2020, June). Negative news reporting and derision on social media followed, with

reports claiming that public reaction was part of the motivation for Trump wanting to be seen outside the safety of the White House (Crump, 2020, June).

On the evening of May 31st, at the historic St. John's Episcopal Church close to the White House, protestors set fire to the church's child care facility, causing some damage; the church was subsequently boarded up (LeBlanc, 2020, June).

On June 1st Trump, speaking at the White House about the protests, stated that he was a president of law and order and that the violence must stop. He ended by saying, "And now I'm going to pay my respects to a very, very special place", and undertook the short walk to St. John's (Gelles & Petras, 2020, June). At the time the media reported that, in order to clear the route, police had driven demonstrators from Lafayette Square situated between the White House and the church using riot control measures that included chemical irritants, stun grenades, and officers on horseback. Later, in a press release, the US Park Police said that the protestors were violent and had attacked them, but several journalists repudiated this, claiming the demonstrators were peaceful (Gelles & Petras, 2020, June). Some of the presidential aides accompanying Trump were Attorney General William Barr, Press Secretary Kayleigh McEnany, Trump's daughter Ivanka, and son-in-law Jared Kushner. At the church, Ivanka took a Bible from her handbag and handed it to Trump who then posed for a photoshoot holding up the Bible, before returning to the White House (Goodin & Earle, 2020, June).

Diverse Christian reactions followed. The Episcopal bishop of Washington DC, Bishop Mariann Edgar Budde whose diocese includes St John's church, said that she was outraged: "The President just used a Bible, the most sacred text of the Judeo-Christian tradition, and one of the churches of my diocese, without permission, as a backdrop for a message antithetical to the teachings of Jesus" (Koran & Sullivan, 2020, June). South African Catholic priest Fr Russell Pollitt commented: "Nothing is out of bounds, nothing is sacred when the political expediency and ego of Donald Trump is concerned. He is shameless. Trump will literally trample on anyone or anything for his own sordid purposes" (Pollitt, 2020, June).

Some evangelical Trump supporters interpreted events differently though, applauding his actions. Prominent evangelical leader Franklin Graham defended Trump, saying that he had made an important statement, and criticised religious leaders who attacked Trump "for holding up 'God's word' in a time of unrest" (Parke, 2020, June). Kilgore sums it up: "So when Donald Trump holds up a Bible in front of a fire-damaged church, his most fervent religious followers don't see a statement of personal faith [...] but rather an assertion that he will impose *godly order* on a disordered country [...] or as many conservative Evangelicals confess, a return to the America of the 1950s" (Kilgore, 2020, June). This fundamentalist view is put into an arguably more balanced, theological perspective by Whitaker (2020, June):

The Bible [...] did not begin its life as the text of the victor. Had Trump read the text he held, he would have found a story of liberation for slaves, a divine preference for the poor, a demand of justice for the marginalised, a cry of lament from those who grieve, and a damning critique of any empire that oppressed its people.

Ultimately the problem, according to Whitaker, was the complete disconnect between the text in Trump's hand, and the force, both verbally threatened and actually used, to clear the way for his stunt.

This study looks at a selection of editorial cartoons dealing with the photo op, originally published from the 1st to the 10th June 2020. The research objective of the paper then is to see

how they present the political motivations and spiritual convictions, and to determine the extent to which these two concepts interact, i.e. asking how much of it is about Trump's political purposes, and whether the presence of the Bible is merely incidental rather than engaging with the cartoon messages in a meaningful way.

2. The convergence of humour and religion in academic research

This study fits neatly into the context of the growing academic interest in the relationship between humour and religion as observed by various researchers (Gardner, 2020, p. 152; Graham, 2024, p. 185; Martin et al., 2024, p. 171). In essence it combines satirical cartoon humour with spiritual beliefs embodied in the image of the Bible. The relationship between humour and religion is often perceived as ambivalent and incompatible, facetiously highlighted in the introduction to a special issue of *Humor*: “[...] humour and religion, ‘you must be joking?!’” (Martin et al., 2024, p. 169); Schweizer (2022, p. 11) calls them “odd bedfellows”.

Researchers give a variety of reasons for the “alleged” (Martin et al., 2024, p. 169) mutual exclusivity of religion and humour. Hyers (in Gardner, 2020, p. 156), for instance, claims that “religion is concerned with the serious and humour with the non-serious and thus, with a few exceptions, they have been treated as having little to do with one another”. Schuurman (quoted by Graham, 2024, p. 190) aptly calls this “the seriousness fallacy”. Researchers pointing to the historical roots of the animosity between faith and humour mention amongst others the attitude of certain early Church Fathers (Lindvall, 2015b, p. 2), and the influence of Protestantism (Gardner, p. 156). Schweizer (2022, p. 12) agrees that religious institutions and clerical authorities have the power to influence the boundaries of humour and laughter, although socio-cultural, political, and civic conditions also define what humourists can and cannot imagine or express.

Regardless of the negative assessments, the contemporary direction in thinking is that humour and religion are not as incompatible as is often assumed (Martin et al., 2024, p. 171). Akhapkina (2024, p. 219) believes that the Christian religious framework should not be seen as rigid and oppressive, remaining unchanged throughout history and opposed to all forms of non-serious behaviour. Humour historians point to instances where humour and faith interacted in history, like the curious origins of Easter laughter when late medieval European priests amused congregants with crude humour and slapstick comedy based on some Church Fathers' idea that God had played a practical joke on the devil by resurrecting Jesus (Coxon, 2022). Lindvall (2015a) provides a whole history of religious satire starting with the Hebrew prophets, through to late-night host Stephen Colbert. According to Graham (2024, p. 182) confronting our prejudices and presumptions about the relationship between humour and religion, reveals opportunities in both disciplines. This would however need a rejection of what she views as the privilege granted by religion to serious matters in favour of the inclusion of the non-serious, with an emphasis on humour. She contends that humour “offers an opportunity to reflect upon and even respond to existential concerns, such as suffering, death, and religion, and to provide social commentary on matters of utmost seriousness” (Graham, 2024, p. 182).

A definition of satire, despite Condren's (reasonable) reservations about the regular insistence on definitions in research work (Condren, 2012, p. 376), is still helpful to at least have some point of departure. Britannica then defines it as “[An] artistic form [...] in which human or individual vices, follies, abuses, or shortcomings are held up to censure by means of

ridicule, derision, burlesque, irony, parody, caricature, or other methods, sometimes with an intent to inspire social reform” (Elliott, 2025). Phiddian (2019, p. 5) remarks that “the noun ‘satire’ is really only a descriptive label for a text (novel, chat show, poem, cartoon, painting, and so on) where the satirical mode reaches a critical mass such as to become dominant”. Some of the related, often intersecting concepts, include laughter, which nowadays is generally seen as encompassing humour; the relationship between the two is however asymmetric (Condren, 2023, p. 7), and while both can be aligned to satire, neither is an essential component in every instance (Phiddian, 2019, p. 7, 16). Condren (2023, p. 135) uses the example of Orwell’s *1984* which, notwithstanding that the current understanding of satire is heavily inflected with humour, is referred to as satire. Phiddian (2019, p. 7) stresses that art “can be satirical without being funny. Satirical caricature and distortion are often comical, but they need not be”. The truth of this statement is evident in some of the Trump cartoons. According to Condren (2023, p. 111), satire as critique had been linked to hostile laughter since antiquity; this also applies to the Bible, and Lindvall (2015b, p. 1) observes that the biblical attitude towards laughter is ambiguous, with mockery making up a large part of it.

At the root of the satiric “mode” (the term preferred by Phiddian (2019, p. 4) rather than ‘genre’), lies a “powerful desire to achieve some harsh poetic justice in a world of knaves and fools” (Phiddian, 2019, p. 3). Condren says that this validates a crucial attribute of satire, namely that it makes some ethical point, displaying moral seriousness; that does not mean that we necessarily have to accept satirists’ sincerity or agree with their methods, but he finds that, due to its becoming so much part of mainstream media entertainment, the moral edge is blunted, concentrating on safe targets while carefully treading around contemporary sensitivities (Condren, 2012, p. 391). Characteristically, satirists provoke indignation, a suitable umbrella term which includes the CAD triad hypothesis, comprising the negative emotions of contempt, anger, and disgust (Phiddian, 2019, p. 6).

Donald Trump’s relationship with satirical comedy (about him) is unusual, and in some ways the satirical target became a disruptor. One reason may be that he has not always been taken too seriously, as Chiaro & Lobano (2021, p. 27) found: “Trump emerges as a comic trope in which just the mention of his name triggers humorous tweets”. McClennen (2021, p. 27) observes that “the most significant Trump effect on satire was to produce ironic irony”, pointing to the “complexities of making jokes about a joke, impersonating an impersonation, and parodying a parody” (McClennen, 2021, p. 34). Cartoonist David Horsey agrees, saying that, even though his work is to exaggerate reality, Trump is such an extreme character that “you can’t get weirder. You can’t exaggerate beyond the bizarre exaggerations that are coming out every day” (Talbot, 2021, June). Trump however does not take kindly to being ridiculed, as can be seen in, amongst other, his Twitter war with Alec Baldwin and *Saturday Night Live* (Becker, 2018, p. 1737).

Political cartoons, used here synonymously with editorial cartoons, are described as opinion-orientated drawings frequently incorporating caricature, conveying editorial comment on current events. Even though cartoonists use visual distortions to reflect their viewpoint, they are not supposed to alter basic facts (Knieper, 2023). Being distributed globally nowadays, brings about new challenges regarding intertextuality (Bourdon & Boudana, 2016, p. 202), with readers worldwide having different views from the initial audience (Scully, 2019, June). Understanding them requires readers to have some insight into the topic addressed (Knieper, 2023; Negro Alousque, 2013, p. 370). DeSousa & Medhurst (cited in Landbeck, 2008, p. 3) compare it to an inside joke between the cartoonist and the reader, where the latter must be

aware of current events as well as grasp allegorical references. Pinar-Sanz (2020, p. 16) stresses that readers need access to intertextual references present, as the interface between humour and textuality is one of the defining features of editorial cartoons. Tsakona (2018, p. 2) explains: “Intertextuality infiltrates everything we say or write: our utterances/texts respond to previous utterances/texts, they reflect, recontextualize, or even re-accentuate them via implicit or explicit references”. Intertextual links in this study include news actuality, scripture references, other cartoons, art, literary works, and popular culture.

Many studies feature thorough research on different aspects of the relationship between cartoons and humour (e.g., Genova, 2018a, pp. 146-147; Genova, 2018b, pp. 85-88; Tsakona, 2009, p. 1171; Pinar-Sanz, 2020, p. 16), with a notable distinction between nonsense type cartoons whose sole purpose is to be funny, and editorial cartoons in which humour is not always evident. Most of the Trump cartoons though would qualify as humorous, owing in part to the presence of a regularly derided Donald Trump.

With reference to the Bible, many westerners today believe that it has lost its significance in a secularized world; Davis (2024) nevertheless finds that “[i]ts importance lies not merely in its overtly religious influence but also [...] in its pervasive effect on the thinking and feeling processes, the attitudes and sense of values that, whether recognized as biblical or not, still help to make people what they are”. Thomas’ observation (2021, p. 32) concerning some *Private Eye* cartoons that they “[...] tend to use the Bible as a cultural reference with which to target a more modern ‘butt’”, is only partially relevant here. Even if taken as a cultural allusion, some of the Bible’s spiritual values are significant: firstly, overall the Bible does not condone violence even though it contains numerous “texts of terror” (Cox, 2015, p. 228); secondly, although truth is primarily described in terms of faith (in God), cartoon readers, regardless of their background, will understand the Bible as a symbol of opposition to untruths; lastly, the Bible repeatedly emphasizes that God is siding with poor people, outcasts, widows, orphans, the ‘others’, and against the powerful (Cox, 2008, p. 217). These spiritual values are employed to challenge concrete issues in the cartoons.

3. Methodology and corpus

Editorial artists’ work is normally syndicated by publishing sites like *caglecartoons.com*, *creators.com*, *cartoonmovement.com*, *theeditorialcartoons.com*, and *facebook.com/Muzejkarikature*. Of these, *Caglecartoons* is generally regarded as the most comprehensive searchable online database (Godioli & Pedrazzini, 2019, p. 304). In addition to publishing sites, cartoons were found by means of a broad internet search via *Google Images*, employing phrases like ‘Trump photo op’, ‘Trump Bible 2020’, and variants thereof. This resulted in cartoons as well as internet memes accessed on *Facebook*, *X (Twitter)* at the time), online news media, and some lesser-known independent sites.

Altogether, the search yielded 127 English and image-only cartoons, of which 66 are discussed; reasons for exclusion besides the time frame, were duplication of ideas, a degree of incomprehensibility, and insufficient information. Though the study cannot claim to be exhaustive, it is reasonable to accept that the selection represents a fair sample size. Kwon (2019, p. 13) observes that data on the web can be erratic and difficult to be tracked efficiently; notwithstanding, wherever possible cartoons were traced to their original source and/or earliest date of publishing between the 1st and 10th June 2020. (The impact of Trump’s photo op lasted

longer and was still resembled in cartoons way after the study cut-off date, e.g., when addressing Trump's *God bless the USA*-Bible advertisement in March 2024). The 66 selected cartoons were created by 56 artists representing some 16 different nationalities. US contributors make up 50 per cent, reflecting the fact that cartoonists everywhere regularly comment on US news and presidents, especially Donald Trump. The cartoonists' religious affiliations, if any, are mostly unknown.

The method followed is to describe and assess the data by way of a quantitative analysis, arranging cartoons according to themes and techniques. Interpretations are subjective, and indexing is fluid, with themes overlapping amongst themselves while also sometimes intersecting with techniques used by cartoonists. As example, tear gas images are prevalent and may be seen as a theme, but in this instance they also intensify the underlying violent atmosphere of pictures and therefore rather designated as a device used by the artists. The same is applicable to the church notice board which is effectively used to integrate verbal messages or humorous remarks in a spontaneous way; as such they are an integral and sometimes significant part of various cartoons' messages rather than a specific theme. (See Figure 1).

Categorisation is also influenced by the fact that a cartoon may consist of several jokes all contributing to the humorous effect while generating multiple meanings (Tsakona, 2009, pp. 1185-1186). Chris Britt provides an example: Trump is unsympathetically caricatured, contemptuously called "Bunker boy", shouting "It's war time!" as he crushes protesters with an army tank while flying the American flag and holding a Bible upside down (Britt, 2020, June). Bourdon & Boudana (2016, pp. 188, 190), using Hirsch's premise in their cartoon analysis, differentiate between the meaning of a text, i.e. what the artist intends to convey, and its significance, i.e. how it is received by the reader. Essentially, interpreting a visual medium such as cartoons is more ambiguous than texts (Bourdon & Boudana, 2016, p. 189). In addition to cartoon interpretation, expounding biblical texts which originated in contexts very different from ours, presents a similar inherent ambiguity.

The issues explored in the selected cartoons correspond to countless others covering the same events like Floyd's death, the protests, the bunker episode, and Trump's perceived inflammatory rhetoric, but with the added element of the photoshoot. Visual identifiers are Trump holding up the Bible or a substitute object combined with the related events mentioned. Verbal cues consist of captions, the church message board, speech bubbles, cartoon titles, and occasionally titles on the publisher's page not included elsewhere.

Cartoons can be accessed via the underlined links in the in-text references. These lead to sites where the cartoons are still available and not necessarily the original publisher, as they are sometimes unknown or do not exist anymore.

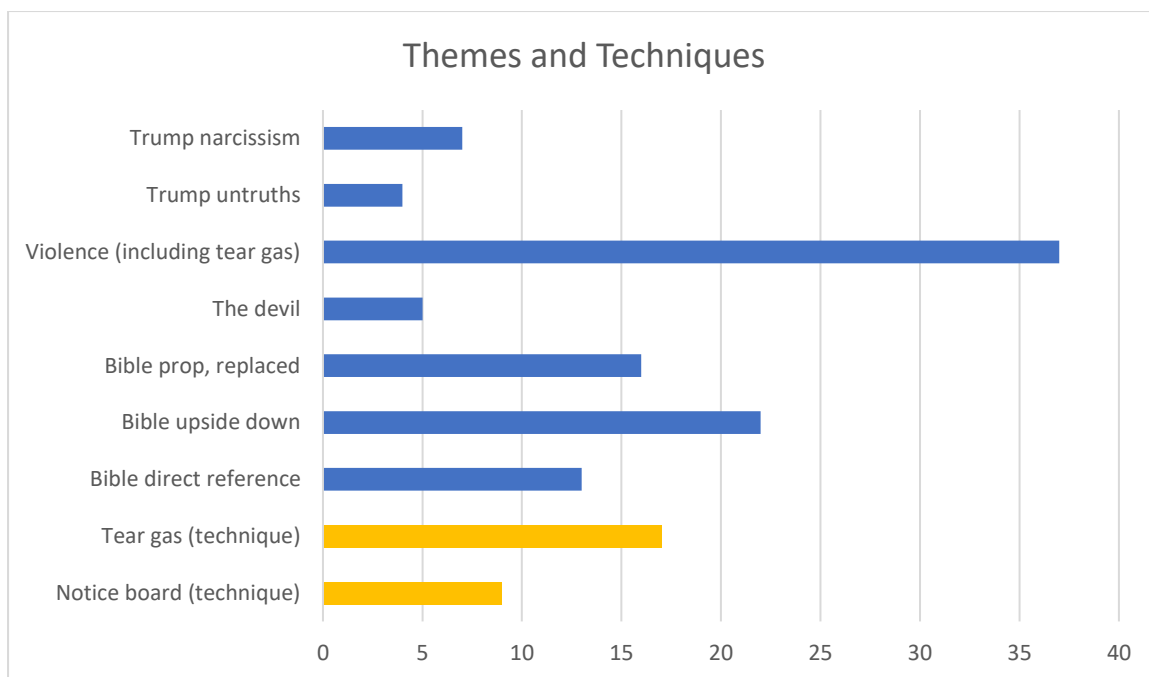


Figure 1. Themes and techniques

3. Cartoon themes and techniques

3.1. Caricaturing Trump

Most of the Trump cartoons make use of this technique, but here the focus is more on those leaning towards grotesqueness. Despite possible objections, grotesque portrayals of politicians are in line with acceptable norms for cartooning, as Patrick Oliphant points out, political cartoonists are disturbers of peace and their cartoons must be savagely funny (Prince-Gibson, 2005, November).

Visual stereotyping usually employed for Trump are an exaggerated coifed hairstyle (a ferret in the case of Dave Brown’s cartoons, possibly inspired by Jon Stewart appearing on *The late show* wearing a “dead animal” on his head; cf. Rahim, 2017), his (unproven) small hands (based on journalist Graydon Carter calling Trump a “short fingered vulgarian” – Gabbatt, 2016, August), pouting lips, and an excessively long red tie. These allow for easy recognition, serve as social commentary, and assist in creating humour. Not all Trump portrayals are unaesthetic caricatures though, with some being typical of artistic sketches while others are no more than playful, inoffensive impressions (cf. [Bennett](#), 2020, June). Artists like [Le Lievre](#) (2020, June) use actual photographs from the shoot. But, although Trump himself may not be caricatured, he becomes that through accompanying captions, incidents around him, or the presence of a Bible substitute. Clay Bennett’s drawing ([Bennett](#), 2020, June) of a serious looking Trump, for example, is refuted by the book in his hand, “Crisis management for dummies”, creating a greater humorous impact than if Trump himself had been portrayed as some dummy.

Blair Gauntt released two contrasting sketches at the same time: one renders a respectable Trump (putting aside the fact that he is upside down) ([Gauntt](#), 2020, June 2b). The other one ([Gauntt](#), 2020, June 2a), portrays Trump’s face and the cover of the Bible both representing a fictional magic book, *Necronomicon*, aka the *Book of the Dead*, reflecting the movie prop

version of the book used in the 1987 film *Evil dead II*. The accompanying title to this cartoon, “Hail to the king, baby”, probably refers to statements made by Trump that the president has total authority, to which some responded that he is not a king (Waldman, 2019, November). Although superficially insinuating that Trump is wicked, the cartoon should be considered against the backdrop of a pop culture horror movie. Steve Bell ([Bell](#), 2020, June) presents his signature image of Trump with a toilet bowl head. Bell recalls waking up in the morning to the news that Trump had won the election, and he “just despairingly did him as a toilet bowl. His hair is a kind of golden toilet seat, but it kind of works, there is something utterly disgusting about Trump” (Pinar-Sanz, 2020, p. 20). Australian cartoonist Peter Sully, creates an extreme contrast between a naked, unflattering cartoon-drawn Trump striking a ludicrous pose against a photographic background image of protesters being sprayed with tear gas, emphasising the perceived absurdity of Trump’s use of the Bible ([Sully](#), 2020, June).

3.2. The devil

Depictions of Trump as the devil can also be viewed as caricatures. The ambiguous figure of the devil encountered in the Bible under various guises and names, was often portrayed in ancient and medieval art as a grotesque being with traits like pointy tails, horns, and hooves. Ordinarily cartoons picturing Trump as the devil are more cartoony than grotesquely though. Austrian illustrator Marian Kamensky shows Trump with furry goat leg standing on a pedestal with the inscription “666”, the sign of the beast described in Revelation 13:18. Trump is holding a chain binding kneeling slaves, with the further inscription, “Make America great again”, ironically implying a return to pre-Civil War times, supposedly with biblical support ([Kamensky](#), 2020, June 4a). In Nick Anderson’s representation Trump himself is not portrayed as the devil; instead, a pop culture demon-like figure is inciting violent protests while Trump poses on the side for a photo amidst the crisis ([Anderson](#), 2020, June 2). Canadian Michael de Adder’s contribution ([De Adder](#), 2020, June) was inspired by the horror film *The Exorcist*. De Adder explains that he found Trump holding up the Bible to be a defining moment, and *The Exorcist* popped into his head. He normally depicts Trump (and other politicians) mostly respectfully and devoid of significant distortions, which often results in giving his cartoons an unexpected mordant slant. This cartoon differs in that it pictures an ominous, ghost-like Trump with his face turned 180 degrees backwards giving him a fiendish undertone, and, taking into account the presence of the Bible and the church, suggests a measure of hypocrisy. An overtly pro-Trump cartoon by politically conservative cartoonist Henry Payne, caricatures Trump as the devil. A fictitious front page headline reads, “Beelzebub seizes D.C. church” ([Payne](#), 2020, June). There are some indicators pointing to the ironic intentions of the cartoon: contributing ‘articles’ cited on the front page mention FBI director James Comey’s statements about Trump’s involvement in Russian election interference (unfounded allegations according to the official investigation), Ocasio-Cortez claiming the church fire was caused by climate warming, Trump’s support of the burned chapel being a threat to Christianity, and B-52 fighter jets carpet bombing Lafayette Square – all of them outrageous. The newspaper called “The Daily Spleen”, possibly references obsolete understandings of the spleen, such as causing hypochondria (i.e. imaginary illness), malevolence, or laughter. The fake news article headings suggest that the portrayal of Trump as the devil should be interpreted as ironic hyperbole, while at the same time taking a jab at Trump’s opponents.

While the ‘devil-cartoons’ should predominantly be understood to be within the context of popular culture depictions, comparing someone to Hitler might arguably vilify them more. Bart van Leeuwen juxtaposes Trump and Hitler both holding up Bibles ([Van Leeuwen](#), 2020, June), a cartoon which is likely based on social media posts of a digitally manipulated meme of Hitler that was fact checked by sources like *Snopes* (Evon, 2020, June 2) and *Reuters* (Schmidt, 2020, June), and proven to be false. Aligning Trump with Hitler is not unique. The (facetious) Godwin’s Law, established by author Mike Godwin, postulates that online discussions inevitably regress to someone eventually being compared to Hitler or the Nazis, regardless of the original topic (Steinmetz, 2012, November). Indeed, historian Mathew Turner (2020, November) observes that many social media users have thoughtlessly conflated Hitler with Trump, and German voters in 1930 with American voters in 2020. The Hitler-themed cartoons should be judged against this backdrop.

3.3. Trump’s narcissism and untruths

In David Horsey’s sketch ([Horsey](#), 2020, June) Trump wants to know if the Bible mentions him. The caption sarcastically contrasts “the riffraff” (protestors) with “the great man”. Jeff Darcy places Trump in front of da Vinci’s *The last supper* painting (blocking out Jesus), holding the twelfth commandment decreeing, “Thou shalt reflect me [Trump]” ([Darcy](#), 2020, June). A book that does reflect Trump is *The art of the deal* which, according to him, is his second most favourite book after the Bible (O’Neil, 2020, June). Dutch artist Jos Collingnon divides his panel into two: Trump at the church below, and God, up in the clouds, grappling with Trump’s book ([Collingnon](#), 2020, June); the implication is that God is reading Trump’s book but Trump has apparently never read God’s book – at least not attentively. Collingnon’s is the only cartoon portraying God (the Father), depicting him in a style typical of contemporary Western pop-cartoon impressions, which in turn resemble renaissance-style paintings identifying God as an old man with a long beard.

The Washington Post, tracking Trump’s false claims, counted 30 573 untruths told during his four years in office (Kessler et al., 2021, January). His economic relationship with the truth found its way into cartoons, portraying the bound ribbon bookmarks in some Bibles (like the actual one held by Trump); the bookmark is transformed into a snake-like forked tongue, a reference to the idiom ‘speaking with a forked tongue’. The expression could have originated in Native American languages, or be a reference to the narrative of Adam and Eve and the snake found in Genesis 3; in the photo op context though, the phrase, implying deception, is thematically closer to the latter explanation. Joel Pett’s wordless image draws a direct analogy between the bookmark and Trump with a forked tongue: they are identical and exaggerated ([Pett](#), 2020, June). Barry Blitt shows Trump in four visuals, putting the whole Bible in his mouth until only the ribbon/forked tongue sticks out ([Blitt](#), 2020, June). These images create an unsettling dichotomy between truth and untruths. Hassan [Bleibel](#) (2020, June) attributes George Floyd’s dying words, “I can’t breathe”, to the White House being choked by Trump while he is holding up the Bible, forked tongue bookmark and all. The belief that the serpent in the garden was a manifestation of the devil is prevalent amongst Christians, yet most theologians consider this to be based on unsound hermeneutics, and finding a meaning beyond a negative assessment of Trump’s chicanery is unjustified.

Ann Telnaes’ cartoon is forthright in its criticism: it has no wording except for the notice board next to an unappealing looking Trump with an upside-down Bible, bluntly proclaiming,

“This is a conman” ([Telnaes](#), 2020, June 1). The image ostensibly is cautioning Trump’s evangelical followers to be more sceptical, particularly those perceiving the photo op as a victory in a world full of evil (Teague, 2020, June).

3.4. Trump and violence

South African cartoonist Zapiro contributes a sardonic and dark drawing inspired by one of Goya’s so-called *Black Paintings* called *Saturn devouring one of his sons* ([Shapiro](#), 2020, June). Cartoon intertextuality evidently played a role as well, as several other cartoonists have used the painting allegorically in various contexts. Interpretations of the original painting differ, but it is normally accepted that it is based on the (Roman) myth of Saturn eating his children in order not to be overthrown by one of them. Keeping in mind Trump’s war-talk (Lemire et al., 2020, June) it makes sense to further place the painting within the wider context of Goya’s many depictions of the barbarity of war, like the well-known *The third of May*. In Zapiro’s cartoon Saturn is substituted by an orangy coloured, deranged Trump devouring America, personified by a live Statue of Liberty. He is doing this in a savage and cruel way, being protected by police officers while kneeling on George Floyd and a Covid 19 patient. The presence of the Bible does not seem to be of particular significance, and interpretations of its peculiar positioning may lead to speculation; it probably does little more than mockingly act as a circumstantial identifier. In effect, the cartoon predominantly conveys a political message.

In Marian Kamensky’s captionless image ([Kamensky](#), 2020, June 4b) Trump holds the Bible high while sitting on the shoulders of an officer pinning his hapless victim to the ground. The biblical theme of God being on the side of the downtrodden seems to be ironically emphasised by creating a significant physical distance between the Bible (i.e. God high up) and the oppressed at the opposite, underside of the image. Perhaps the most striking of the ‘I can’t breathe’-themed cartoons, is David Rowe’s *Strange fruit selfie* ([Rowe](#), 2020, June 2), based on a poem and later a protest song written by Abel Meeropol against the lynching of African Americans. The cartoon highlights parallels between Floyd’s death and lynchings, addressing systemic racism through extreme sarcasm by having Trump, sitting on a tree swing and taking a selfie, telling the Attorney General to push him in order to create the look of a tear gas breeze in his hair.

Trump regularly used the phrase ‘Law and Order’, a concept dating back to 19th century American history; it has always been as much about defending privilege as dealing with crime (Sarat, 2020, September), and in the sixties some saw it as “a shorthand message promising repression of the black community” (Waxman, 2020, June). South African cartoonist team 2Lani & Curtis shows an unhinged Trump, Bible in hand, kneeling on George Floyd ([Ntsong & Curtis](#), 2020, June). The cartoon no doubt recalls pre-democratic South African apartheid prime ministers like John Vorster and P.W. Botha, who were known as proponents of “kragdadige” (heavy-handed, uncompromising, ruthless) action, while the Bible sardonically references the mainly Afrikaans churches who supported government policies at the time. The cartoon finds a definite resemblance between Trump and the South Africans, providing an ironic perspective to Trump’s remark about shithole African countries (Fram & Lemire, 2018, January). Dave [Whamond](#) (2020, June) transforms the Bible into *Nixon Playbook 1968*, a throwback to Richard Nixon whose presidential campaign took place in similar circumstances of racial tensions, and whose ‘law and order’ propaganda was perceived to have racist undertones. Nixon and his adviser, Kevin P. Phillips, played a major role in developing the

Southern Strategy, a successful Republican Party election plan followed by subsequent presidents, facilitating their political domination of the south. It is a strategy which is, alarmingly, supported by right wing evangelicals. In the cartoon the reporter's question to Trump whether it was his [personal] Bible (Gontcharosa, 2020, June), becomes an implied accusation that Trump is living by a set of rules contrary to the ideals of reconciliation and respect for others.

The use of chemical riot control agents against protestors forms part of a broader pattern of disproportionate institutionalised force; "tear gas" became the collective phrase for different substances (Robertson, 2020, June). Initial allegations that the White House had sanctioned its use to clear the route through Lafayette Park, were invalidated in the Inspector General's report one year later (Ebbs & Siegel, 2021, June), but cartoonists understandably followed mainstream media's original narrative that it was done to safeguard Trump, and they frequently employ it as a metaphor for the unnecessary use of force.

Jack Ohman ([Ohman](#), 2020, June) pictures Trump and his entourage on their way to the church with the president (anachronistically) holding up one Bible, and another in Ivanka's handbag. The title, "Teargaslighting", is a pun-neologism on tear gas and Trump's tendency to manipulate people psychologically, misleading them and ultimately causing them to doubt their own convictions while highlighting the exploitation of the voters by the misuse of their religious sentiments. Bruce Mackinnon ([Mackinnon](#), 2020, June) presents Trump cynically thinking how he loves the smell of tear gas in the morning, referencing an iconic line from the 1979 film *Apocalypse now*, "I love the smell of napalm in the morning...[it] smelled like victory" (IMDb, n.d.). According to the film's director, Francis Ford Coppola, the movie is anti-war, but even more anti-lie: "[T]he fact that a culture can lie about what's really going on in warfare, that people are being brutalized, tortured, maimed, and killed, and somehow present this as moral is what horrifies me, and perpetuates the possibility of war." (Sable, 2020, August). (See Section 3.6 for direct links between tear gas and biblical passages).

Trump inciting disharmony in fire-related cartoons appear within an extensive collection of general Trump 'arson' cartoons. Martin Sutovec's photo op version portrays Trump as a fire-breathing Godzilla-like (orange) monster ([Sutovec](#), 2020, June), while "Making America a grate again" is Martyn Turner's send-up of Trump's well-known electioneering slogan ([Turner](#), 2020, June). Social media puns regarding 'making America grate again' almost all refer to the process of grating food, but in Turner's case it refers to a frame of iron bars holding up a fire, as can be observed in the pyre next to Trump on which the Statue of Liberty is burning. In its history, America has gone through several periods of upheaval and violent protests, often literally accompanied by arson, with the cartoon almost a prophetic warning that it can happen again. In 2016 Bruce MacKinnon published a cartoon displaying Trump with a petrol can head and his supporters as matches, suggesting that one spark, Trump's rally speech, is enough to start an inferno (cf. Genova, 2018b, p. 93 for a detailed analysis). The cartoon, which has been widely distributed as a meme, possibly inspired Kenian artist Victor [Ndula](#) (2020, June) to draw Trump holding up a Bible cover hiding a large match box with the striking surface ready for use. The message is the same as that of MacKinnon's: "Trump's inflammatory rhetoric is likely to result in a conflagration" (Genova, 2018b, p. 94). Rainer Hachfeld draws a fire-fighter Trump with the fire hose connected to a gasoline tanker ([Hachfeld](#), 2020, June); while evidently pointing to Trump inflaming conflict, the Bible under Trump's arm could also be alluding to a propaganda technique called "the firehose of falsehood", which entails inundating the audience with disinformation – a classic propaganda tactic which Trump is supposedly good at (Jonathan Rauch TV interview, quoted by Stelter, 2020, November).

New Zealand artist Yeo uses the notice board to quote Martin Luther King Jr: “Nothing in all the world is more dangerous than sincere ignorance and conscientious stupidity” (Yeo, 2020, June). It clearly mocks Trump, but the abridged quote is obscuring the original anti-war message urging people to be kind-hearted (King, 1964). Ebert (aka Enrico Bertuccioli), pictures a Bible inserted into the grip of a pistol decorated with the American flag (Bertuccioli, 2020, June), maybe criticising both Christian nationalism and the American gun culture. The title, which only appears on the publisher’s page, “An eye for an eye...”, sub-titled “The law of retaliation”, enables a more profound insight, referring to the principle found in the Hebrew Bible as well as extrabiblical sources designed to create equivalence in punishment as opposed to disproportionate revenge.

Trump and riot police coercively marching in Monte Wolverton’s “Trump crossing the street” (Wolverton, 2020, June), was likely inspired by legendary gag cartoonist Gary Larson’s “Washington crosses the street” (cf. White, 2020, June), a parody of an Emanuel Leutze painting, *Washington crossing the Delaware*. Accepting both intertextual influences creates an interpretational paradox: Wolverton’s cartoon recalls the humour of the Larson image, while simultaneously reminding one that Washington was busy waging war when he crossed the Delaware River, as portrayed by Leutze. This concurrent inciting of humour and serious emotions increases the effectiveness of the satire more than would have otherwise been the case.

A localised interpretation by South African Avi (Ramjan, 2020, June) targets South African politicians and their hypocritical criticism of Trump and the US government: the (ANC ruling party) politician looks over the fence, telling the “psychopath” Trump to clean up Floyd’s blood in his yard. On his own side however is the blood of people killed by security forces during the Covid-19 lockdown and 34 Marikana miners gunned down by police in 2012, giving the cartoon a largely political message. Milt Priggee complements Trump’s red pointy-tail and tie with blood almost indistinctly dripping from his hands (Priggee, 2020, June). The latter part of the well-known John F. Kennedy adage, “Ask not what your country can do for you”, is modified to “ask what you are doing to your country”, aimed at Trump and presumably his supporters. The fact that the phrase appears on the notice board possibly implies that the church is providing some socio-political counterbalance to the religious right, but that may be over analysing the cartoon. Compared to Priggee’s image, film actor Jim Carrey’s contribution (Carrey, 2020, June) shows substantially more blood. His Twitter account gives the cartoon title as “Blasphemer-in-chief”, with the image revealing blood running down Trump’s arm from the Bible, contrasting feigned piousness with the “violent rhetoric he has used instead of trying to unify the country during the unrest” (Dicker, 2020, June).

Paolo Lombardi’s cartoon (Lombardi, 2020, June) features Trump holding a Bible and an assault rifle in each hand. The fact that this is an image-only cartoon, creates ambiguity around possible interpretations: white evangelical Christians, who often support the NRA (National Rifle Association), may well perceive it as an endorsement of their faith supporting Trump’s militarised style reaction to the protests; alternatively, the image may be condemning Trump’s actions by contrasting peace and violence through incongruously incorporating the Bible, church notice board, rifle, and president. When looking at the original title given to the cartoon on the publisher’s site (which does not necessarily accompany subsequent publications), it clarifies that the second option is more in line with Lombardi’s approach: “Book and rifle, perfect fascist” (Lombardi, 2020, June). The “fascist” insult has been used against Trump often,

and includes a variety of meanings, mostly not relating to the original meaning of the term; as early as 1944 George Orwell already remarked that calling someone a fascist has, through its misuse, become almost meaningless (Orwell, 1968). Ultimately the publisher's description, though necessary for a more precise interpretation of the cartoon, may weaken the satiric effect of the image by labelling Trump something he is not. Conversely, Mexican cartoonist Boligán (Corbo, 2020, June), combines the two opposing concepts by replacing the Bible with a US Army soldier, typically armed with a machine gun. The same incongruity is present as in Lombardi's rendition, but with Boligán more suggesting that (or asking whether) violence is replacing biblical morals.

Steve Bell illustrates the violence graphically by burlesquing a frequently parodied Eugène Delacroix painting, *Liberty leading the people* (Bell, 2020, June). The revolution's fighters are transformed into sinister paramilitary forces, while Liberty is replaced by a bizarre-looking Trump, "leading the white people"; being concerned with only looking after the interests of a particular section of the population, questions his leadership. In one hand he is holding the traditional Grim Reaper's scythe, giving the picture an ominous feel, with the Bible incongruently in the other. Norwegian artist Morten Morland features a law enforcement officer forcefully pushing down an elderly Uncle Sam, recalling an incident when an elderly, peaceful protester was pushed to the ground and seriously injured by a Buffalo Police officer. (Morland, 2020, June). Morland, like Bell, highlights the excessive use of violence by the images of trampled people.

3.5. The Bible as prop, replaced, and upside down

Shortly after the photo op, Bishop Budde denounced Trump for using the church and the Bible as props (Frias, 2020, June), a notion disseminated in the media and expanded on by cartoonists. Examples include Robert Ariail's cartoon which alludes to this directly by means of the church notice board mockingly instructing in pseudo King James Bible language, "Thou shalt not use the word of God like unto a political prop" (Ariail, 2020, June).

Conservative Christian cartoonist Gary Varvel chose not to draw Trump, instead focussing on the apparent hypocrisy of prominent (white) Democrats Nancy Pelosi and Chuck Schumer for wearing Ghanaian Kente cloth scarves at an event honouring George Floyd (Varvel, 2020, June). People criticised them for misappropriating African heritage, with one tweet maintaining that there is no difference between holding up a Bible you never read for a photo op, and kneeling in Kente cloth you never wear for a photo op (Lee, 2020, June). Varvel reflects this sentiment in his cartoon in which Pelosi and Schumer shame Trump for using the Bible as a prop.

Closely related to and often overlapping with the prop theme, is the Bible being replaced with other objects such as mobile phones, petrol cans, and books. Don Asmussen skilfully combines the prop theme and replacement idea in at least three cartoons in his *Bad Reporter* series, a cartoon which nowadays will be associated with internet memes, but originally developed as a political comic strip in 2003. The images illustrate Trump holding up various, film props: Andúril, the sword from *The Lord of the rings* (Asmussen, 2020, June 2a), the leg-lamp from the film *A Christmas story* (Asmussen, 2020, June 2b), and Wilson, the volley ball from the film *Cast away* (Asmussen, 2020, June 2c); the overarching notion can be found in the newspaper headline, "Trump holds prop in front of N.Y. church". The objects may have been randomly chosen with the only commonality the fact that they are pop culture collectibles,

or they may have been more thoughtfully selected, in which case the prevailing theme can possibly be identified as symbols of goodness, for example, Andúril fighting evil, Wilson giving hope, and the leg-lamp encouraging relationships – all of these to be interpreted as ironic as far as Trump is concerned. A fourth, similar cartoon, does not feature a film prop but rather a supposedly incriminating lewd videotaped attempt to discredit Trump with the headline, “Defiant Trump holds Steele dossier VHS tape in front of N.Y. church”, subtitled, “Evangelicals cheer their God” ([Asmussen](#), 2020, June 2d). Probably unintended, but the fact that these objects are all fictional (the existence of the sex tape has never been proven and therefore as fictitious as the others), is effectively placing the Bible in the realm of fiction.

Bill Bramhall replaces the Bible with the well-known dystopian novel by George Orwell, *1984*, a warning about the dangers of totalitarianism ([Bramhall](#), 2020, June). While the cartoon obviously alludes to some alarming similarities in the US situation internally, equating the book with the Bible also brings to mind Old Testament prophets’ warnings against the abuse of political power, as well as Jesus’ confrontation with the Roman Empire. Borg & Crossan, who accentuate Jesus’ resistance, also draw a parallel between the empires of Rome and the US (Borg & Crossan, 2008, p. 213). In Graeme Keyes’ cartoon ([Keyes](#), 2020, June), a mobile phone replaces the Bible while the notice board proclaims that “Orange lies matter”, wordplay on Black Lives Matter and Trump’s sometimes face skin colour, indicating that Trump’s social media comments are more important to him than the principles behind BLM. Glen Le Lievre presents a meme-style cartoon using the actual photo of Trump, but holding a cartoon Bible which is on fire and has an astonished/shocked emoji expression ([Le Lievre](#), 2020, June). The cartoon is evidence of the blurred lines between professional editorial cartoonists and memes, described by Tsakona & Popa (2013, p. 2) as unconventional political humour. Numerous memes scorned the photoshoot by substituting the Bible with items such as porn magazines, Satan’s black book, textbooks for dummies, and a giant hamburger, and some of these must have undoubtedly inspired some cartoonists.

Shortly after the photo opportunity a rumour that Trump had held the Bible upside down started circulating on social media. In reality, Trump fumbled the Bible somewhat, but fact checks determined that he had held it right way up (Evon, 2020, June 3; Qiu & Decker 2020, September). Cartoonists, regardless of whether they had prior knowledge of the fact, exploited the idea. Ann [Telnaes](#) (2020, June 7) contrasts extreme wealth with an upside-down Bible, conceivably signifying disapproval, protruding from Ivanka Trump’s much-discussed expensive handbag (cf. Goodin & Earle, 2020, June). The cartoon seemingly goes deeper than reflecting peoples’ envious gossip, in principle aligning itself with the biblical motif of God siding with the underprivileged. In Steve Benson’s cartoon titled “Trump’s upside-down world”, the notice board absurdly welcomes all “except Blacks, Democrats, and especially Black Democrats”. The upside-down Bible and the notice board both contradict Trump saying, “Look at me! I’m a Christian!” ([Benson](#), 2020, June). Jonathan Schmock’s notice board claims that Trump would have known this church believes in love had he ever been inside, then demanding, “Now give back the book and get off my lawn” ([Schmock](#), 2020, June). “Get off my lawn” cites a Trump tweet about immigrants; it is also a meme and a cliché used in Clint Eastwood’s film, *Gran Torino*, in which the main character affronts his immigrant neighbours (Wolf, 2018, July). David Rowe’s near-naked Trump is titled “Bible basher” on some publishers’ sites ([Rowe](#), 2020, June 4), and an example of a cartoon containing multiple references: hydroxychloroquine tablets (one of Trump’s proposed cures for Covid-19), an open

bird cage crown, and him presiding over violent chaos below which also includes him kneeling on the Statue of Liberty. The upside-down Bible held high seems to be on fire, satirically disputing the Bible bashing description. Dale Cumming's cartoon is tagged on the publishing site as "Donald Trump inverts God". Trump gives the command, "Heel!", while his hand gestures 'sit' (Cumming, 2020, June). Inverted, 'god' becomes 'dog', which, if interpreted correctly, implies that Trump is giving God obedience commands.

3.6. Referencing the Bible and religious expressions directly

Cartoons creating a direct link between photo op events and a biblical message comprise techniques such as verbal references, visual renditions of Jesus, and adapted or distorted religious quotes.

Ben Garrison is a right leaning cartoonist and as can be expected, one of the few artists providing a positive angle on the photo op. In his cartoon (Garrison, 2020, June), the Democrat-symbol donkey stands amid a burning, rioting city, while Trump shouts from a pulpit, "Repent sinner!", a well-known phrase in evangelical/Pentecostal circles. Garrison's interpretation of Trump's actions is unrealistic, even if judged within the scope of satirical hyperbole, as he does not seem to observe any situational insincerity, with the result that the cartoon appears to overestimate Trump's evangelistic intentions.

The saying "Jesus wept" (John 11:35) is at times used sarcastically in pretend sympathy; these cartoons however employ it as wordplay on tears produced by the use of tear gas and Jesus crying in empathy with people. Kevin Siers' "Peaceful protesters teargassed to make way for photo-op..." consists of four panels, with a fumbling Trump initially blocking the view of the notice board, then moving away revealing the verse, while discordantly linking tear gas, Trump's behaviour, and Jesus' demeanour (Siers, 2020, June). Andy Marlette portrays Jesus as a peace demonstrator being tear-gassed by police, juxtaposing him with a grinning Trump standing next to the message board proclaiming "Jesus wept" (Marlette, 2020, June 2). Incorporating the scripture reference draws attention to the original context, highlighting at least two aspects: Jesus had compassion with the plight of those around him, and in identifying with vulnerable people, he came into conflict with unjust, powerful authorities.

Another Marlette cartoon (Marlette, 2020, June 4) touches on the unity of the church, an important faith tenet especially in ecumenical circles. While Trump is hiding in the bunker, the Elephant (Republican Party symbol) brings news that the photo op has united Christians in their condemnation of Trump: Baptists declared it immoral, Catholics called it blasphemous, and the Episcopalians would rather allow snake handling [a peculiar belief in some American Pentecostal churches] than vote for Trump – a backhanded, witty way of introducing an important theological topic.

Adam Zyglis' two panel cartoon (Zyglis, 2020, June) applies one of Trump's slurs to Trump himself: the title, "Looters..." cites a regular Trump label for protesters, and Zyglis contrasts a looter stealing a TV set with Trump holding up the "Word of God" (the only cartoon using this phrase), suggesting that he is essentially 'looting' the Bible for his own purposes. Tom Toles' rendition replaces the cross on the Bible cover with a "T", while the cartoon title changes the well-known phrase, "The sermon on the mount", to "Sermon from the pit". Trump twists Jesus' beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-12) by replacing them with "Blessed are the tear gas and rubber bullets [...] the unmerciful [...] the persecutors [...]" (Toles, 2020, June). Likewise, Stuart Carlson's Trump (Carlson, 2020, June) perverts well-known phrases from the Peace Prayer (sometimes

mistakenly attributed to St Francis of Assisi), creating a new range of negative adaptations of ‘make me an instrument of your peace’ which directly contradicts spiritual principles. Rob Rogers ([Rogers](#), 2020, June) revises the concept of false prophets (cf. Matthew 7:15; 2 Peter 2:1), warning, “Beware false prophets who use tear gas and rubber bullets on their citizens for a photo op!”. Besides the obvious sarcasm in equating Trump to a prophet, let alone a false one, it openly cautions Trump’s evangelical supporters. In Dave Brown’s depiction ([Brown](#), 2020, June), the Bible is titled “The art of the kneel”, a play on words referring to the anti-racism gesture, the officer kneeling on Floyd, and Trump’s book *The art of the deal*. Trump quotes from this ‘bible’: “As the good book says... ‘An eye for an eye, a knee for a windpipe’!”; Trump revealed in a 2016 radio interview that “an eye for an eye” was his favourite Bible verse (O’Neil, 2020, June). Despite the humorous aspects of the cartoon, the notice board which renames the church as “Church of St Don the malign”, points to the idea of something harmful or evil taking place; kneeling on someone’s neck indicates submitting the person violently, which is in line with Trump’s order to governors at the time that they must “dominate” in order to swiftly crush the protests (Lemire et al., 2020, June). Nick Anderson’s drawing ([Anderson](#), 2020, June 5) is captioned, “WWJD” (What would Jesus do?). Anderson’s Jesus-figure is drawn respectfully and his use of a well-known Christian acronym suggests that he might be appealing to Christians to evaluate events in the light of the teachings of Jesus. Steve Sack’s cartoon implies that Trump is not taking the Bible seriously: Jared Kushner is asked to hand him his “prop Bible”, but instructed not to open it: “I don’t wanna see any of that ‘Blessed are the peacemakers’ crap” ([Sack](#), 2020, June).

References to the crucifixion are used diversly. Daniel Murphy presents a minimalistic-style photo montage titled “The problem with right wing Christians” ([Murphy](#), 2020, June), questioning the unconditional endorsement of Trump who is holding a Bible and a hammer while standing next to Jesus on the cross. The cartoon consequently denounces Trump’s behaviour in a striking but quite cynical way. Pat Bagley’s “Fake piety” ([Bagley](#), 2020, June) also places Trump at the crucifixion events, creating a disturbing image of Trump sitting on the cross (going along for the ride so to speak), while a bruised Jesus is dragging it along. The message coming across is that Trump is abusing, and therefore making a mockery of a crucial belief in the Christian faith. Schweizer (2022, p. 13) observes that Western Christian societies are at a point where anything is allowed comically, yet reaction to the two previous cartoons might not completely rule out Phiddian’s (2019, p. 6) notion of the CAD triad of emotional responses, as (Christian) readers will conceivably have one of two reactions: either experience contempt for Trump, anger towards his abuse of a revered conviction, and overall disgust with his actions, or, in the case of Trump loyalists, the same feelings but directed against the cartoon itself and/or the cartoonist.

Andy Marlette ([Marlette](#), 2020, June 7), juxtaposes Trump and Press Secretary Kayleigh McEnany with Jesus on the cross. McEnany, holding a mobile phone in an imitation-pose of Trump, asks Jesus to smile for the president’s photo op. A stark disparity is created by drawing Jesus in an earnest style while distinctly caricaturing Trump and McEnany. (McEnany is unfairly targeted here as she seems to be a dedicated Christian - cf. McEnany, 2024, March).

4. Conclusion

The photo op cartoons do not target the Bible or religion. This is however often different in the comedy universe as a whole (cartoons, stand up, late night TV, etc.), and more research is needed from an interdisciplinary angle as to what is communicated and why. The situation is quite different amongst religious groups, but from a Christian position specifically, some introspection as well as serious apologetics is necessary, as atheist and agnostic comedians and writers often pose difficult but valid questions through their humour. While religious studies seemingly already benefit from humour research, religion should maybe play a bigger role in contributing to the ethics within humour studies, and although individual religions' views are valuable, the ultimate approach must be from a comprehensive faith point of view.

It is clear that the cartoons in this study are primarily about Donald Trump rather than the Bible, and it is logical to assume that the Bible would not have featured in political cartoons as a subject independently for ten consecutive days. The cartoons deride Trump while severely criticizing his moral standards, but their motivation is political rather religious. On the other hand the Bible, even if taken as a type of cultural artefact, is more than a supporting act, and in some instances a reversal of roles even seem to take place when the main character and his ideas are subordinated to biblical ideas. Though the cartoons generally do not strive to convey some profound religious ideas, some possible theological concepts do emerge. These include the upside-down Bible as indication that it is Trump's morality which is often incorrectly orientated; the Bible held up high (higher than the photo op images) as indicative of providing moral guidance; and as a constant reminder of values such as truth, nonviolence, and treating others as you would like to be treated.

The accusation that Trump used the Bible as a prop raises the interesting question of whether the cartoonists are similarly (mis)using the Bible image merely as a means to achieve *their* aim, namely castigating Trump. For example, when the Bible is replaced by a book for dummies, the book title amusingly alludes to Trump, but may at the same time be suggesting what the cartoonist thinks of Trump with no thought given to any biblical persuasions. The answer probably lies in the reality that any improper use of the sacred book stems from the original idea to utilise it as part of the photo op for whatever positive results Trump's team had expected to come from it. The cartoonists therefore seemed to simply take the opportunity conveniently supplied to them.

Responding to the paper's research question, it is true that in some cases the Bible image acts as little more than a situational identifier, but it also functions as more than "an intertextual partner in the act of targeting their joke" (cf. Thomas, 2021, p. 30). The mere presence of the Bible pictured throughout the cartoons is a constant metaphor for moral behaviours, while serving as an incongruous counterbalance to harmful ideas and challenger of injustice. Friesen (2022, p. 21) postulates that in antiquity, sacred texts functioned as icons conferring religious authority and political legitimacy, and Trump holding up the Bible resembled this ritualisation. The cartoons thoroughly debunk this belief.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to express his appreciation to the anonymous reviewers for their valuable input and guidance.

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[All cartoon in-text links were confirmed on 14th April 2025].

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