



Written by [R. Cort Kirkwood](#) on March 17, 2026

## Hegseth Pastor Would Ban Public Displays of Catholic Devotion

The 250,000 Catholics who serve in the U.S. military might like a word with Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth. His pastor, [Doug Wilson](#), founder of the [Communion of Reformed Evangelical Churches](#), and whom Hegseth invited to speak at the Pentagon, thinks public display of the Catholic faith must be banned because they are either “idolatry” or “Mariolatry.”

Hegseth has said he supports Wilson’s views, which likely will alarm the quarter-million Catholics — and their families — whom Hegseth is supposed to lead. Catholics are the largest Christian denomination in the military.



AP Images  
Doug Wilson

Secretary Pete Hegseth Pastor who was Invited to Pray at Pentagon Says Publicly Eucharist and Marian Procession Should NOT be Permitted in Public. See more here:

<https://t.co/5fpj1d1ff8> [pic.twitter.com/iKJg1bPCuI](https://pic.twitter.com/iKJg1bPCuI)

— John-Henry Westen (@JhWesten) [March 13, 2026](#)

### What Wilson Said

Frighteningly, Wilson compared the Catholic faith to Islam and Hinduism because they are all, he falsely claimed, equally idolatrous. On March 6, he appeared on the Dad Saves America podcast, hosted by Catholic John Papola. Wilson first detailed the restrictions upon Muslims, but then segued to Catholics, noting that “the public spaces belong to Christ.”

“We are a Christian nation, so church bells are OK, but a Muslim call to prayer in the public space would not be okay,” Wilson said:

Catholic church bells would be okay, Catholic church bells would be OK. But a parade in honor of the Virgin Mary, carrying an image of the Virgin Mary down Main Street, no!

“What about a Eucharistic procession?” Papola asked. Replied Wilson:

That’s a new one. I would say probably not. It would depend on what was being done around it, how it was being conducted.

But basically, public displays of idolatry, what the Protestant foundation of the law would consider to be idolatry, would not be allowed. So you wouldn’t have a Hindu procession with a Hindu god, you wouldn’t have a procession of the Virgin Mary.”



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On March 16, Wilson posted another video explaining himself, the transcripts of [which appeared](#) on his Blog & Mablog. Wilson allowed that he had great respect for such Catholics as U.S. Supreme Court Associate Justice Clarence Thomas, or writers such as J.R.R. Tolkien and G.K. Chesterton.

But alas, in Wilson's Protestant America, while "church bells would be fine," the Hindus and Catholics are also banned:

No ninety foot statues of Hindu gods by the freeway either. One critic was astonished that I would restrict Catholic displays like this while being as friendly as I am to the Jews. But this is an equal weights and measures thing. The Jews couldn't have Virgin Mary parades either.

Wilson didn't name any "Jews" who wanted "Virgin Mary parades."

Leftist Catholic Christopher Hale detailed Wilson's visit to the Pentagon at Hegseth's request. He appeared on February 18 and led a service on the Pentagon internal television network, Hale wrote before elaborating on Wilson's views.

"Under Wilson's framework, the Corpus Christi procession that Catholics have carried through their towns for eight centuries would be outlawed," [Hale wrote](#):

So would the rosary walks and Marian processions that mark parish life across this country, along with the Eucharistic processions that Pope Leo XIV has called Catholics to embrace with renewed devotion.

Wilson is not some marginal crank shouting into the void. He runs Christ Church in Moscow, Idaho, the flagship congregation of the Communion of Reformed Evangelical Churches. He operates Canon Press, a publishing house with national reach.

He helped build the classical Christian school network that Hegseth credits with transforming his family's life. Pentagon spokesman Sean Parnell confirmed that Hegseth is "a proud member of a church affiliated with the Congregation of Reformed Evangelical Churches," which Wilson co-founded, and that the Secretary "very much appreciates many of Mr. Wilson's writings and teachings."...

They include Wilson's characterization of the Mass as "idolatry," his description of Catholic devotion to Mary as "Mariolatry," and his labeling of the papacy, the veneration of images, and the entire Catholic sacramental system as areas of "covenantal rebellion" against God. Wilson once compared the Catholic Church to "an adulterous husband" — technically still married to Christ, but "cheating on Him."

This is the man the United States Secretary of Defense invited to preach to American troops.

NEW: Pete Hegseth's pastor and mentor says the United States should ban public Masses, Marian processions, and Corpus Christi devotions.

Hegseth invited the anti-Catholic preacher to lead a prayer service at the Pentagon on February 14. <https://t.co/KASwkbTy5e>

— Christopher Hale (@ChristopherHale) [March 13, 2026](#)



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Other prominent Catholics are equally unhappy.

“The idea that public adoration of the Blessed Sacrament is idolatry is a fundamentally antichristic stance, and one we should not be afraid to call out as such,” Joshua Charles wrote on X:

As St. Robert Bellarmine observed in his treatise on Antichrist (Ch. 7) about the protestants: “The heretics of this time, apart from all other things, are precursors of Antichrist since no one more ardently desires to altogether abolish the sacrifice of the Eucharist than they.”

I’m thankful that some protestant brethren assert and defend some important truths.

But as I have often said, we are different religions. I do not partner too closely, because at the end of the day, full loyalty to Christ and His Church will come into conflict with the tenets of... <https://t.co/tY9Wlx0VBj>

— Joshua Charles ( @JoshuaTCharles ) [March 13, 2026](#)

## Catholics in the Service

[A 2019 survey revealed](#) that Catholics are the largest denomination in the armed services. While 70 percent of service members are Christians, 32 percent are nondenominational, 20 percent are Catholics, and 18 percent are Protestant.

And again, 250,000 of the 1.33 million active-duty service members are Catholics. That’s about two of every 10 men and women with whom Hegseth served in the Army.

Hegseth — who supported GOP presidential candidate John McCain in 2008 — apparently doesn’t know or care about those data given that he knows very well about Wilson’s anti-Catholic bias.

That said, evidence has not surfaced to show that Hegseth agrees with Wilson on banning the public displays of Catholic devotion.

Although Hegseth is a Protestant, he has a yen for historic Catholic symbols. His right chest sports a tattoo of the [Jerusalem Cross](#), the symbol of the first Catholic crusaders and the coat of arms for the Kingdom of Jerusalem in the 11th century. He wears a [“Deus Vult”](#) (“God Wills It”) tattoo on his right bicep. It was the battle cry of those crusaders.



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