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U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio appears on a screen at the "Rededicate 250: A National Jubilee of Prayer, Praise & Thanksgiving" event at the National Mall in Washington, May 17, 2026. (OSV News/Reuters/Eric Lee)



by Emma Cieslik

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In anticipation of the 250th anniversary of the United States, thousands came to the National Mall in Washington for "Rededicate 250: A National Jubilee Of Prayer, Praise & Thanksgiving." The eight-hour-long event, [created and organized](#) by Freedom 250 in collaboration with the White House, drew throngs of people over the weekend, who waited in line to reach a grassy plot in front of a chapel-style stage with three arched screens. I attended the event as a Catholic public historian, curious about the materials that attendees, organizers and protestors were distributing.

But the materials that I and other members of the public received revealed deep-seated tension between Catholics and Protestants at an event focused on Christian unity and featuring Catholic speakers. I saw echoes of the same anti-Catholic conspiracies that have existed since the very beginning of the United States, and have affected the way that American Christianity has been constructed. The juxtaposition between the event's anti-Catholic elements and its Catholic speakers emphasized the [ongoing fracture](#) between Protestants and Catholics in Trump's MAGA coalition.

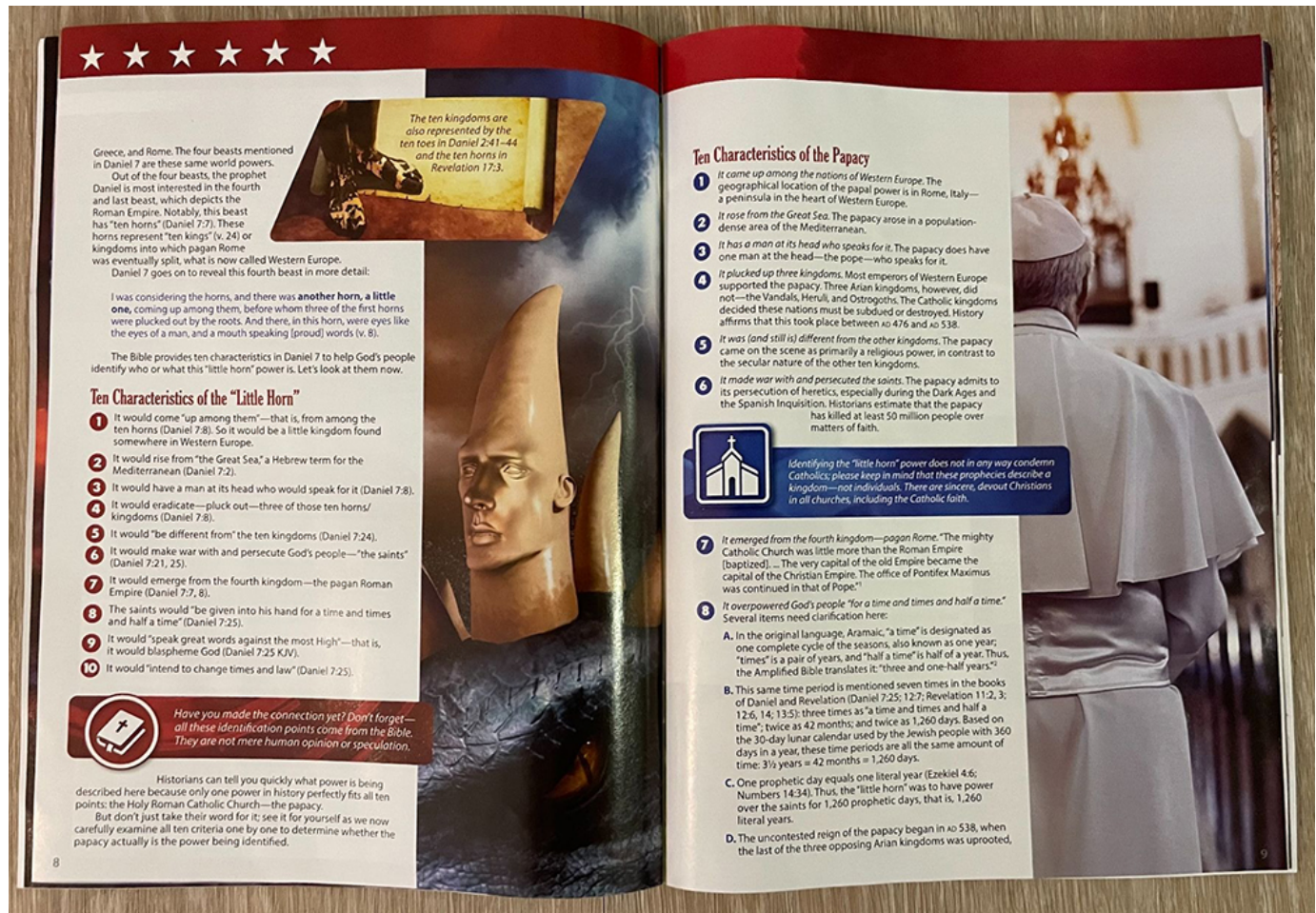
I, like everyone who walked up from the Smithsonian metro stop, was handed a bag with the screenprinted logo "Religious Freedom 250" from [Amazing Facts International](#), a [multimillion dollar](#) religious nonprofit organization [run by Pastor Doug Batchelor](#).

In it was Ellen Gould White's *The Fall and Rise of Jerusalem: The Great Controversy Between Good and Evil*, along with a glossy magazine titled "Religious Freedom and America in Bible Prophecy: The Future of Earth's Last Superpower Revealed" published by Amazing Facts and other assorted leaflets. While not officially affiliated with the event, the bag and its contents closely mirrored Rededicate 250's design, and they were the only materials that I was handed while walking around the event.

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I was already skeptical of the materials because White is [well-known](#) for her [anti-Catholic views](#). In fact, White's book *The Great Controversy*, which argues that the Catholic Church [misinterprets](#) the Second and Fourth Commandments, is a prominent source of [anti-Catholic conspiracies](#).

But what I encountered inside of the magazine was even more blatant.



The inside of the magazine "Religious Freedom and America in Bible Prophecy: The Future of Earth's Last Superpower Revealed" (Courtesy of Emma Cieslik)

In articles stating that "an image of the first beast [prophesized in Revelation] would be a representation of the papacy," the magazine argued that Catholicism itself is the greatest threat to religious liberty in the United States.

"In order for the USA to make a copy of the papacy, a church-state government," the magazine read, "it would have to set aside its founding principles and combine church and state. Upon doing so, in imitation of the papacy at the height of its power

during the Dark Ages, the USA will then legislate religious observance in accordance with the papacy. It will then influence all the nations of the world to follow its example."

From arguments about the Catholic Church observing commandments different from those in the Bible to conspiracy theories about the fabricated papal title *Vicarius Filii Dei* standing for 666, or a numerology indicative of the devil, this magazine regurgitated nativist, anti-Catholic conspiracies that have [a long, dark history in America](#) — from the Know-Nothing party and the Bloody Monday Massacre of German Catholics in Louisville, Kentucky, in the mid-1800s, to Ku Klux Klan violence against Catholics and incendiary conspiracy theories about American Catholics' loyalty.

The anti-Catholic rhetoric of these materials stood in strange contrast to the high-profile Catholics speaking at the event including JD Vance and Marco Rubio, and ordained Catholic leaders Bishop Robert Barron and Cardinal Timothy Dolan. Barron himself may have been alluding to anti-Catholicism during his keynote address when he said that "I can stand on this National Mall today as both a proud Catholic bishop and a proud American citizen and say, 'God bless the United States of America.' "



Bishop Robert E. Barron of Winona-Rochester, Minnesota, a member of the U.S. Religious Liberty Commission, speaks at the "Rededicate 250: A National Jubilee of Prayer, Praise & Thanksgiving" event at the National Mall in Washington, May 17, 2026. (OSV News screenshot)

Although Amazing Facts International was not officially affiliated with Rededicate 250, anti-Catholic bigotry was woven into the fabric of the event, making Barron and Dolan's participation more curious. Headliners included Robert Jeffress, who [has described](#) Catholicism as a "cult-like pagan religion," and speakers Eric Metaxas and Jack Graham have [accused](#) Pope Leo XIV of "pious blather" and of not having read the bible, respectively.

These sentiments aren't limited to the external evangelical speakers — Rededicate 250 took place just weeks after the president [openly attacked](#) Leo for the pontiff's opposition to the war in Iran, and after Doug Wilson, the evangelical pastor who Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth has invited to host prayer services at the Pentagon, [said that](#) Marian processions would not be allowed in a Christian nationalist America because they are "a public display of idolatry."

While the extreme materials from Amazing Facts International may seem like isolated, possibly fringe, examples of contemporary anti-Catholicism, they are part of a larger picture. Rededicate 250 was plagued by the same division that has afflicted American Christians since our country's beginning, and which now undermines the already fragile MAGA coalition between Catholics and Protestants.

This story appears in the **USA 250** feature series. [View the full series.](#)