

Interesting times

JD Vance on His Faith and Trump's Most Controversial Policies



Full text :

Ross Douthat: Mr. Vice President, welcome to “Interesting Times.”

JD Vance: Thank you, Ross — wait, is that actually the name of your podcast?

Douthat: That is the name of our show. Do we not live in interesting times?

So we're here in Rome, the day after the papal inauguration, and you just met with Pope Leo XIV, the first American pope.

Vance: I did.

Douthat: So what did you talk about?

Vance: Well, I want to be respectful of the private conversation we had.

Generally, we talked about issues the Vatican cares a lot about. Obviously, they care about the migration issue. They care a lot about world peace. They care a lot about what's happening in Russia and Ukraine. They care a lot about what's happening with Gaza and Israel. It was a very productive conversation. I mean, amazing to me. As you know, I was one of the last world leaders to meet with Pope Francis on Easter Sunday, before he passed away. I'm actually wearing the tie that he gave me, which is very cool —

Douthat: That's the Vatican seal on polka dots.

Vance: Yes, on dark blue polka dots.

So, in the life of one person's faith who happens to be an American political leader, it's been really an amazing three or four weeks. I'm sure I'll have some time to think about it and reflect on what it all means, but I'm really just honored to be here and thrilled to be a part of it.

Douthat: How does being either a Catholic or just a Christian shape your politics? What are things that you feel like you believe or care about in politics that are specific to Christianity rather than conservatism, the Republican Party and so on? How would your worldview be different if you weren't a Catholic Christian?

Vance: Well, I think one of the criticisms that I get from the right is that I am insufficiently committed to the capital-M market.

I am a capitalist. I believe the market economy is the best way of provisioning goods and services and coordinating people across a very complex society. But I'm not one of these people who says every intervention in the market is good — for example, trade, which I'm sure we'll get into.

If you apply a tariff on an import good, there are a lot of people who say: Well, that is a violation of some market rule. I think one of the things that I take from my Christian principles and Catholic social teachings — specifically whether you agree with the specific policies of our administration — is the market is a tool, but it is not the purpose of American politics.

The purpose of American politics should be to encourage our citizens to live a good life. And part of that is good, dignified work. Part of that is having a high enough wage that you can support a family. That very much flows through my Catholicism.

To be clear, I'm not saying it has to flow and that people who don't share my faith can't worry about those things. But that is something very much that I take from Catholic social teaching, and it certainly influences my views on economics. Obviously, I'm pro-life. I care about the rights of the unborn. That very much flows from my Christian perspective. There's a lot of stuff.

When we talk about family policy — we talked about this a little bit with the Holy Father today — American society, I think, has become way too hostile to family formation. I think it's probably true across the West. In some ways maybe the Europeans are even worse off than we are. Europe and America have been quite bad at supporting families over the last generation, and I think you see that in the fact that fewer people are choosing to start families. That's something else that I think a lot about because of my faith.

It would be easier to ask what does your faith not cause you to think about, because when you really believe something, and I do believe it — I'm not saying I don't have doubts; I think everybody does — but when you really believe something, it ought to influence how you think about the way that you do your job, the way that you spend time with your wife and your children. It just kind of necessarily inform