

The Golden Calf Debate: When Political Honor Becomes Religious Controversy

A Trump statue dedication sparks fierce debate about idol worship, religious symbolism, and the line between reverence and veneration.

-Adam Makins, May 9, 2026

A gold statue called “Don Colossus” went up at Trump National Doral golf course in Miami, and it’s become a masterclass in how the same object can mean completely different things to different people. The sculpture, funded by crypto investors and depicting Donald Trump with his fist raised, was dedicated Wednesday by Pastor Mark Burns. What followed was a collision between those who saw it as patriotic tribute and those who saw something darker: idol worship dressed up as civic pride.

The comparison to the biblical “golden calf” spread across social media like wildfire. Critics pointed to Exodus, where the Israelites fashioned a golden calf while Moses was away, and God responded with considerable fury. It’s a loaded reference. It carries weight. It suggests that what’s being defended isn’t just a statue but something bordering on religious devotion to a political figure.

Burns pushed back hard. Multiple times. “This statue is not about worship. It is about honor,” he wrote on X. “It is a celebration of life and a powerful symbol of resilience, freedom, patriotism, courage, and the will to keep fighting for America.” He added that the statue serves as a reminder of “the hand of God over President Trump’s life.”

But here’s where things get uncomfortable for his argument: the more you deny something specific, the more people start asking why you need to deny it so urgently.

The Problem With Defensive Framing

One X user captured this dynamic perfectly: “Saying ‘this is not a golden calf’ as you put up a golden calf doesn’t cancel that fact out.” The line went viral, which tells you something about how people were feeling. Another user joked, “My ‘not a golden calf’ statue has people asking a lot of questions already answered by my statue.” Even “Law and Order: SVU” star Christopher Meloni chimed in with a biblical callback: “Waiting for Moses to come down with a couple tablets.”

Burns doubled down on the religious framing in his defense: “We worship the Lord Jesus Christ and Him alone.” Fair enough. But the statue itself existed now, made of gold, erected at a luxury resort, funded by thousands of supporters, and dedicated at a formal ceremony. The physical reality didn’t change based on what Burns said about it afterward.

Former Republican Rep. Adam Kinzinger called it what he saw: “This is absolutely idol worship.” Keith Olbermann pointed out the biblical angle more sharply: “This is literally described in the bible as a sin. Maybe you could read it, ‘Pastor.’ It’s available in all popular bookstores.”

Where Politics and Religion Collide

The real issue here isn’t whether Burns personally worships Trump. It’s what happens when [political](#) reverence gets dressed in religious language and given religious dimensions. When a pastor leads a dedication ceremony and speaks about God’s protection of a political figure, when the defense against idol worship accusations includes appeals to divine providence, the lines blur whether anyone intends them to or not.

Mehdi Hasan from Zeteo made a pointed observation: “Remember: in the Middle East, we’re fighting a regime of religious maniacs who blindly follow a Supreme Leader.” The comparison stung because it forced people to consider how their own political veneration might look from the outside.

The statue exists now. It’s gold. It’s massive. And it’s become a symbol of something much bigger than itself: a debate about how far the celebration of political figures can go before it starts looking like something else entirely. Burns can insist until he’s hoarse that it’s about honor and not worship, but the icon is still standing there, and people are still asking what the difference really is.