

Ronald Reagan's son, a leading figure of American non-believers



Photo: David Ryder Le Devoir Despite his many public interventions on atheism, Ron Reagan does not consider himself an "activist".

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In the United States, religion takes such a place in society that atheism has become a real political movement with its lobbies, its demands and, recently, its representatives in Congress. Second of three texts today with the portrait of Ronald Reagan Junior, son of the former president and figure of a phenomenon less and less marginal among our neighbors to the South.

Ronald Reagan Junior is one of the best known figures of the atheist cause in the

United States. In an advertisement broadcast these days on television, the son of the former president declares a smirk "that he is not afraid to burn in hell".

"Hello, I am Ron Reagan, an assumed atheist, and I am alarmed by the intrusions of religion into our government," he says in the sober advertisement.

How could the son of one of the most conservative presidents in modern American history end up there? A little by chance, answers the Duty the principal concerned.

"It started about 40 years ago, when my father was elected president. The New York Times asked me in an interview if I was going to be in politics too. You know, I had been asked this question all my life, and I used to answer that it was not for me, that I did not like politics ... But there, I still had an answer better to give. I told them that I was not interested and that, anyway, I could never be elected because I am not a believer. "

As he hoped, this argument closed the topic. But it also caused a scandal. "The response has been incredible. It made everyone angry. I have received indignant letters from some friends. They wanted to know why I said that, what I was looking for... It was the first time I realized how much people really care about other people's beliefs. I found it interesting. "

Born in 1958, Ronald Reagan is the youngest of the couple Ronald and Nancy Reagan, who also had a daughter, the other two Reagan children being from a previous marriage.

Son of president

Ron was 22 when his father was elected president, but was only 8 when Ronald Reagan Sr. was first elected governor of California. In family photos from the time, the couple often pose alone with the little boy he was, with the other children already grown up.

It was at this time that he came to the conclusion that God did not exist. "By 10 years old, I had already moved away from most Christian beliefs," he says. "Then, when I was 12, I told my parents that I wouldn't go to church with them anymore because it

would be hypocritical. After all, if they were right about God, he himself would know that I was faking it! "

Now we end up with a Donald Trump who is obviously not a believer, but who went to seek the vote of the evangelists

- Ronald Reagan jr

Where did these early convictions come from? Perhaps from his passion for prehistory. He remembers that his mother was not sure what to say to him when he wanted to know if Adam and Eve were "cavemen". Then Santa Claus didn't help. "When you are little, your parents tell you that there is a Santa Claus in the North, that he has a big white beard and that he knows whether you have been nice or not during the year. It makes you think of God a lot! And then you find out that it doesn't exist. "

Little of his father's reaction to his rejection of the Church. But one thing is certain, Ronald Reagan Sr. was not the type to meddle in the faith of others. "He was a pious man, but he never made the mistake of many politicians who use their faith for political gain," he said at his funeral in 2004. "He It is true that after being the victim of an attempted murder, he came to think that God had spared him to do good. But he accepted it as a responsibility, not as a mandate. "

Opposition to [Donald Trump](#)

Despite being a notorious Democrat, Ron Reagan insists his father would have disapproved of what the Republican Party has become, even before Trump's accession.

"My father signed a law authorizing abortion, he raised taxes after having reduced them, gave amnesty to 3 million immigrants," he reported on Bill Maher's show in 2015. "And when a hole formed in the ozone layer over the South Pole [...] he didn't decide it was a leftist plot to deprive us of cold beer and he acted! "

He concedes, however, that it was also during his father's time that Republicans began to approach evangelical lobbies. "The party wanted to woo the evangelist vote, and it

was pretty simple to do: my father was a Christian, he could tell he was on their side. "

Then it got out of hand. "Now we end up with a Donald Trump who is clearly not a believer, but who has sought the vote of the evangelists. Why ? Because he hates or pretends to hate the same people as them: all those progressives who want to allow homosexuals to marry, have black friends, want to deprive them of their white privileges and threaten their way of life, etc. ", He launches ironically.

Ron Reagan has no tongue in his pocket and handles the sarcastic comment with obvious pleasure. He is also occasionally invited to television to comment on politics, especially on MSNBC. He even had his own show, the Ron Reagan Show, before Air America Media went bankrupt. He shares his life between Seattle and Italy with his second wife.

Despite his numerous public interventions on atheism, he does not consider himself a "militant". After his publication in The Times, he became "the atheist who has a famous father", he recounts amused. "After that, I could allude to it, they would ask me the question again and I would confirm it. Then eventually the Freedom From Religion Foundation [FFRF] heard about it and asked me to make the announcement. "

It was 2014, and the ad is still circulating, while continuing to generate strong reactions. During the debate at the Democratic convention, commentators even said she stole the show from the debate itself by sparking a surge of positive comments on the Twitter platform. Conversely, some TV channels still censor the passage where Mr. Reagan says he is not afraid to burn in hell.

For the FFRF, his contribution is invaluable, especially since celebrities who dare to publicly call themselves atheists are very rare in the United States. "For the son of a very conservative president to advertise for a controversial group like ours by presenting himself openly as an atheist, it had a big educational impact. It helped show the nation that this kind of people exist, that they are normal, "says the co-director of the FFRF, Annie Laurie Gaylor.

“This publicity was a big blow to us,” she adds. “He started from a short 30-second clip and took it much further with his personality. It was he who added the expression “assumed atheist who is not afraid to burn in hell”. ”

Who does he think he is addressing with this message? “I would like this to be heard by atheists who are still 'in the closet'. It would probably be the most useful thing. So that people are less afraid to take responsibility. I am not trying to convert anyone to atheism or to lead believers away from their faith. It's something they have to do on their own. ”

But beyond that, it's a way for him to defend science. “What doesn't bother me the most is what effect religion has on stem cell research, for example. People can believe whatever they want, but when it goes into public space and it affects everyone's life, we have a problem. ”