



# CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM

AND THE JANUARY 6, 2021

# INSURRECTION

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## **INTRODUCTION**

Amanda Tyler

## **WHAT IS CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM? 1**

Andrew Whitehead & Samuel Perry

## **WHAT IS WHITE CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM? 4**

Anthea Butler

## **THE PATRIOTIC WITNESS OF BLACK CHRISTIANS 7**

Jemar Tisby, Ph.D.

## **NETWORK OF CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM LEADING UP TO JANUARY 6 10**

Katherine Stewart

## **EVENTS, PEOPLE, AND NETWORKS LEADING UP TO JANUARY 6 14**

Andrew L. Seidel

## **ATTACK ON THE CAPITOL: EVIDENCE OF THE ROLE OF WHITE CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM 25**

Andrew L. Seidel

## **CHRISTIAN RESPONSES TO CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM AFTER JANUARY 6 41**

Amanda Tyler

## **CONTRIBUTORS 45**

## **ENDNOTES 48**



# INTRODUCTION

Amanda Tyler

Even with the voluminous coverage of the events of January 6, 2021, one area that has not yet been studied enough is the role that Christian nationalism played in bolstering, justifying, and intensifying the attack on the U.S. Capitol. This report describes Christian nationalism and recounts its impact on the day itself as well as in the weeks leading up to the insurrection. Drawing on reporting, videos, statements, and images from the attack and its precursor events, this report contains the most comprehensive account to date of Christian nationalism and its role in the January 6 insurrection.

Christian nationalism is a political ideology and cultural framework that seeks to merge American and Christian identities, distorting both the Christian faith and America's constitutional democracy. Christian nationalism relies on the mythological founding of the United States as a "Christian nation," singled out for God's providence in order to fulfill God's purposes on earth. Christian nationalism demands a privileged place for Christianity in public life, buttressed by the active support of government at all levels.

Christian nationalism is not Christianity, though it is not accurate to say that Christian nationalism has nothing to do with Christianity. Christian nationalism relies on Christian imagery and language, as described vividly in this report. Christian nationalism has been rebuked by a wide variety of individuals and organizations, including Christian groups and individuals, both clergy and laity. In other words, to oppose and work against Christian nationalism is not to oppose Christianity; in fact, many Christians see opposing Christian nationalism as key to preserving the faith.

The contributing authors have studied and written about Christian nationalism for years. They agree that Christian nationalism is a pervasive and long-standing ideology in American society that has been particularly prominent in recent years. Some contributors describe Christian nationalism as a movement led from the top down. Other contributors focus on how Christian nationalism appears in survey data of Americans. The events of January 6 show how both power leadership and grassroots movements came together in a horrific and previously unthinkable way to threaten American democracy at the seat of representative government.

Throughout the report, the authors use the terms "Christian nationalism" and "white Christian nationalism," the latter term explicitly acknowledging the overlap of Christian nationalism with racism and white supremacy. The different contributors to the project use the terms with which they are most comfortable or that best reflect their research and areas of expertise.

Central to the events of January 6 was the pervasive lie that the 2020 election was fraudulent and stolen from President Donald Trump. The false narrative that Trump won the election, which a significant number of Americans continue to believe, has been furthered in numerous challenges to the integrity of the 2020 presidential election. References in these pages to "election lies" should be read as general references to this overarching lie of a stolen election.

This report's focus on the events leading up to and on January 6 does not suggest that this is the sole example or manifestation of Christian nationalism in the United States today. Concentrating solely on the most violent or obvious examples of Christian nationalism could distract us from addressing the more mundane and yet insidious forms of the ideology that often go unnoticed. The contributors and sponsors of this report are committed to studying and combatting Christian nationalism in its many forms. The scale and severity of the January 6 attack warrant a dedicated report of this kind.

Dismantling Christian nationalism will take a broad and diverse response from individuals and organizations committed to effecting change. This report is sponsored by Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty (BJC) and Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF). These two organizations both advocate for the separation of the institutions of government and religion, albeit from two very different perspectives. As we learn more about Christian nationalism and how it threatens to destroy American democracy, we are even more convinced of the need for a national commitment — from religious and secular groups and individuals — to furthering the American ideal that our belonging in American society is not in any way conditioned on or connected to our religious identity. Standing against Christian nationalism is standing up for everyone's religious freedom — the freedom to practice any faith or no faith without unnecessary interference by government.

# Section I

## WHAT IS CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM?

Andrew Whitehead & Samuel Perry

**Andrew L. Whitehead is an Associate Professor of Sociology and Director of the Association of Religion Data Archives at the Center for the Study of Religion and American Culture at IUPUI. Samuel L. Perry is an Associate Professor of Sociology at the University of Oklahoma. They are the co-authors of *Taking America Back for God: Christian Nationalism in the United States* (Oxford University Press).**

Building on the historical and theological works that define white Christian nationalism and distinguish it from Christianity, social scientists continue to establish empirically its prevalence in the U.S. population and relationship to other identities and political issues. Survey after survey finds that close to half of Americans are at the very least supportive of the fusion of Christianity with American civic life.<sup>1</sup> These Americans believe that Christianity should influence our public policies, sacred symbols, and national identity. Scholars find, however, that the “Christianity” of Christian nationalism brings with it a host of other assumptions about who are true and rightful citizens. Namely, that true Americans are white, culturally conservative, natural-born citizens.

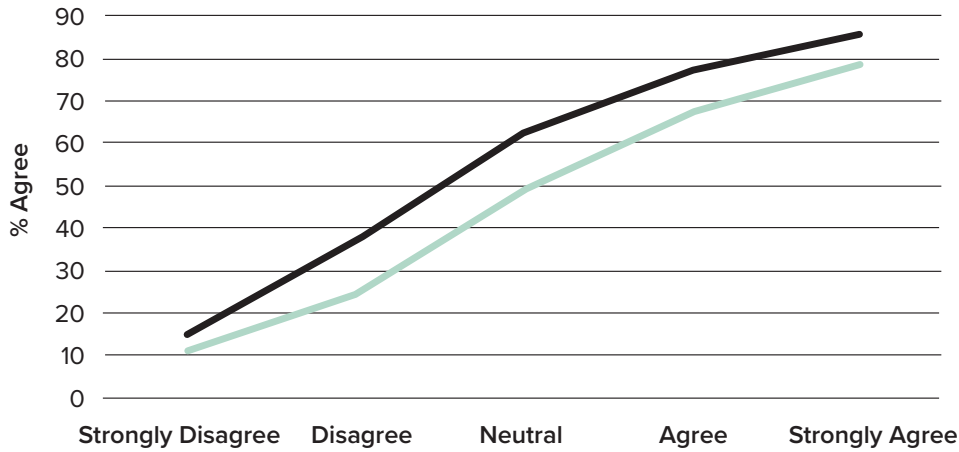
Regarding the Capitol insurrection specifically, national survey data collected in early February 2021 found that indicators of Christian nationalist ideology (specifically, believing the founding documents of the United States are divinely inspired or that the federal government should declare the U.S. a “Christian nation”) were strongly associated with white Americans believing that Black Lives Matter and Antifa started the violence and that

President Donald Trump was not to blame for the riots. As the figures on the next page illustrate, the more white Americans affirm indicators of Christian nationalism, the more likely they are to deny Trump’s culpability in the riots and the more likely they are to affirm debunked conspiracy theories about the involvement of Black Lives Matter or Antifa.

Christian nationalism is also related to other conspiratorial views. Recent research demonstrates that white Christian nationalism is intimately intertwined with conspiratorial thinking — such as QAnon — and white supremacist ideology.<sup>2</sup> In one survey, of those Americans who strongly embrace Christian nationalism, 73 percent agree with the QAnon conspiracy. This same subset of Americans who strongly embrace Christian nationalism are also much more likely to subscribe to anti-Semitic views. In fact, conspiratorial thinking and Christian nationalism are mutually reinforcing white supremacist beliefs. The Americans who embrace QAnon and Christian nationalism are the most likely to agree with various anti-Semitic tropes.



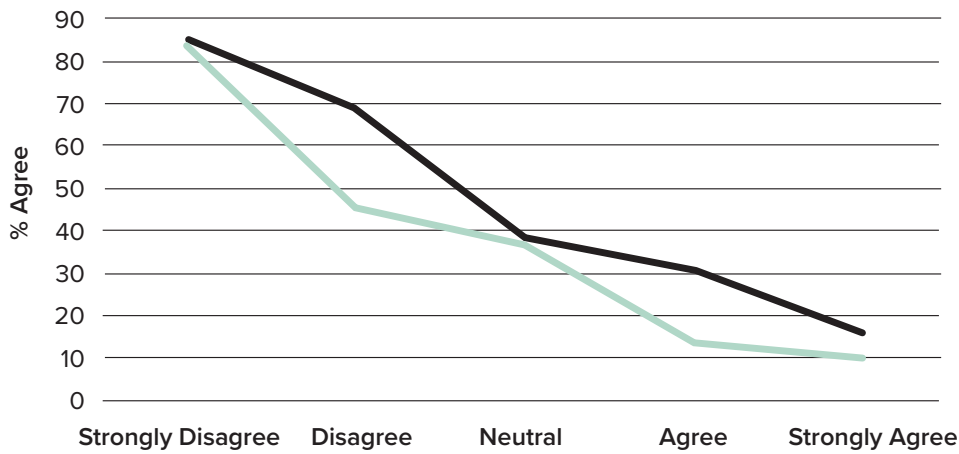
Percent who agree that “outside agitators like Antifa and Black Lives Matter were mixed into the crowd and started the violence” across agreement with Christian nationalist claims



I consider the founding documents like the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution to be divinely inspired

The federal government should declare the U.S. a Christian nation

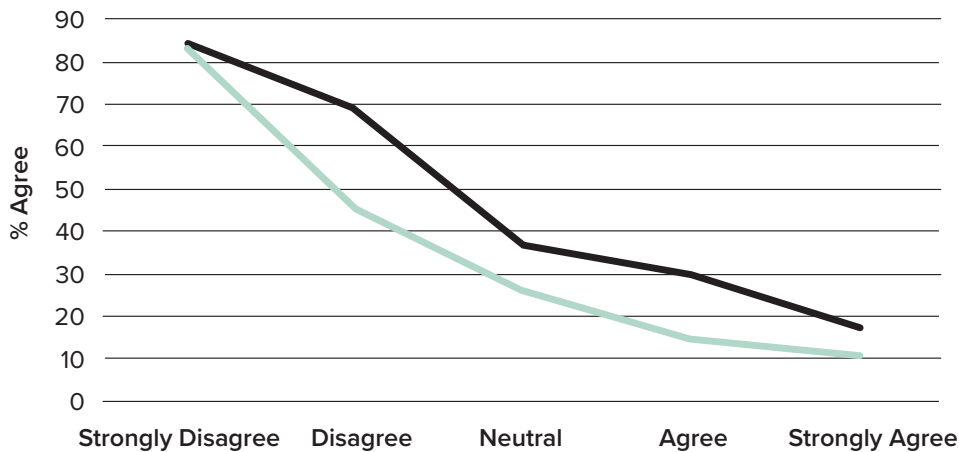
Percent who agree that “President Trump holds much of the blame for the event escalating to violence” across agreement with Christian nationalist claims



I consider the founding documents like the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution to be divinely inspired

The federal government should declare the U.S. a Christian nation

Percent who agree that “the violence at the Capitol was the result of misinformation spread by Trump and others” across agreement with Christian nationalist claims



I consider the founding documents like the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution to be divinely inspired

The federal government should declare the U.S. a Christian nation

Source: Public Discourse and Ethics Survey, Wave 7 (February 2021) Fielded by YouGov. Survey design by Joshua B. Grubbs and Samuel L. Perry.

Various other scholarly works highlight how increasing acceptance of white Christian nationalism results in a much greater likelihood of embracing racist attitudes. White Christian nationalism is linked to a greater likelihood of subscribing to racist explanations<sup>3</sup> of COVID-19, of opposing interracial marriage<sup>4</sup> and transracial adoption,<sup>5</sup> of believing that Black Americans deserve whatever violence they receive from police,<sup>6</sup> and of believing that any socioeconomic inequality<sup>7</sup> Black Americans face is due to their own shortcomings.

In fact, recent social science studies highlight how much of the polarization within American politics and civic life is related to how strongly Americans reject or embrace white Christian nationalism. White Christian nationalism is vital for making sense of the various touchstones for the ongoing culture wars. For instance, Americans who embrace white Christian nationalism are more likely to:

- eschew safe behaviors and participate in incautious behaviors related to the pandemic.<sup>8</sup>
- want to protect the economy and liberty over the vulnerable during the pandemic.<sup>9</sup>
- oppose any federal gun control restrictions due to belief that the Second Amendment is divinely inspired.<sup>10</sup>
- hold anti-vaccine attitudes.<sup>11</sup>
- distrust science and scientists and are scientifically illiterate toward religiously contested scientific claims.<sup>12 13</sup>
- support Trump and Trumpism in the last two national elections.<sup>14 15</sup>
- fear immigrants and endorse anti-immigrant policies.<sup>16 17 18</sup>
- endorse “traditional” gender roles where men lead and women follow.<sup>19</sup>
- oppose same-sex marriage and transgender rights.<sup>20 21</sup>
- hold anti-democratic attitudes favoring restricting the vote and denying the existence of voter suppression.<sup>22</sup>

One fascinating finding in almost all of these studies, though, is that religious practice and Christian nationalism are not one and the same. Pointing out the negative influence of Christian nationalism is not to be equated with decrying religious practice or Christianity, writ large. In fact, once researchers account for the influence of Christian nationalism and hold it constant, the influence of religious practice works in the *exact opposite direction* of Christian nationalism.

Imagine two Americans, identical in every respect — age, gender, income, education, region of the country — including how strongly they embrace Christian nationalism. The one who rarely attends religious services is more likely to hold many of the views in the bulleted list. The one who is more religiously active, however, is more likely than the identical other person (who embraces Christian nationalism to the same extent) to practice various safety behaviors due to COVID-19, support federal gun control legislation, welcome immigrants, support interracial marriage, and support women working in all spheres of civic life.

This underscores how white Christian nationalism and Christianity are not one and the same. It is the cultural influence of white Christian nationalism inclining many Christian and religious Americans toward beliefs and behaviors that harm minorities, democracy, and broader measures of social safety. Those Christian Americans who reject white Christian nationalism and are actively involved in their faith communities are generally more likely to advocate for a civil arena that protects and defends the rights of all people and groups.

Therefore, it is important to confront and oppose white Christian nationalism because it is intent on privileging access to political and cultural power for only a certain subset of Americans. Expressions of Christianity that encourage Americans to participate in a pluralistic democratic society are something else entirely.

## Section II

# WHAT IS WHITE CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM?

Anthea Butler

**Dr. Anthea Butler is the Geraldine R. Segal Professor of American Social Thought at the University of Pennsylvania.**

What is white Christian nationalism? Simply put, it is the belief that America's founding is based on Christian principles, white protestant Christianity is the operational religion of the land, and that Christianity should be the foundation of how the nation develops its laws, principles and policies.

But what kind of Christianity, and what kind of nationalism? This is the question. At the insurrection on January 6, there were ample examples of white Christian nationalism. The prayer in the Senate chamber. The myriad of Christian images carried by the insurrectionists.

The scene in the Senate chamber at the insurrection is the best physical description of the phenomenon. Their prayer in the chamber — in which they began “Jesus Christ, we invoke your name”<sup>1</sup> — hints at the rot at the core of religious nationalism: the assumption that Christ is at the core of efforts to establish and promote white protestant Christianity in the service of white male autocratic authority. More recently, the assertion by General Michael Flynn that “[i]f we are going to have one

nation under God, which we must, we have to have to have one religion.” He continued, “One nation under God, and one religion under God.”<sup>2</sup> One nation under God and one religion under God is another example of how white Christian nationalism operates. The one religion is Christianity.

Understanding this phenomenon requires an understanding of the basic ways white Christian nationalism has worked as a unifying theme for a particular type of narrative about America. That narrative can be summed up as follows:

1. America is a divinely appointed nation by God that is Christian.
2. America's founders, rather than wanting to disestablish religion as a unifier for the nation, were in fact establishing a nation based on Christian principles, with white men as the leaders.
3. Others (Native Americans, enslaved Africans, and immigrants) would accept and cede to this narrative



of America as a Christian nation, and accept their leadership.

4. America has a special place not only in world history, but in biblical Scripture, especially concerning the return of Christ.
5. There is no separation between church and state.

This narrative has been employed in various ways throughout our nation's history, in peacetime, war, expansion, and internal strife. What follows is a summary of that history, and how white Christian nationalism has influenced our nation's history and plays a part in our present situation.

Slavery in America enabled white Christian nationalism by asserting that enslaved Africans were not human — in part by using scriptural justifications to support it. Southern slaveholder pastors and elected officials justified slaveholding, even if the enslaved embraced Christianity. Treatises written by people like Thomas Dew and James Henry Thornwell defended slavery and white dominance on scriptural grounds. Their teachings influenced denominations; soon, Baptists, Methodists, and Presbyterians would split over the issue of slavery. When the South declared war, the Confederate States of America were established to be a Christian nation,<sup>3</sup> enshrining this in the Confederate constitution: “We, the people of the Confederate States, each State acting in its sovereign and independent character, in order to form a permanent and federal government, establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, and secure the blessing of liberty to ourselves and our posterity — invoking the favor and guidance of Almighty God — do ordain and establish this Constitution for the Confederate States of America.”<sup>4</sup>

The protection of God, and invoking God's favor and guidance, would be a key clause to that constitution and to later appeals to Christian nationalism.

After the Civil War and the destruction of the Confederacy, the “Religion of the Lost Cause” — as historian Charles Reagan Wilson termed it<sup>5</sup> — turned the Confederate defeat into a noble cause that continued to focus on Christian themes, white supremacy, and the sacralization of its war dead. It also effectively created a narrative about the morals and nobility of white southerners despite their sedition against the Union. Using monuments to support their cause, they created physical monuments that would later be rallying points for modern day conflicts, such as the Charlottesville rally in August 2017.

Violence would also become an effective way to promote white Christian nationalism. The KKK was explicitly formed as an organization that was the literal expression of white Christian nationalism. White robes, burning crosses, and rituals combined with nationalist thought and imagery to create scenes of terror throughout America, most explicitly displayed at the Klan's 1925

March in Washington, D.C.<sup>6</sup> Like the insurrectionists, they carried both crosses and American flags to show their dominance. Whether in public marches or in private harassment from the 1870s to the Civil Rights Movement and beyond, the Klan has been an unmistakable symbol of white Christian nationalism.

In the 20th century, white Christian nationalism was expressed in various ways. Americanism, the belief that America is only the best nation, was linked to religion in order to combat the communist threat. Embraced by many religious leaders like Billy Graham and others, this belief that America as a Christian nation would triumph against communism was important. It also was invoked to oppose the Civil Rights Movement, which was seen by many white Americans as an outgrowth of the communist movement. This combination of patriotism, opposition to communism, and the opposition to the Civil Rights Movement would manifest in many organizations that formed in the 1950s, including the White Citizens' Council and the John Birch Society.<sup>7</sup> These organizations, unlike the brutishness of the KKK, would provide a palatable, yet dangerous face to white Christian nationalism.

In the 1970s and beyond, white Christian nationalism would find a home in various places in the American landscape. Republicans would make appeals to white Christianity and nationalism through attitudes towards immigration, screeds against crime, and the drug war. The famous Willie Horton commercial (run by supporters of George H.W. Bush for president in 1988)<sup>8</sup> combined race and policing to use fear, law and order, and racism as potent tools to bring white voters out to the polls.

The 21st century presented a new wave of white Christian nationalism after 9/11. The nation, reeling from the attacks, would stigmatize Muslims, Sikhs, and others who were deemed to be “other” because of their religious beliefs and their supposed connection to the violent events of September 11, 2001. This would also be fueled by the rhetoric of crusade, which President George W. Bush invoked after 9/11, and in the “War on Terror” which would promote America's role as a Christian nation, fighting the infidels which had attacked the country. For many conservative Christians in America, this would become a new “Holy War” that would bring the fringe elements of white Christian nationalism into the mainstream.

Finally, the election of President Barack Obama, the nation's first African American president, would bring out both fringe elements of white Christian nationalism as well as mainstream religious white Christian nationalism. Birtherism would become a tool in which to discount his American citizenship through vicious rumors about his name and Christianity.<sup>9</sup> The rise of the Tea Party in 2009, which was called an “economic” movement,<sup>10</sup> was also, in fact, a movement that found its purpose in racial animus against the president and the furtherance of conspiracy

theories and birtherism. It was a ripe ground for the rise of the kind of white Christian nationalism that would come bursting onto the scene on June 16, 2015, when Donald Trump announced his candidacy for president of the United States.

One day later — June 17, 2015 — nine African American members of Mother Emanuel AME Church in Charleston, South Carolina, were gunned down after a prayer meeting in which a white supremacist — hoping to start a race war — joined their Bible study, and at the end, shot them to death.

## Section III

# THE PATRIOTIC WITNESS OF BLACK CHRISTIANS

Jemar Tisby, Ph.D.

**A historian of race and religion, Jemar Tisby is the author of *The Color of Compromise: The Truth about the American Church's Complicity in Racism* (Zondervan, 2019) and *How to Fight Racism* (Zondervan, 2021).**

White Christian nationalists often refer to themselves as patriots. They understand their mission as defending the core principles of the United States and, in this sense, they are acting as the truest Americans.

Unfortunately, the white Christian nationalist version of patriotism is racist, xenophobic, patriarchal, and exclusionary. Their vision of the nation conveniently puts white people — especially men — who are politically conservative and who make some claim of Christian adherence at the top of the social hierarchy. Moreover, white Christian nationalist ideas of patriotism not only condone but celebrate the use of violent force to protect their power, as seen in the January 6 insurrection attempt.

The Black church tradition, however, presents another version of patriotism. In contrast to white Christian nationalism, Black Christians have historically tended to embrace a kind of patriotism that leads to an expansion of democratic processes, the inclusion of marginalized people, and a call for the nation to live up to its foundational ideals.

In the age of the American Revolution, white leaders drew on the ideas of natural rights to make a moral case for self-governance and freedom from British rule. As people of African descent in the North American British colonies heard this, they, too, appealed to universal principles to argue for their literal emancipation.

### Liberty for all

In a 1773 letter to the Massachusetts General Court, a committee of enslaved people wrote, “We cannot but expect your house will again take our deplorable case into serious consideration, and give us that ample relief which, as men, we have a natural right to.”<sup>1</sup>

A few years later, Black Christians in the Revolutionary era found resonance with words in the Declaration of Independence, which referenced being “endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights.”



The freedom that enslaved people advocated was the abolition of slavery and the basic right to be treated as equal citizens and human beings alongside white people. Enslaved Black people in the Revolutionary era understood that the same principles that led the patriots to rebel against Britain could also be used to make the case for emancipation.

These women and men believed in a form of freedom that would lead to greater dignity for all people. It is a freedom from oppression in order to pursue individual and community flourishing.

The freedom the white Christian nationalist insists upon is the liberty to do as he or she pleases without the involvement of federal or local policy.

## The meaning of the Fourth of July for Black Christians

Frederick Douglass, the great orator and abolitionist, was at one point a licensed preacher<sup>2</sup> in the African Methodist Episcopal Church. As a justice advocate, he maintained respect for the so-called “founding fathers” of the United States.

In his jeremiad against the hypocrisy of American liberty, “The Meaning of July Fourth for the Negro,” he stated, “The point at which I am compelled to view them is not, certainly, the most favorable; and yet I cannot contemplate their great deeds with less than admiration.”<sup>3</sup>

Douglass held a realistic view of the men who wrote the founding documents of the nation — many of them were slaveholders who sought to profit from the exploited labor of African-descended people. He also knew them to be fallible human beings just like any other. Yet Douglass also admired their vision and fortitude in helping to forge a new nation.

Douglass called the early political leaders of the United States “statesmen, patriots and heroes.”<sup>4</sup>

Yet Douglass deployed his admiration of the founding fathers in service to liberation. “With them, justice, liberty and humanity were ‘final’; not slavery and oppression.”<sup>5</sup> Douglass used their example of patriotism to indict those of his day (the speech was given in 1852) who opposed freedom for enslaved Black people and denied them the most basic privileges of citizenship.

## Is this America?

Fannie Lou Hamer, the sharecropper turned national civil rights activist, also appealed to notions of patriotism in her pursuit of voting rights for Black people and poverty alleviation for her homeland in the Mississippi Delta.

Her journey into civil rights activism began at William Chapel Missionary Baptist Church in Ruleville, Mississippi, in 1962. She heard a presentation on voting rights and later reflected, “They talked about how it was our right to vote. And they was talking about how we could vote out people that we didn’t want in office. I never heard until 1962 that Black people could register to vote.”<sup>6</sup>

Once Hamer realized that Black people could work through the political process to ensure their rights and well-being, she dedicated the rest of her life to the cause. She often appealed to the idea of patriotism by calling out the corrupt system that barred Black people and others from voting and securing their civil rights.

Hamer’s Christian faith taught her that all people were created equal in God’s sight, so no one should be denied the right to vote or the opportunities of full civic participation based on race. She often referenced Acts 17:26, which says God “has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth.”<sup>7</sup>

She also adapted Mark 3:25, which says, “[I]f a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand.”<sup>8</sup> Hamer applied that same biblical principle of human unity to the struggle for civil rights saying, “[T]hat same thing applies to America.”<sup>9</sup>

Hamer’s notion of patriotism derived from her understanding of Christianity’s teaching that all people were created with equal dignity by God. She applied this understanding of human equality to injustices such as segregation and white supremacy.

In her famous testimony at the 1964 Democratic National Convention, Hamer ended her powerful statement saying, “Is this America, the land of the free and the home of the brave, where we have to sleep with our telephones off the hooks because our lives be threatened daily, because we want to live as decent human beings, in America?”<sup>10</sup>

## A Different Commitment to God and Country

More examples of Black Christians demonstrating a healthier form of patriotism than the white Christian nationalist version abound. Hundreds of thousands of Black soldiers, many of them Christians, fought in the Civil War to secure their freedom and move the nation toward a multi-racial democracy. Countless Black Christians marched during the Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s and 1960s to gain voting rights, not only for themselves but for all citizens. Today the movement continues as Black Christians such as the Rev. Raphael Warnock serve both in the pulpit and in Congress as a seamless integration of the Christian faith and the patriotic effort to “form a more perfect union.”

While public attention often turns to the absurdities and indignities promulgated by white Christian nationalists, there are other examples of how to demonstrate a commitment to America.

Black Christians throughout U.S. history have often hearkened back to the nation's stated commitment to freedom and democracy to fight for greater inclusion. They saw this form of patriotism as a coherent, integrated expression of their Christian faith. While the fusion of

faith and public life led white Christian nationalists to an attempted insurrection on January 6, 2021, that left several people injured and dead, it led Black Christians to participate in the Civil Rights Movement, which heralded the end of nearly a century of Jim Crow discrimination.

The historic example of Black Christians demonstrates that a Christian commitment to God and country does not always mean making America a white man's country.

## Section IV

# NETWORK OF CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM LEADING UP TO JANUARY 6

Katherine Stewart

**Katherine Stewart has reported on the religious right for more than a decade. She is the author of *The Power Worshipers: Inside the Dangerous Rise of Religious Nationalism* (Bloomsbury).**

By now, most Americans understand that Christian nationalism played a role in last year's violent attack on the Capitol. But the movement's contribution is much more complex and goes deeper than is widely appreciated. Understanding its part involves looking beyond the Christian nationalist activists and signage at the specific event of January 6, the day that former President Donald Trump's attempt to overturn the 2020 election crossed into violence.

In order to grasp the role of Christian nationalism in this and other recent political developments, it is helpful to know something about the movement itself — its structure, its forms of operation, and its ultimate goals.

Because Christian nationalism is identified (or, more accurately, because it identifies itself) with a religion, the movement is often understood as a set of religious and/or theological positions that are then assumed to lead in a deductive way to a certain set of cultural and policy preferences, and from there to a certain kind of politics. But Christian nationalism is, first and foremost,

a political movement. Its principal goal, and the goal of its most active leaders, is power. Its leadership looks forward to the day when they can rely on government for three things: power and influence for themselves and their political allies; a steady stream of taxpayer funding for their initiatives; and policies that favor “approved” religious and political viewpoints.

The strength of the movement is in its dense organizational infrastructure: a closely interconnected network of right-wing policy groups, legal advocacy organizations, legislative initiatives, sophisticated data operations, networking groups, leadership training initiatives, and media and messaging platforms, all working together for common political aims. Its leadership cadre includes a number of personally associated activists and politicians, some of them working through multiple organizations. It derives much of its power and direction from an informal club of funders, a number of them belonging to extended, hyper-wealthy families. It took me some time to navigate the sea of acronyms, funding schemes, denominations, and policy and kinship



networks, and I lay out much of this ecosystem in my book, *The Power Worshipers*. Yet the important thing to understand about the collective effort is not its evident variety but the profound source of its unity.

The top-level leadership of the movement is unified by its members' consistent, and often performative, repetition of their commitment to a shared ideological vision and a certain set of messages. Many of the movement's conferences, summits, and strategy gatherings have a "religious" character — not necessarily in the sense that they are promoting specific religious or theological doctrines, but that those meetings center on the constant repetition and back-and-forth of the core messages. At the conferences and presentations I have reported on over the past year, audiences were told, heatedly and repeatedly, that America is and always has been a Christian nation, that the Bible is on the verge of being outlawed, and that the 2020 election was corrupt. This is part of the reason why the hold of Mr. Trump on this wing of the Republican Party has been so hard to break: because Christian nationalist gatherings generally don't involve open debates about facts or policy, but rather displays of fidelity to a message and loyalty to the leaders who have managed to identify themselves with that message.

When Mr. Trump launched the effort to overturn the election by promoting the lie that it was stolen, consider where some of the most militant and coordinated support came from. The Conservative Action Project, a group associated with the Council for National Policy, which serves as a key networking organization for America's religious and economic right-wing elite, made its position clear in a statement issued a week before the insurrection.

It called<sup>1</sup> for members of the U.S. Senate to "contest the electoral votes" from Georgia, Pennsylvania, Michigan, and other states that were the focus of Republicans' baseless allegations. Cosignatories included nearly two dozen powerful movement figures including Bob McEwen, a leader of the Council for National Policy; Morton C. Blackwell of the Leadership Institute; Alfred S. Regnery, the former publisher; Tony Perkins, the president of the Family Research Council; the conservative lawyer and activist Cleta Mitchell, who was on the phone with Mr. Trump when he urged Georgia's secretary of state to "find" extra votes; and Thomas Fitton of Judicial Watch.

Even as Republican figures like former President George W. Bush and Senator Mitt Romney attempted to nudge Mr. Trump toward a graceful concession, many religious right leaders doubled down on conspiracy or denial or provided indirect support for election lies by articulating "concerns" about supposed "constitutional irregularities" in battleground states. Today, many of the movement's most influential organizations have embraced the cause

of "election integrity" as a fairly transparent means of undercutting faith in elections as a cornerstone of our democracy.

A key to the movement's durability is its influence on elected political leaders (and their appointees). Its influence on these leaders depends in large part on its ability to deliver large numbers of votes in a consistent way. And its ability to deliver these votes rests on at least three important mechanisms:

The first is that Christian nationalism serves as an effective tool for controlling information flows to a significant part of the population. It is a way of creating a population that will be receptive to certain forms of disinformation and immune to other types of information, which the present leadership often denigrates as "fake news" or "the lying media." This gives the leadership cadre, and their political allies, a tremendous degree of power.

A second mechanism for mobilizing mass political power involves manufacturing and focusing a sense of persecution and resentment among the rank and file. To be clear, the movement draws on a wide range of pre-existing anxieties and concerns. But its real contribution consists in identifying and promoting grievance and then aiming it at political opponents.

And finally, the movement offers its supporters a means of reconciling two seemingly contradictory notions: that our nation is the greatest nation on earth precisely because it is a Christian nation; and at the same time that our nation is overrun with alien and evil forces. On the one hand, Christian nationalists *are* America, at least in their own minds. On the other hand, movement supporters are persuaded that America is in the grip of malevolent forces, which they variously identify as "secularists," "the homosexual agenda," "the communist threat," and even "demonic organizations," and they insist they need to "take America back." The ability to keep a population in this state of tension — engaged in an apocalyptic struggle between absolute good and its opposite — is critical to the movement's power.

All three mechanisms were on display during the attempted coup, which erupted in violence on January 6. On the matter of information flows, there was no shortage of publicly available evidence on the question of the integrity of the 2020 election. There was no factual support for the fraudulent claims that were repeatedly promoted by Mr. Trump and used as the pretext for his attempted coup. There are of course many sources of disinformation, and a number have become the focus of commentators: social media in general, Fox News, Breitbart News Network, and too many others to count. All played significant roles, no doubt. But it is clear that disinformation about the 2020 election was promoted by many Christian nationalist leaders and organizations,

and it had a lasting impact among the rank and file. Within the Republican base, survey data shows<sup>2</sup> that white evangelicals are the most likely cohort to believe in Mr. Trump's election lies.

To be clear, however, not all white evangelicals do. Many evangelical Christians either do not support or actively oppose Christian nationalism, and a substantial number of America's religious nationalists are not evangelical. The movement includes representatives of both Protestant and non-Protestant religion, and it receives support from some people and groups that do not identify as Christian at all.

An important point is that the movement is led from the top down, rather than the ground up. Understanding its appeal to a broad mass of American voters is necessary in explaining its strength but is not sufficient in explaining the movement's direction. It is a means through which a small number of people — quite a few of them residing in the Washington, D.C., area — harness the passions, concerns, and resentments of a large and diverse population in their own quest for power. Movement leaders have quite consciously reframed religion itself to suit their political objectives and then promoted this new reactionary religion as widely as possible, thus turning citizens into congregants and congregants into useful foot soldiers.

The rank and file come to the movement with a wide variety of backgrounds, ideas, and interests, and a very substantial number do not explicitly support anything like a "theocracy." Many would be unhappy to learn all of the details about what their leaders are proposing. Much of this group votes identity, not policy. When they vote for the candidates who promise to end abortion or defend the traditional family or re-unite church and state, they aren't explicitly aiming for major fundamental changes in the way American government is organized; they are making a statement about who they are, what they value in themselves, and perhaps what they fear in other people.

They may also be drawn to the movement's promise of certainty in an uncertain world. Against a backdrop of escalating economic inequality, deindustrialization, rapid technological change, and climate instability, many people, on all points of the economic spectrum, feel that the world has entered a state of disorder. The movement gives them confidence, an identity, and the feeling that their position in the world is safe.

Yet the price of certainty is often the surrendering of one's political will to those who claim to offer refuge from the tempest of modern life. The leaders of the movement have demonstrated real savvy in satisfying some of the emotional concerns of their followers, but they have little intention of giving them a voice in where the movement is

going. I can still hear the words of one activist I met along the way. When I asked her if the anti-democratic aspects of the movement ever bothered her, she replied, "The Bible tells us that we don't need to worry about anything."

Many Americans have underestimated the movement's influence on our politics, in part because we often hear predictions of the movement's imminent demise — usually accompanied by reporting on the rising numbers of the so-called "nones." These predictions overlook the fact that you don't need to win the support of a majority of Americans to dominate in election cycles or to transform society through the courts. In a country where around 40 percent of people don't vote, an organized and committed minority that turns out to vote in disproportionate numbers can dominate in election cycles. The politics of minority rule are further entrenched through flaws in the American electoral system, such as voter suppression, gerrymandering, and other antidemocratic practices that many of the movement's political allies are intent on promoting.

The leadership of the Christian nationalist movement conveys messaging to their followers through a wide range of means. Among the most important is the targeting and exploitation of the nation's conservative houses of worship. The faith communities may be fragmented in a variety of denominations and theologies, but movement leaders have had considerable success in uniting them around their political vision and mobilizing them to get out the vote for their chosen candidates.

Leaders of the movement know that members of the clergy can drive votes. They also understand that if you can get congregants to vote on a small handful of issues, you can control their vote. And so they draw pastors into conservative networks focused on political engagement and offer them sophisticated tools that they can use to deliver the "correct" messages about the issues that they wish to emphasize in election cycles.

Notwithstanding the generally toothless regulations that the Federal Election Commission imposes on religious organizations, movement leaders have effectively turned many conservative houses of worship into a tax-advantaged way of promoting candidates and promoting a political party. Some prominent pastors have delivered explicitly partisan political messages from the pulpit. Most, however, avoid directly endorsing political candidates themselves; instead, they may distribute materials, such as voter guides, that leave little doubt about which issues ought to matter in election cycles and which political candidates are aligned with the supposedly "biblical" worldview.

It is fair to say that the coup attempt started with the actions of Mr. Trump, who very few people identify directly with the "family values" that Christian nationalists

frequently claim to support. But this misses the point about the way this kind of movement operates. Once the movement laid the basic groundwork for an antidemocratic politics, others in Mr. Trump's position could have done what he did. The movement threw its support behind Mr. Trump at a critical moment, delivering to him the Republican Party's most reliable slice of electoral votes. He in turn gave the movement everything he had promised them: power and political access, access to public money, policies favorable to their agenda, and above all the appointment of hard-right judges. At the 2021 Road to Majority conference, a gathering of religious

right activists, strategists, and political leaders, Senator Lindsey Graham said, "Bottom line is President Trump delivered, don't you think?"

No doubt things might have played out differently had a different Republican politician come to power in 2016. But as we look to the future, it would be false comfort to imagine that the entire episode can be written off to the actions of a single bad leader. With or without Mr. Trump, the movement will remain committed to the illiberal, antidemocratic politics that the former president so ably embodied.



## Section V

# EVENTS, PEOPLE, AND NETWORKS LEADING UP TO JANUARY 6

Andrew L. Seidel

**Andrew L. Seidel is a constitutional attorney at the Freedom From Religion Foundation and author of *The Founding Myth: Why Christian Nationalism Is Un-American* (Sterling, 2019) and *American Crusade: How the Supreme Court is Weaponizing Religious Freedom* (Union Square & Co. Publishing, 2022).**

As the previous section shows, there is a substantial structural network in place that allows a few leaders at the top to push Christian nationalist disinformation and motivate a massive cadre of followers.

Christian nationalists engaged this network to win the election. This was electoral politics, but it was sold to the masses as spiritual warfare.<sup>1</sup> Almost immediately after the polls closed on Election Day, that machinery changed gears to stoke outrage and fear, exhort action, and work to give Trump a second term as president, no matter what the voters wanted.

Paula White, still involved with the White House at the time, preached a sermon that went viral the day after the election because she spoke in tongues, rhythmically chanted seemingly disconnected phrases such as “I hear a sound of an abundance of rain,” and preached of “angels dispatched from Africa right now. Africa right now. Africa right now. From Africa right now.”<sup>2</sup>

White preached all this “in the name of Jesus.”<sup>3</sup>

White began hosting nightly prayers after this first prayer went viral. “White and fellow prayer warriors called on God to smite the president’s enemies—his political opponents, anyone standing in the way of a second term, and anyone interfering with their vision of national and global dominion,” explained one observer.<sup>4</sup> On the second night of prayer, White preached that “God, we declare that you will keep the POTUS [sic] in his purpose and in his position,” and, “We override the will of man for the will of God, right now.”

Others, such as Lance Wallnau, the father of American Dominionism, also framed the fight to overturn the election as a spiritual war. “Fighting with Trump is fighting with God,” he declared.<sup>5</sup> This warfare rhetoric was tinged with violence — stochastic terrorism — that increased leading up to January 6. Said Wallnau, “[W]e got to get some of that energy over there on our side. Because we need a couple of risk takers, and, you know, stir-things-up evangelists and revivalists and prophets, because I’m telling you, these angels want something to do, and they’re looking for some wildcards that are gonna go start something up.”<sup>6</sup>

Against the backdrop of this rhetoric, a few events held in late 2020 became practice runs for the Capitol insurrection.

## November 14, 2020: The Million MAGA March

One of the first post-election rallies in Washington, D.C., took place on November 14 in Freedom Plaza. It was typical of the pre-January 6 rallies, with many of the same players and speakers. It opened with a prayer infused with Christian nationalism that set the tone for everything that happened later.<sup>7</sup> Ed Martin of Phyllis Schlafly's Eagles (the Eagle Forum Education & Legal Defense Fund) stood on stage, a "Jesus Matters" sign waving behind him, and prayed:

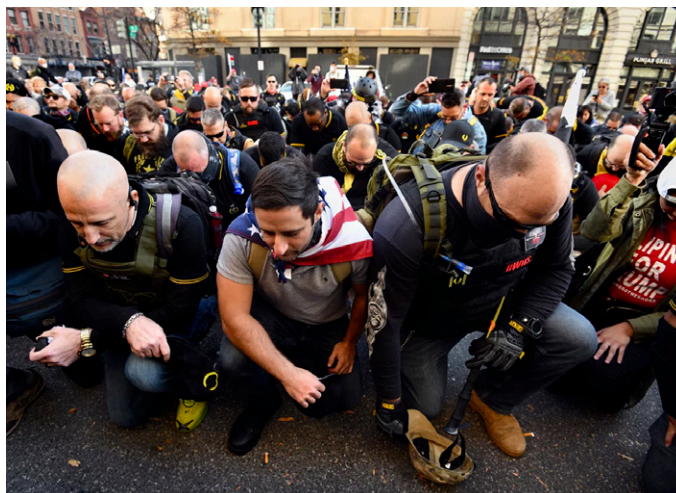
Today, Lord, we gather in this hallowed place, we make it holy right now, in your name because we ask you, Lord, bless us in our work. Our nation, Lord, you gave it to us as a gift and you said you will have this nation, founded on Judeo-Christian principles and framed by a declaration and a constitution. You will not be led by CNN or cable news or fake news. [CHEERS] Lord, you said to us, "If you take this American nation" — Lord, you said to us — "and you serve me in righteousness, I will give you prosperity and joy, and I will give you for the world, a light, a beacon on a hill." And we say, "Thank you, Lord." And now Lord, we ask you for this today, to strengthen us like our founding fathers had, and like our president has. We ask you Lord, strengthen us in the fight because the powers of darkness are descending. They're saying, "concession, not Constitution." ... Finally, Lord, we ask you to expose the fraud.

He ended the prayer with a convoluted invocation of the founding fathers, said "Amen," and then led a "U-S-A" chant.

The Proud Boys attended the rally and knelt in prayer. The Proud Boys are a neo-fascist, white supremacist group whose founder, Gavin McInnes, "calls himself a 'Western chauvinist,' espousing the idea that Western civilization, which he associates with 'Judeo-Christian values,' is superior to all others."<sup>8</sup>

There were many prayers that day<sup>9</sup> and even into the night as violence broke out.<sup>10</sup>

Representative-elect Marjorie Taylor Greene, R-Ga., who also promotes Christian nationalism, urged them to march to the Supreme Court, just as Trump urged them to march on the Capitol on January 6.<sup>11</sup> They marched — they called it the "Million MAGA March" — down Pennsylvania Avenue to the Supreme Court for more speeches.<sup>12</sup>



The Proud Boys kneel in prayer at the November 14 Million MAGA March. Carol Guzy / NPR



Million MAGA Marchers kneel in prayer on November 14. Alex Edelman / Bloomberg / Getty Images

They marched with crosses,<sup>13</sup> images of the Virgin Mary,<sup>14</sup> "Jesus is my Savior, Trump is my President" flags,<sup>15</sup> "An Appeal to Heaven" flags,<sup>16</sup> and a red flag that proclaimed "JESUS IS LORD."<sup>17</sup> An RV bedecked in Trump paraphernalia declared, "PRAY FOR 45."<sup>18</sup> At the Supreme Court, they erected a massive white Christian cross.<sup>19</sup>

They carried yellow "Jesus Saves" signs<sup>20</sup> and handwritten signs that said, "Jesus Saves, Trump Leads,"<sup>21</sup> "Thank God for Trump,"<sup>22</sup> "Jesus is King, Trump is president,"<sup>23</sup> and "Ex: 28 vs. 11-19 [sic] It's been done. My feet are on the ROCK," which can be seen as someone preaches over a loudspeaker that "in the end, God has already won the victory."<sup>24</sup> One woman in a QAnon T-shirt carried two signs "WE LOVE TRUMP" and "WE LOVE AMERICA, GOD & BABIES."<sup>25</sup> Another protester held two signs on a pole; the top said, "Isaiah 45" (alluding to Trump as King Cyrus), and the bottom, "True Believer in Christ 4 Trump."<sup>26</sup> He also carried the "Proud American Christian" flag featuring a red, white, and blue ichthys, which is an image of a fish used as a symbol of Christianity, sometimes called a "Jesus fish."<sup>27</sup>

One Trump supporter warned that day: “[C]areful what you wish for, because a wounded bear is a lot more dangerous than a bear that’s not wounded.” As night fell on November 14, violence erupted in D.C.<sup>28</sup>

The violence we saw on November 14 was not the last time an event of this nature took such a turn — the mobs also turned violent at events on December 12 and January 6. The threat of violence was clear in the weeks before the attack on our Capitol.<sup>29</sup> The rallies, the marching to the Capitol, the violence: Dry runs like this are typical of terrorist attacks.

This day became a practice run — seven weeks later, they marched to the Capitol.

## December 12, 2020: Jericho March’s “Let the Church ROAR” Rally

The battle of Jericho as portrayed in the Bible was less a battle and more a slaughter. In the story, God orders his followers to march around the city of Jericho while blowing shofars (ram’s horns) and carrying the ark holding the Ten Commandments. God brings the walls down and orders his followers to violently sack the defenseless city, steal the silver and gold, and murder every living being, including animals.<sup>30</sup>

After Trump lost the election, two federal workers sought to oppose Joe Biden’s electoral victory by recreating this story. They christened their endeavor “Jericho March” and claimed that God had sent them visions, just like Joshua. One co-founder, Rob Weaver,<sup>31</sup> explained the vision. “God told me to let the church roar,” he said. And, as God’s army marched around Jericho, God now wanted Americans to march around the “spiritual walls of this country.” By which Weaver meant the Capitol, the Supreme Court, the Department of Justice, and the capitals of the swing states — all choke points for

certifying and ensuring the results of the election.<sup>32</sup> “God is the head of this country. ... This country stands on the shoulders of Jesus; He’s the real government,” said Weaver in typical Christian nationalist terms. Weaver noted that his Jesus is militant and manly: “I remember my Jesus turning over tables in the literal temple in Jerusalem. ... They [the Supreme Court, Congress, etc.] need to do the right thing. They need to fix this ... The church is awake, and we’re getting louder,” Weaver added.<sup>33</sup>

The other Jericho March co-founder, Arina Grossu,<sup>34</sup> said that the “Jericho March is about people coming and praying in their own way, in diverse ways. Judeo-Christians coming together and expressing their plea to God for truth to come out, because we know this is a battle not just on a temporal level.”<sup>35</sup>

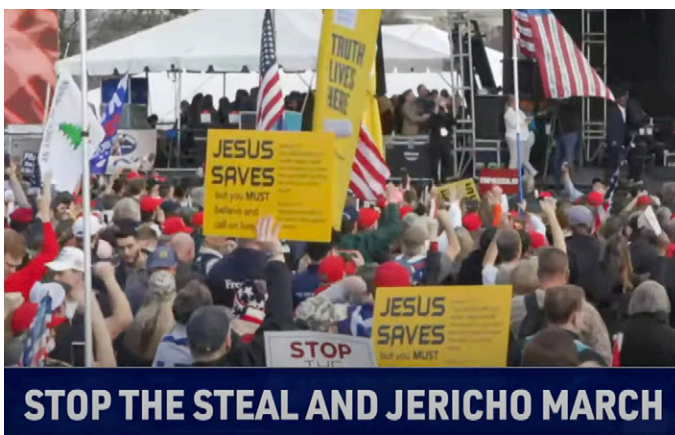
Even after the insurrection on January 6, Christian nationalists stood by this message.<sup>36</sup>

Jericho March organized several events leading up to January 6. Throughout December, it had people marching around state capitols blowing shofars. On December 12, less than four weeks before the insurrection, Jericho March organized a “prayer rally” on the National Mall. They named the event “Let the Church ROAR.”<sup>37</sup>

Partnering with Jericho March on “Let the Church ROAR” were Stop the Steal (Ali Alexander’s organization, which he said was inspired by Roger Stone) and Phyllis Schlafly’s Eagles (Ed Martin’s group). In the press release for the event, Weaver, Grossu, Alexander, and Martin praised God and preached Christian nationalism. Martin said, “Our founder, the late Phyllis Schlafly, taught us to build bridges of faith, policy, and politics to keep America great and to always fight for God, country, and the family. Our groups are in this fight to save the Republic from all the forces that seek to destroy it and to restore America to the vision of our Founding Fathers.”<sup>38</sup>

One video ad for the march made the violent undertones clear. It featured crowds chanting “fight for Trump” and multiple speakers talking about losing the nation, losing freedom, the last stand, and “fighting” to prevent that: “we will stand up and fight! ... we’re going to protect this president ... this is our fight, this is for our freedom.”<sup>39</sup> The ad drew a clear line between Jericho March’s Let the Church ROAR event on December 12 and the Million MAGA March on November 14, showing those crowds and saying it was the “biggest rally.”<sup>40</sup>

A three-minute trailer for the event made the Christian nationalism plain.<sup>41</sup> It begins by recapping the presidential election and then says that our country is “at a crossroads. One path leads to a return to our founding Judeo-Christian principles: love of God, life, liberty, justice, law, and order. The other path leads to socialism,



The crowd at Jericho March’s Let the Church ROAR event on December 12 waves the “An Appeal to Heaven” flag and yellow “Jesus Saves” signs amid American flags and “Stop the Steal” signs. Crossroads with Joshua Philipp / YouTube



globalism, destruction — a dismantling of our great nation as we know it. But the voices of patriots and people of faith will not be silenced. America is a gift entrusted to us by our Creator ... . Now it is our moment to save our republic and protect our freedoms from the corrupt and destructive forces at work.” The ad then alludes to the biblical violence: “Jericho was a city of false gods and corruption. On God’s command, Joshua and the army of Israel marched around the city seven times and let out a loud shout, and God brought down the walls of the city and exposed the darkness. Our Jericho March was born of a vision from God.” It then calls for that same kind of action: “We are calling on all American patriots and people of faith to join us on our Jericho Marches ... . These marches will culminate on December 12 with a ‘Let The Church ROAR’ national march on Washington, D.C. ... This is our battle of Jericho for people of faith and patriots from all across America. ... We believe in a great and powerful God who can move mountains, expose corruption, and restore justice. We believe in a God of miracles. ... Share. March. Pray. Donate. Hold the line. And expect a miracle.”

Jericho March accustomed people to marching on the halls of power, just as they did on November 14 and as they would on January 6. In another promotional video for “Let the Church ROAR,” Grossu explained, “For the march, we are going to simultaneously go around the U.S. Capitol, the Supreme Court, and Department of Justice, after we do that ... we will gather onto the National Mall to hear some wonderful talks and prayers by faith leaders, political leaders, and also be led in praise and worship ... .”<sup>42</sup> The biblical allusion made violence the implicit goal of the march. In the Bible, Joshua’s army marched around Jericho for several days; the insurrectionists marched in multiple locations across the span of several weeks. Both culminated in violence.

“Let the Church ROAR” was held on the National Mall a few blocks from the Capitol and was basically another dry run for January 6.<sup>43</sup> The crowd waved signs and flags that were seen at the Million MAGA March on November 14 and everywhere on January 6, including the “An Appeal to Heaven” flag<sup>44</sup> and the yellow “Jesus Saves” sign.<sup>45</sup> The crowd chanted “U-S-A.” Nearly every speaker invoked the genocide at Jericho in adoring terms or prayed to Jesus. “One nation under God,” was perhaps the most common refrain. One sang “Ave Maria.”<sup>46</sup> Another sang “God Bless America.” They played Christian rock tunes, like “Chainbreaker,” in between the various speakers (and had a worship concert before the rally began).<sup>47</sup> At the December 12 “Let the Church ROAR” event hosted by the Jericho March, the crowd waved yellow “Jesus Saves” signs as a band led a singalong of the Battle Hymn of the Republic while the livestream displayed the lyrics for all to join; on January 6, the attackers would sing the battle hymn in the Rotunda of the Capitol.<sup>48</sup>

Eric Metaxas emceed the “Let the Church ROAR” event. An evangelical radio host and writer, Metaxas personally turned to violence in August 2020 when he punched an aggressive protester after leaving the White House, which Metaxas admitted to journalists.<sup>49</sup>

As at the biblical Jericho, it began with shofars. First, two shofars were blown at once on stage. Next, a shofar was blown that was “made for Donald Trump” and featured the flags of the United States and Israel painted on the horn alongside the presidential seal.<sup>50</sup> Then a woman in a Women for Trump shirt sang “the national anthem [which] rises as a prayer to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Yeshua ha Mashiach [Jesus the Messiah].”<sup>51</sup>

After the prayer/anthem and while the crowd chanted “U-S-A,” Metaxas took the stage.<sup>52</sup> A portrait of Mary as the Virgin of Guadalupe blessing Pope John Paul II was on stage, too, which served as a prop for an exorcism later in the day.<sup>53</sup> Metaxas began:

Is there anything that could be more important than the USA? His name is “Yeshua ha Mashiach” [Jesus the Messiah]. Praise the Lord. Hallelujah. Hallelujah. Hallelujah. Hallelujah. Hallelujah. “Hallelujah” is American for “praise the Lord.”<sup>54</sup>

Metaxas was speaking the language of Christian nationalism. “We are here because we love the God of the Bible ... We are here today to cry out to the God of heaven to ask him to have mercy on the greatest nation in the history of the world,” he added. “We are what God is doing in the United States today ... and today, we’re going to see heaven move. Heaven is going to move. Thank you, Jesus. Thank you, Jesus.”

The Rev. Kevin Jessip made the Christian nationalism explicit. “Some have said this is not a Christian nation. I’m telling you this is a Judeo-Christian nation. ... Today, I call this the warrior mandate, a battle cry, a call to arms.” And then, almost as an afterthought, he qualified the belligerence with “in the spiritual realm.”<sup>55</sup> He explained that the “battle cry” is a “mobilization of God’s men made holy by the blood of Jesus Christ and empowered by the gift of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. This battle cry is a Christian call to all Christian men ... as we prepare for a strategic gathering of men in this hour to dispel the Kingdom of Darkness.” This was a sermon of Christian conquest framed with military terminology: warrior, battle cry, mobilization, secret weapon, enlistment, strategic, prisoners of war, glory, deployed in hostile territory under enemy occupation, commissioned as special forces, stationed, final mission to ending this high treason, search and rescue team. And if the allusions weren’t clear enough, Jessip explained, “We are, without question, men born for war. We are fully equipped as warriors, with battle armor directed and suited for our assignment ... to restore the Eden Mandate of occupation and expansion of the



Rev. Kevin Jessip delivers a “battle cry,” a “call to arms,” at the Jericho March’s Let the Church ROAR event on December 12. Jericho March / Video Squirrel

Glory of God, filling the earth.” He wanted an “Army of the Lord” and preached unadulterated Christian nationalism and a clear call to arms. Jessip himself had organized “The Return: National and Global Day of Prayer and Repentance” on September 26, in Washington, D.C., and he viewed the Jericho March event as the “culmination” of that work.

Noted anti-Muslim bigot and conspiracy theorist Frank Gaffney announced a new political party. “The principal purpose of this” new party, said Gaffney, “is to get back to the founding principles of this nation. The belief that we are ‘one nation, under God!’”<sup>56</sup>

Former U.S. Rep. Michele Bachmann, R-Minn., sent in a video prayer that began by greeting all of those “who love the Lord” and “who love this country” and came “to Washington, D.C., in obedience to the Lord to do the Jericho March.” She declared that they were there to turn “faith to action” and to “go on offense for our nation, on the Jericho March,” which she said was a duty to God and which would result in a miracle.<sup>57</sup> Mike Lindell, Founder and CEO of My Pillow, Inc., then came on and told election lies. Lance Wallnau spoke about the “spiritual warfare presidency” and how people were going to “come out of the shadows” and engage and fight for Trump. He repeated election lies and called for a “Christian populist uprising” to “see America restored” and another “great awakening.”<sup>58</sup> Throughout the event, the speakers cross-promoted Lindell’s pillows, including Metaxas giving out coupon codes.

Conspiracy theorist and radio host Alex Jones began, “Praise God, America is awakening, humanity is awakening, and Jesus Christ is king.” He found occasion to mention that George Washington “didn’t want to be king” and that he “was a Christian.” Jones invoked Jesus often, including that “Christ’s crucifixion was not our defeat, it was our greatest victory,” and ended his shouting, “1776 is God’s number of victory over the satanic 1984. God bless you all and I salute you. Thank you, Jesus.”<sup>59</sup>

Another speaker at the event was Michael Flynn, the former general who served as national security adviser during the Trump administration before resigning after it came to light that he misled others about conversations he had with a Russian diplomat.<sup>60</sup> Flynn’s Jericho March speech recast the biblical story of slaughter into a peaceful protest: “[T]hey didn’t want to assault Jericho ... they wanted to march in peace around there.”<sup>61</sup> This is simply not reflected in any of the stories, which are about conquest, but it shows the strategy of claiming peace when the goal is violence, which was the refrain after January 6.

Flynn then said the Lord’s Prayer. All morning, the speakers had teased an appearance by Trump himself. Instead, President Donald Trump blessed the crowd with a flyover in Marine One in the middle of Flynn’s speech.

Flynn then invoked the Jericho genocide again in a rather sloppy metaphor that the crowd cheered:

I’m going to use a metaphor because Jericho we’re inside the walls of the deep state. Okay? And there is — there is evil and there’s corruption ... and there’s light and truth. We’re going to get to the light and we’re going to get to the truth ... Inside of this barricade, we’re going to knock those walls down. Okay? We’re going to knock those walls down. So be proud. Be proud as Christians. Be proud as patriots. And what we ... do is we give witness today to our faith in God, our love of country, the United States of America, for our Constitution, and for our President Donald J. Trump. God bless America.<sup>62</sup>

Ali Alexander, who founded Stop the Steal, took the stage.<sup>63</sup> He paraphrased the Bible when he talked about shutting everything down and “occupy[ing] D.C. full of patriots here, won’t we? We can do all things through Christ who strengthens us.” He told the crowd, “We just need to find us one brave senator” to object to the election or they would “burn the Republican Party down.”<sup>64</sup> He concluded, “We have God’s favor ... To God be the glory. For God and country.”

Three days later, Alexander told the media at a press conference, “Our hope is in Christ. Our hope is in God. And our hope is in the founding documents, the Constitution that we must continue to exhaust.”<sup>65</sup>

Other speakers that day represented a variety of Christian denominations. Father Greg Bramlage conducted an exorcism on stage in front of the portrait of Mary as the Virgin of Guadalupe blessing Pope John Paul II. He claimed to “specialize in exorcism and deliverance,” and he told the crowd that “we are in a spiritual battle, this cannot be solved by human means.” He prayed, “I ask that no demonic bondage, door, entity, portal, astral projection, or disembodied spirit may enter this space of 5,000 miles in all directions. I ask that any demons



within this vicinity or any that should try to enter here be rendered deaf, dumb, and blind. That you, Lord Jesus, would bind them, rebuke them, and disable them.”<sup>66</sup>

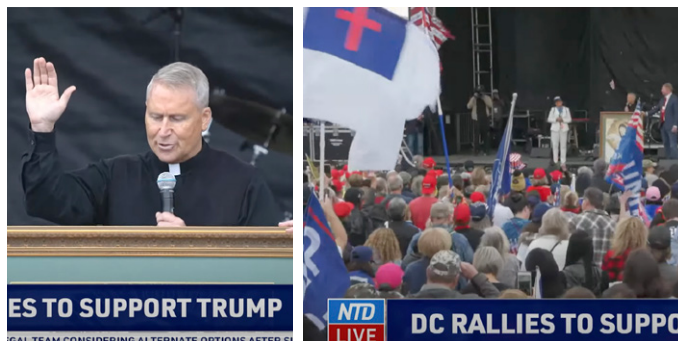
Archbishop Carlo Maria Viganò preached that fighting for Trump was a holy crusade with “the lies and deceptions of the children of darkness” on one side and, on the other, “the silent army of the children of Light, the humble ranks who overthrow evil by invoking God, the praying army that walks around the walls of lies and betrayal in order to bring them down.” He added, “We fight the battles of the Lord with faith and courage, carrying the Ark of the Covenant in our hearts, remaining faithful to the teachings of the Gospel of Our Lord!” After preaching about the “deep state” and converting every public official, Viganò invoked Christian nationalism: “Be proud, as Christians and as patriots, to be able to give witness today to your faith in God and your love for the United States of America, for its Constitution, and for its president, Donald J. Trump.” An Italian citizen, Viganò repeatedly talked of “our nation” and “our beloved nation,” and ended with a prayer that concluded, “... granting victory to those who served under thy holy banner, Amen. God bless our president. God bless the United States of America. One nation under God.”<sup>67</sup>

Jill Noble is a Jericho March coordinator,<sup>68</sup> and she hit the podium repeatedly with a gavel, which she called a hammer, and somehow this was related to a conspiracy theory about voting machines. As she hammered, the crowd chanted, “No king but Jesus.” She thanked God for not leaving them defenseless but giving them “weapons of warfare” to fight corruption and finished, “We say, let this be one nation under God! In Jesus’ name, Amen.”<sup>69</sup>

Bishop Joseph Strickland, the Catholic bishop of Tyler, Texas, delivered a Christian nationalist prayer in a video message.<sup>70</sup> “We come before you praying for our nation,” said Strickland in his church in front of a stained-glass cross, “a nation that proudly proclaims that we are ‘One Nation Under God.’ ... We pray that truly, we can embrace the words, ‘God bless America,’ more profoundly and more deeply than ever. Amen.”

Frank Pavone, who runs Priests for Life, delivered a prayer that sounded like a stump speech. In front of a portrait of Trump and an American flag that said, “One Nation Under God,” Pavone prayed, “We thank you for the United States of America which you have preserved through many trials and have blessed with the greatest president we’ve had, Donald J. Trump.”<sup>71</sup> He then repeated election lies.

Sister Deirdre Byrne, in her nun’s habit as she was for her speech at the 2020 Republican National Convention, thanked people for coming to the Jericho March to “help pray to end Satan’s lies that have covered our nation.”<sup>72</sup> She asserted that the “rosary is a weapon.”



**At the Let the Church ROAR event, Father Greg Bramlage performs the exorcism behind a framed painting of the Virgin Mary as the crowd holds up their hands in reverence and waves the Christian flag and Trump flags.**

Crossroads with Joshua Philipp / YouTube

Bishop Leon Benjamin, the senior pastor and bishop of New Life Harvest Church in Richmond, Virginia, said, “American patriots, are you ready? We are here in the mighty name of Jesus today to declare that every Jericho wall must come down! ... President Donald Trump has faith in America. He has faith in God. He has faith in Jesus. There are walls that must come down ... A fresh anointing is about to come on this nation ... Jesus is the lion of the Tribe of Judah and he will rule in America! The Jericho walls — we know the history, Joshua is told to do something crazy, but we know when God tells us to do something crazy it means it’s going to work ... You came to bring these Jericho walls down in Washington, D.C. ... the walls must come down!”<sup>73</sup> He then again recounted the story of Jericho, with the Levites consecrating America in his version, and he used warfare language: “The demons we kill now, our children will not have to fight these devils. These are our devils, and we will kill them now. They will not fight our children. The Jericho walls must come down!” And he blew a shofar to bring down the walls.

Metaxas announced there would be a “prophetic declaration” and introduced “Curt Landry, a prophet of God.”<sup>74</sup> Landry, an anti-vaccine, right-wing minister, called this “spiritual warfare” and talked about the Pilgrims landing 400 years ago “this day.” He went into a cinematic vision of the Ten Commandments and warfare: “a traditional vision, a prophetic vision of your traditional Moses, Charlton Heston, standing up on the rock.”

The head of the “Black Robed Regiment,” the Rev. Bill Cook, wore an Oath Keepers shirt and a MAGA hat.<sup>75</sup> He used mythologized American history to shame pastors into militant action. He told of a pastor in the stories of Paul Revere and the battles of Lexington and Concord, and he said that the pastor even trained the militia. “Boy that’s radical,” he said. “Where are our pastors today in this battle? ... Why are pastors running today? Why are they not at the forefront of this battle?”



The Rev. Bill Cook wears a MAGA hat and Oath Keepers T-shirt with his “Prayer Rally” ID badge, and he asks the pastors in the crowd to raise their hands at the Jericho March’s Let the Church ROAR event. Jericho March / Video Squirrel

Stewart Rhodes, founder of the far-right anti-government militia group known as Oath Keepers,<sup>76</sup> told the crowd about the Insurrection Act and that “you can be called up as the militia to support and defend the Constitution ... [W]e’re going to have to do it ourselves later, in a much more desperate, much more bloody war. Let’s get it on now — while he is still the commander-in-chief.” To which Metaxas replied, “Oh, God bless you. This guy’s keepin’ it real, folks.”<sup>77</sup>

That night, the Proud Boys roamed the streets of D.C., starting fights, vandalizing Black churches and burning a Black Lives Matter banner.<sup>78</sup> The next day, Trump said to aides, “seems like quite a few crazies,” an understatement given the arson, stabbings, and 30-plus arrests. This statement shows that Trump fully understood the violent power of this mob.<sup>79</sup>

To be fair, Trump may not have only been talking about the participants in the Jericho March. There was another Trump rally on December 12 and, as this report shows, Christian nationalism was the common thread tying together the disparate identities — from white supremacists to QAnon conspiracists to Proud Boys.

## December 12, 2020: Women for America First

While Jericho March, Stop the Steal, and Schlafly’s Eagles set up on the National Mall just down the street from the U.S. Capitol, Women for America First ended a nationwide bus tour (which began after the November 14 march<sup>80</sup>) with a rally at Freedom Plaza near the White House.<sup>81</sup> Women for America First has ties to Stop the Steal, and many of the same speakers and preachers appeared at both rallies.

Televangelist Mark Burns opened the rally by preaching a slapdash string of Christian nationalist talking points,

with special attention to “under God” in the Pledge of Allegiance: “I am going to pray because we elected Donald Trump, we elected a man who believes in the name of Jesus Christ. And they are trying to take God out of everything, you know they are trying to take God out of our Pledge of Allegiance. They are trying to take God out of our Pledge of Allegiance.” He then recited the pledge, along with the crowd, which screamed the addition: “under God!” After whipping up the crowd, Burns turned militant, saying, “I’ve got patriots here who are ready for a fight on every race-baiting, dividing, God-hating liberal in America, that you will not take away the beautiful country we call the United States of America ... you will not take God out of our nation. You will not take our faith, you will not take our liberty. Give me liberty or give me death!” After invoking the Constitution, he prayed, “Father God — in the name of Jesus, our savior, our king — he died on the cross that we might have a relationship with the Father in Heaven — wrap your arms around Donald J. Trump and give him the strength to keep on fighting, to never back down, and never become quiet, because we believe that God is on our side.” He ended with, “God bless you, America, God bless the United States,” and then led a chant of “Donald Trump.”<sup>82</sup>

Mike Lindell said, “this is the time we could bring our great country back to one nation under God — and that God is Jesus.”<sup>83</sup>

Jennifer Lawrence of We Build the Wall said, “We answer to God, not government. And God is gonna tell us who is going to be the president. And God is gonna tell us how this country is going to go.”<sup>84</sup>

Anna Khait, a former contestant on the TV show “Survivor” who was “born again” and now has a YouTube channel to “reach the lost,” delivered a sermon in which she claimed to have had visions and that Trump “was prophesied to have two terms, in Jesus’ name ... we thank you for two awesome terms.” She also had “a message ... for the devil. And his minions. And all the wizards and witches that are watching right now” that “Trump is our anointed one to bring justice back into this country. We’re going to lift the name above every name, in Jesus’ name.” She then tried to get the crowd to chant “Jesus” with her, but they couldn’t get the rhythm. She wanted the chant because it “was a vision [she] had a few weeks ago” but also made the crowd “repent for all of the blood sacrifice that has been poured.”<sup>85</sup>

The lead pastor at HIS Church in Kentucky, Brian Gibson, ended that rally. Gibson is affiliated in some manner with Church United, a national network of hundreds of pastors.<sup>86</sup> He preached about Jesus being a lamb and a lion, that “he died on the cross for you,” and then seamlessly transitioned into Christian nationalism: “I’m looking at some lion-like patriots. I’m looking at some liberty-loving patriots. I’m looking at some lion-like Bible

believers ... We're not gonna give this land to Marxism ... to communism ... to the devil ... This was founded in Christian roots, and my children are gonna be raised in a Christian nation. Amen?" He talked about the founders, but he claimed that the real founders were the black-robed preachers and that "we need a brand new group of black-robed preachers in America ... that'll lead the Christian army to a rightful birthright in this country ... America did not birth the church, but the church birthed America."<sup>87</sup>

## Other groups and rallies

Plenty of other groups were active before January 6 — some small, some big. The "Let the Church ROAR" rally included a brief plug from Kimberly Fletcher of Moms For America, who asked people to come back the next day (December 13) for the Keep Christmas Rally. "If you want them to stop canceling Christmas ... then come tomorrow because we're going to have a Keep Christmas Rally with Mike Lindell."<sup>88</sup> That rally was in the same vein as these other rallies, with phrases such as "America is still a Christian nation ... there are more of us than them ... America is still a Christian nation."<sup>89</sup> Another speaker preached, "the U.S. Constitution was founded upon ... the Bible, Judeo-Christian principles."<sup>90</sup> In a bedazzled American flag hat, Grossu, the co-founder of Jericho March, spoke about her visions and "righteous anger," but also "our Christian history, Judeo-Christian history."<sup>91</sup>

Other big pieces were moving behind the scenes, too. The Council for National Policy, the networking outfit identified earlier, sent the letter mentioned in the previous section falsely declaring "Trump is the lawful winner of the presidential election."<sup>92</sup>

The members of Congress who promised to object to the results of the free and fair election were nearly all people who promote Christian nationalist ideologies, as were those members who eventually did object.<sup>93</sup> This had an impact on the leaders and organizers of these marches and rallies. Any who doubt the impact of Senators Josh Hawley and Ted Cruz and the other objecting lawmakers to the results of a free and fair election need only listen to the Jericho March organizers, who announced their January 5-6 plans "after Hawley announced he would object to the results of several states being certified, joining several U.S. representatives who have said they will do the same."<sup>94</sup>

## January 5, 2021: Marches and rallies everywhere

Jericho March hosted a week of events leading up to the attack that included candlelight prayer vigils at the National Christmas Tree, Vice President Michael Pence's

home at the Naval Observatory, and the Russell Senate Office Building. Jericho March called for self-guided marches around the Capitol and Supreme Court on January 2-4. Then, on January 5 and 6, it got serious, with guided marches, speeches, and more.<sup>95</sup> The Eric Metaxas Show, on the day before the assault, aired an episode in which the host and guest argued that "Christian nationalism is a good thing."<sup>96</sup>

January 5 kicked off with a "Supreme Court Blessing." As the crowd arrived, Religion News Service's Jack Jenkins reported that organizers used the sound system to "blast an overtly Christian nationalist anthem. 'God bless America again, We need the blood of Jesus to wash away our sins ...'"<sup>97</sup>

At the Capitol across from the Supreme Court, they held "An Appeal to Heaven" flags and danced to "God's Not Dead," a song featured in the film of the same name that was intimately tied up with Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF), a Christian nationalist legal organization.<sup>98</sup> As in the biblical story of Jericho, one group marched around the Capitol, but instead of the Ark of the Covenant, they carried a two-foot tall cutout of Trump's head at the forefront along with a handwritten sign: "Thank you Lord, Donald v. Goliath." They sang "How Great is Our God" as their American, blue line, Gadsden ("Don't Tread on Me"), and Trump flags waved amid the red MAGA hats.<sup>99</sup>

Back at the Supreme Court, marchers formed prayer circles talking about how they were cheated, asking God to intervene, and said "This is not about fighting, this is about supporting 'One [Nation] Under God.'"<sup>100</sup> Jenkins reported on the rhetoric that day:

"This is our moment, Lord, this is our moment to take our country back," declared one woman standing in a prayer circle near the U.S. Supreme Court. "This is our moment to fight ... with you as our weapon. You are our fighter." A few minutes later, someone could be heard chanting a few feet away: "We fight for God, and God fights for us!"<sup>101</sup>

They blew their shofars and marched. Two people wore white and gold robes featuring Mary as the Virgin of Guadalupe, carried a fat Bible, blew smoke out of their shofar, and one wore a tricorn hat with gold trim, invoking the founders.<sup>102</sup> Other hornblowers draped themselves in American flags.<sup>103</sup>

They marched around the Supreme Court to the "One Nation Under God Prayer Rally," which was organized by a coalition that included Jericho March and Stop the Steal, among others.<sup>104</sup> Roger Stone, a former adviser to Trump's campaign who Trump later pardoned after his conviction for witness tampering and lying to Congress, was escorted to that rally by a group of Oath Keepers in tactical gear.<sup>105</sup> Stone mounted the small stage and



led the crowd in a chant of “bullshit,” then apologized to “his evangelical friends.” Someone in the audience responded, “We feel it, too.” Stone preached the spiritual warfare of Christian nationalism, “Let’s be clear, this ... is a fight for the future of Western Civilization as we know it. It’s a fight between Dark and Light. It’s a fight between the Godly and the Godless. It’s a fight between Good and Evil.” Stone said, “We’re here to express our God-given First Amendment rights!” and then repeated election lies. After hammering those lies over and over, Stone, who found Jesus while awaiting sentencing for his felony convictions and preached about his conversion at Global Vision Bible Church four months earlier,<sup>106</sup> said, “I honestly believe that God has put us here in this place at this time for a great purpose. I believe my life was spared for some greater purpose, and when the Lord is ready to tell me what it is he wants me to do I can tell you I’m prepared to do it, but I will never stop fighting for this nation.” Stone promised to march “shoulder-to-shoulder” with the mob. He concluded, “So, go with God. Remember this: we battle for the Lord and we dare not fail. If we stay true, victory will be ours.”

The crowd cheered Stone off stage to chants of “U-S-A! U-S-A!” and a man in the audience in a MAGA hat can be seen and heard screaming, “Let’s build a gallows!”<sup>107</sup> They did.

Within a few months of the attack, at least ten members of the Oath Keepers militia group would be charged in connection with the insurrection and a conspiracy,<sup>108</sup> including one from Stone’s personal security detail.<sup>109</sup>

The Christian nationalism seemed to ratchet up as the day wore on. There were more rallies that afternoon and night, including the “Rally for Revival” at Freedom Plaza.<sup>110</sup> “This is a Christian nation,” shouted preacher Brian Gibson, adding, “The church of the Lord Jesus Christ started America ... We’re going to take our nation back!”<sup>111</sup>



**TRUMP SUPPORTERS RALLY IN FREEDOM PLAZA**

Pastor Brian Gibson leads new members of the “Black Robed Regiment” in taking their oath at the January 5 “Rally for Revival.” Global TV Online / YouTube



Photo of Pastor Brian Gibson and Jacob Chansley, aka the “QAnon Shaman,” that surfaced after the insurrection.

E (@ladygeewiz5) / Twitter

Gibson, who emceed parts of the rally, also brought up a group of preachers on stage: the Black Robed Regiment. “If Jesus is our King, then our nation is our responsibility.” Gibson had the men swear an oath:<sup>112</sup>

Today, I take an oath to follow Jesus Christ of Nazareth, to serve the kingdom of God’s, to be committed to the Scriptures, to live a holy lifestyle, and to stand for the church. The church is the pillar and the ground of the truth. And if Jesus is my king, then my nation is my responsibility. So I receive my responsibility. And I will never wear a yellow robe. I will only wear the black robe.

And I will stand for liberty. I will stand for freedom. I will stand for America. I swear before you and I swear before these people, that I will protect this nation and the Constitution as a leader of the people of God’s.

And now as a minister, I lead sheep, I feed sheep, and I kill wolves.

Photos later surfaced of this same preacher posing with Jacob Chansley as Chansley wore face paint, fur, and horns.<sup>113</sup>

Pastor Ken Peters, who runs The Church at Planned Parenthood and the Patriot Church, preached a similar message in Freedom Plaza:<sup>114</sup>

We are not just in a culture war, we are in a kingdom war. This is the Kingdom of Darkness versus the Kingdom of Light ... And Satan ... wants nothing less than destroying this country entirely because we are a beacon of the Gospel ... It is important that in

this moment we stand up like never before ... If we don't hold up the shield of faith, Satan will take over this land. But I see a bunch of people here that will say, "No, no." We are not going to allow the enemy to destroy this beautiful and great land that our forefathers gave to us. We will rise up in this time and say like Paul Revere, "The leftists are coming!"... God bless you and God bless America.<sup>115</sup>

The next day, the Patriot Church leader tweeted: "Patriots are now storming the capital [sic] in front of us."<sup>116</sup>

The election was "stolen" in "the most egregious fraud," according to Pastor Ché Ahn, who said at this same rally, "[W]e're going to throw Jezebel out and Jehu's gonna rise up, and we're gonna rule and reign through President Trump and under the lordship of Jesus Christ."<sup>117</sup>

Christie Hutcherson of Women Fighting for America preached, "We serve a mighty, powerful God. He wants everybody to know it's by His might, by His hand, that Donald J. Trump will serve four more years."<sup>118</sup>



At the January 5 "Rally for Revival," a "Jesus Saves" sign is held behind conspiracy theorist Alex Jones as he asks the crowd, "[I]f God be with us, who can stand against us?" Bloomberg Quicktake: Now / YouTube

Alex Jones, with a yellow "Jesus Saves" sign waving behind him, ranted on stage, "... [T]here is a God that inspired our republic and there is a God in the control of the affairs of humans and that God will see us through if we are loyal ... In the end, God will fulfill his destiny and will reward the righteous." He called Biden a "slave of Satan" and preached, "We renounce Satan!" Jones' rant might surprise those who divorce religion and conspiracy theories, but it was highly religious and full of Christian nationalist ideology. He continued, "[M]ore importantly, we embrace God ... and just as we see in the Bible ... God raises up men who are real ... real men like President Trump." Jones screamed about God, God's plan,

connecting with God, holding Trump up and thanking God for trying to send us a "deliverer."<sup>119</sup> He told people they're never alone as long as they had faith in his God and to end, shrieking "the spirit of God is with us! ... And if God be with us, who can stand against us? ... I trust in the plan of God. I trust in Jesus Christ." He ended as one ends prayers: "Amen."

Pastor Mark Burns repackaged his December 12 sermon. He began by asking the crowd outside, "Don't I got some God-fearing, 1776, Trump-loving patriots in the building tonight?" and led a chant of "U-S-A." He preached about the war between good and evil, the biblical book of Revelation, and summed it up by saying, "Jesus wins!"<sup>120</sup>

Pastor Greg Locke, who hosted Roger Stone at his Tennessee church four months earlier, preached to "Jesus-loving patriots." Locke was filling in and praying for the Proud Boys leader Enrique Tarrio. Locke preached unadulterated Christian nationalism ideas in front of a "Jesus Saves" sign:<sup>121</sup>

I wonder how many Jesus-loving patriots we got out there tonight? I'm here to tell you that President Andrew Jackson, on his deathbed, he made a marvelous declaration. He turned and looked at a Bible. He pointed at a copy of the word of God just before he closed his eyes in death and he said — and I quote, "That book, sir, is the rock upon which the republic rests."

After sharing that Christian nationalist myth,<sup>122</sup> Locke continued with one of the clearest and most violent prayers of the day:

And ladies and gentlemen, we are here tonight not just because we have rights given to us by a constitution, but we have rights given to us by a holy Bible and God Almighty himself. And no matter what happens, no matter what they say, no matter what BLM does, no matter what Antifa does ...

Jesus Christ is still king of kings, he is still Lord of Lords, he is still the Alpha and the Omega. He's the beginning, he is the end, and he's everything in between, and my Bible says that he is the way, he is the truth and the life ... God is on our side. America is the last bastion of Christian freedom. It's the last bastion of capitalism ... I declare unto you that President Donald Trump is gonna stay for four more years in the White House ... We're a mighty army. They've gotta listen. They can't ignore us. Our churches have been backed into a corner ...

We pray for Enrique [Tarrio], and Lord, we pray for his organization [the Proud Boys]. And Lord, they may get a bum rap on the news media, but we just thank God that we can lock shields, and we can come shoulder-to-shoulder with people that still stand up for this



nation, and still love the rights and the freedoms that we have cause Lord, we've gotta recognize the fact if we don't have convictions worth dying for, we don't even know what living really is. So, God, help us to live, help us to fight, and if need be, lay down our life for this nation, and we thank you for those that have gone before us and done just that.

The violent Christian nationalism is explicit, and that was the message throughout all of these rallies, held from December 2020 until the attack on January 6, 2021. They were remarkably consistent, preaching that "God is on your side" and creating a divine justification to convince good people to commit evil acts, including attempting to overthrow the United States government and overturn a free and fair election.



**Pastor Greg Locke preaches Christian nationalism as a person in the crowd holds up a Bible.**

Bloomberg Quicktake: Now / YouTube

## Section VI

# ATTACK ON THE CAPITOL: EVIDENCE OF THE ROLE OF WHITE CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM

Andrew L. Seidel

*“My dear, when people show you who they are, why don’t you believe them?”*

— Maya Angelou to Oprah Winfrey

There were three paths to the Capitol on January 6. First, the Jericho Marchers shifted their prayerful focus from the Supreme Court to the Capitol.<sup>1</sup>

Second, Stop the Steal organized its “Wild Protest,”<sup>2</sup> a name chosen to echo Trump’s December 19 tweet: “Big protest in D.C. on January 6th. Be there, will be wild!” Indeed, an Oath Keeper charged in the attack had posted earlier that Trump “wants us to make it WILD that’s what he’s saying.”<sup>3</sup>

The third path was the “Save America” rally hosted and managed by Women for America First, which hosted similar rallies on November 14 and December 12, opposite the Jericho March event. The January 6 stage was set up in front of the White House. The crowd chanted “Fight for Trump,” and the speakers incited people to “fight.”<sup>4</sup> The stage opened with Paula White, one of Trump’s court evangelicals who was given a taxpayer-funded position in the White House, delivering an explicitly Christian nationalist and openly militant prayer.<sup>5</sup> White began with pre-prayer remarks that discussed miracles

and God’s power, purpose, and plan, as interpreted by White. She then quoted a favorite Bible verse for Christian nationalists, Psalm 33:12, “Blessed is the nation whose God is Lord.”<sup>6</sup> She became more bellicose as she asked God, “[M]ay your people rise up and stand strong,” to overturn their fear, and called for a “holy boldness.”<sup>7</sup> She preached about “the Adversary,” meaning Satan, and then transitioned into asking God to “overturn” — a verb choice often related to subverting elections — “every adversary against democracy.”<sup>8</sup> She called for “outpouring of your spirit like never before.”<sup>9</sup> This all echoed the framing from the previous weeks of a battle between light and dark, good and evil, Christians and the godless. White asked God and the listeners to back Trump in that battle, to “secure his destiny,” and to “be his rear guard” and “go in front of him this day,” and again called for “holy boldness.”<sup>10</sup>

White ended with a Christian nationalist version of the Lord’s Prayer. The Bible (Matthew 6:9–13) attributes the words of this prayer to Jesus himself and it ends, “For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory,



The crowd erected a gallows and openly spoke about hanging elected officials. Shay Horse / NurPhoto / Getty Images

forever. Amen.”<sup>11</sup> White rewrote Jesus’s prayer to include the U.S. After “forever,” she added the following: “And we all said for this United States of America, Amen.”<sup>12</sup> White’s final post-prayer flourish was to quote Trump, “For as our president says, ‘We worship God, not government.’ God bless you.”<sup>13</sup>

Rep. Mo Brooks, R-Ala., has been credibly accused of helping Stop the Steal organizers (along with Rep. Paul Gosar, R-Ariz., and Rep. Andy Biggs, R-Ariz.), an allegation Brooks denies.<sup>14</sup> Wearing body armor under his clothing in anticipation of violence that day (Brooks said he was “warned” about “risks” but did not say who warned him, what those risks were, or why he didn’t tell others<sup>15</sup>), Brooks took the stage between White and Trump to preach Christian nationalist-inspired talking points.<sup>16</sup> He claimed that America was straying from its godly foundations and is therefore in danger. “We are here today because America is at risk, unlike it has been in decades and perhaps centuries. Socialist Democrats attack and mock our moral values, even to the point of sarcastically — in the United States Capitol, one of the most revered places in America — mockingly closing their hedonistic prayers with ‘Amen and awoman.’”<sup>17</sup> He mixed election lies and Christian nationalism: “We are not gonna let them continue to corrupt our elections and steal from

us our God-given right to control our nation’s destiny ... Today, Republican senators and congressmen will either vote to turn America into a godless, amoral, dictatorial, oppressed, and socialist nation on the decline. Or they will join us, and they will fight and vote against voter fraud and election theft and vote for keeping America great.”<sup>18</sup>

Brooks invoked the sacrifice of the founding fathers and demanded to know if the crowd was also willing to make such a sacrifice: “Are you willing to do the same? [cheers] My answer is yes. Louder! Are you willing to do what it takes? [cheers] To fight for America? [cheers] Louder!”<sup>19</sup> Arguing that America must get back to a godly foundation — a foundation it does not actually have — is a standard belief in Christian nationalism, and Brooks repeated the trope: “We American patriots are gonna come right at ‘em, that we American patriots are gonna take America back and restore the foundational principles that have combined to make us the greatest nation in world history.”<sup>20</sup> He concluded, “God bless America, and the fight begins today.”<sup>21</sup>

Brooks reiterated and even clarified these Christian nationalist ideologies after they led to violence on January 6.<sup>22</sup> He told one journalist, “I make no apology for doing my absolute best to inspire patriotic Americans to not give up on our country and to fight back against anti-



Christian socialists ... I encourage EVERY citizen to watch my entire rally speech and decide for themselves what kind of America they want: One based on freedom and liberty or one based on godless dictatorial power.”<sup>23</sup>

Others espousing Christian nationalist ideologies preached on the “Save America” stage, too. Rep. Madison Cawthorn, R-N.C., told a crowd in December to “call your congressman and feel free — you can lightly threaten them.”<sup>24</sup> He began his remarks on January 6 by saying, “Wow! This crowd has some fight in it!”<sup>25</sup> He invoked the founders and said that the crowd “ha[d] the voice of lions,” but that the courage was not reflected in “a significant portion of our [Republican] Party,” bemoaning those who “have no backbone” and “sit idly by.”<sup>26</sup>

Trump’s 2016 campaign spokesperson Katrina Pierson reiterated the Trump-as-savior talking points. Trump “loves the United States of America,” she declared. “He loves God. He loves our flag, and he loves all of you. And that’s why we’re all here today. We love Trump. And I gotta tell you, I’ve never seen someone fight so hard, so strong, against everything, here and abroad, just to provide and protect our basic values and principles that keep our nation free and our people able to go to church.”<sup>27</sup>

Rudy Giuliani famously asked for “trial by combat.”<sup>28</sup> Alongside Giuliani on the stage was John Eastman, a senior fellow and director at the Claremont Institute, which one observer recently called “an increasingly white nationalist think tank.”<sup>29</sup> In *Newsweek* in August 2020, Eastman tried to kick off a second wave of birtherism against then-Sen. Kamala Harris, D-Calif., Joe Biden’s running mate. Meanwhile, more details about his role in January 6 continue to emerge. Giuliani talked of invasion and freedom of religion, coded terms for Christian nationalism ideologies: “This has been a year in which they have invaded our freedom of speech, our freedom of religion, our freedom to move, our freedom to live.”<sup>30</sup>

The crowd was at a fever pitch when Trump took the stage. Photos and video show that, amid a sea of maskless faces and red hats, there were American flags, Trump flags, “Don’t Tread on Me” flags (also known as Gadsden flags), and Confederate flags (including one with an AR-15 and the words “COME AND TAKE IT”),<sup>31</sup> accompanied by a mixture of Christian and patriotic imagery and messages, including Christian flags, “An Appeal to Heaven” flags, “Faith over Fear” flags, flags that read “Jesus is my Savior, Trump is my President,” a cross made of PVC pipe,<sup>32</sup> and a sign that simply said, “I am with you. —God.”<sup>33</sup> One sign proclaimed, “JESUS HAS THE THRONE.”<sup>34</sup> One woman listening to Trump had a makeshift shield — a metal trash can lid — that she painted red and on which she wrote “JESUS RULES,” hoisting the shield after Trump concluded his speech, “God Bless America.”<sup>35</sup>



The Christian flag, “An Appeal to Heaven” flag, an upside down American flag, and others (including an “Unleash the Kraken” flag) fly over the crowd as Trump speaks at the “Save America” rally. ProPublica



One of the signs at the “Save America” rally emphasizing that God is on the crowd’s side. ProPublica

Trump told the crowd “we’re gonna walk down” to Congress to convince them “to confront this egregious assault on our democracy ... And I’ll be there with you, we’re going to walk down,” and explained that “you’ll never take back our country with weakness. You have to show strength and you have to be strong. We have come to demand that Congress do the right thing ... ”<sup>36</sup>

With the call to march on the Capitol ringing in their heads after weeks of spiritual warfare rhetoric and hints of violence, the crowd obeyed.

## Iconic imagery at the siege

The imagery and violence of January 6 left indelible stamps on the American memory. Of the thousands of photos and videos taken that day, several moments have come to symbolize the insurrection. The five categories of iconic imagery examined here all have ties to Christian nationalism. The officers on duty that day described seeing the Christian nationalism, even if they didn’t know what to call it. D.C. Metropolitan Police Officer Daniel Hodges testified to a House Select Committee, “It was clear the terrorists perceived themselves to be Christians,” citing a small taste of the imagery and rhetoric noted in this document.<sup>37</sup>



Christian nationalist messages were penned on the gallows.  
Tyler Merbler / Flickr

## 1. The Gallows

The gallows, noose, and calls to hang any who were disloyal to Trump clarified that this was a lynch mob.<sup>38</sup> “Hang Mike Pence!” they chanted. An effigy branded a “traitor” with a noose around its neck was paraded on a stick to the Capitol.<sup>39</sup> Days earlier, Proud Boys leader Joe Biggs wrote on the social media platform Parler, “Every law makers [sic] who breaks their own stupid Fucking laws should be dragged out of office and hung.”<sup>40</sup> Recordings that day show the attackers were less artistic and more violent: “They’ve got the gallows set up outside the Capitol Building. It’s time to start fucking using them.”<sup>41</sup> Another attacker was asked by an NPR reporter what he hoped would come of January 6, and he was clear: “The people in this House who stole this election from us hanging from a gallow out here in this lawn for the whole world to see, so it never happens again. That’s what needs to happen — four by four by four hanging from a rope out here for treason.”<sup>42</sup>

The attackers that destroyed and piled up journalists’ equipment screamed about collecting names. One said, “We start hunting them down, one by one,” to cheers of the crowd and a response of “traitors get guillotine.”<sup>43</sup>

People posed for photos with the gallows. At one point, a man in a “Faith, Family, Freedom” sweatshirt was seen atop the gallows.<sup>44</sup> They signed their names and added thoughts to the wooden gallows erected near the Capitol, including “Hang them high,” “In God We Trust,” “God Bless the USA,” “Hang for treason,” and “Amen.”<sup>45</sup>

## 2. The Cross

One of the most ubiquitous symbols on January 6 was the Christian cross. Latin crosses are “the principal symbol of Christianity around the world,” according to the Supreme Court,<sup>46</sup> and, as used on January 6 by the insurrectionists, one of the clearest displays of Christian nationalism.

Crosses were everywhere that day in D.C., on flags and flagpoles, on signs and clothes, around necks, and erected above the crowd. The Proud Boys also erected a massive cross using ropes in a viral video of the Michigan Capitol (a sister rally, not in D.C.).<sup>47</sup> A cross with “Jesus Saves” written on one plank was featured in some news stories, and it was also paraded next to Alex Jones as he paused on the march to the Capitol, climbed atop a fountain — like a stage — and ranted on a megaphone.<sup>48</sup> The lead image on a *New York Times* article showed a white cross, maybe three feet tall, atop a flagpole with a “Trump: Keep America Great 2020” flag thrust high above the crowd in front of the Capitol as people chanted “Fight for Trump.”<sup>49</sup>

They erected an 8-foot wooden cross in Freedom Plaza (at the White House end of Pennsylvania Avenue)<sup>50</sup> and another 8-foot tall cross at the Capitol that became disturbingly iconic after the crowd prayed around it.



People worshipping at the cross on the east side of the Capitol during the attack.

Left: Win McNamee / Getty Images. Right: Stefani Reynolds / Bloomberg / Getty Images



That wooden cross attained infamy on the east side of the Capitol.<sup>51</sup> Win McNamee photographed the man holding the cross with his forehead resting against it, seemingly in prayer; meanwhile, in the foreground, a man draped in a Trump flag with a smaller American flag on a wooden pole bowed down before that cross and groveled.<sup>52</sup> Other photos show the mob surrounding the cross in their red Trump hats, praying, laying hands on one another, and flying the “Trump Train” flag. These are just a few examples of crosses displayed during the insurrection. There were many, many more.

### 3. Flags

Flags have the potential to be the perfect symbol for Christian nationalism. We typically associate them with a country or nation or some sort of sovereign entity with geography over which to rule. Flags are meant to be symbols of this power, idea, and identity. The insurrection was wrapped in many flags that reflect the mythical Christian nation.



The Confederate flag is paraded in the U.S. Capitol for the first time in American history. SAUL LOEB / AFP / Getty Images

#### The Confederate Flag

As historians Dr. Keri Leigh Merritt and Dr. Rhae Lynn Barnes wrote, “[F]or the first time in American history, White supremacists treasonously raised a Confederate flag inside the United States Capitol, disrupting America’s peaceful transfer of power and invoking tangled memories of our nation’s Civil War.”<sup>53</sup> And this too is a relic of Christian nationalism, albeit Confederate Christian nationalism.<sup>54</sup>

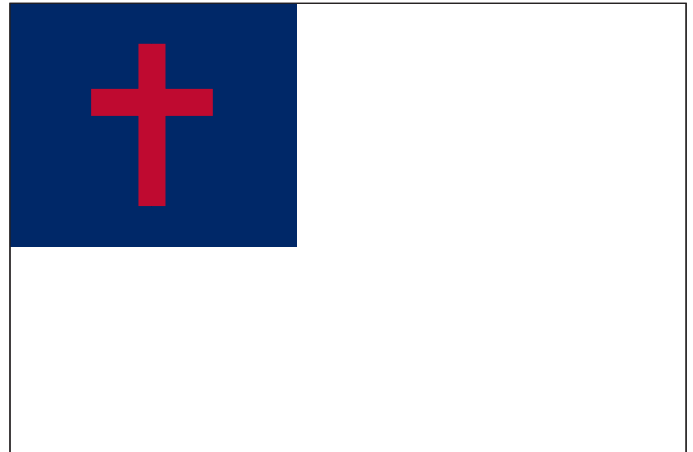
Kevin Seefried carried the flag of white supremacy and traitors into the Capitol that day, but he did more. According to the FBI, Seefried and his son, Hunter, listened to Trump’s speech, marched to the Capitol and watched as lumber 2x4s and riot shields were used to break windows.<sup>55</sup> They then helped clear the glass and

entered the building. A *Christian Chronicle* correspondent and minister, Hamil Harris, filmed Seefried with his seditious flag outside the Capitol exhorting people to “go inside” the Capitol, stop “sitting down,” and yelling, “This is just the beginning.”<sup>56</sup>

Ruth Braunstein, a professor of sociology and author of *Prophets and Patriots: Faith in Democracy across the Political Divide* and co-editor of *Religion and Progressive Activism: New Stories About Faith and Politics*, observed that the juxtaposition of symbols — including the Confederate flag alongside Christian imagery and anti-Semitic T-shirts — was striking. “The riot was a pitch-perfect performance of the kind of white Christian nationalism that has ebbed and flowed throughout American history—from 1860 to 1960, 1920 to 2021.”<sup>57</sup>

#### The Christian Flag

The Christian flag was everywhere on January 6.<sup>58</sup> In a conversation caught on video as the mob surged into the Capitol and shots were about to be fired, a man stood flying two gold-fringed Christian flags, the Capitol and mob just behind him, and said, “Donald Trump coordinated it. We’re his surrogates.” He pauses, looks at



The Christian flag (above) is carried onto the floor of the U.S. Senate (below). NBC News

the flags, and adds, “Jesus loves us.”<sup>59</sup> One photo shows the Christian flag flying above another flag that reads, “JESUS IS KING.”<sup>60</sup>

The insurrectionists also paraded the Christian flag around the Senate on January 6. Perhaps it escaped notice because not many recognized it.

NBC News reporter Frank Thorp was in the Senate Gallery as about a dozen attackers rifled through senators’ desks on the floor of the Senate.<sup>61</sup> Thorp captured the attackers on video, including one who carried and planted the Christian flag on the floor of the Senate.<sup>62</sup> One year later, the attacker with the flag who also rifled through senators’ desks and photographed their papers has not even been identified.



The mob and police clash around a “Jesus is my Savior, Trump is my President” flag. Lev Radin / Pacific Press / Shutterstock

## Other Flags

Many insurrectionists favored flags that read “Jesus is my Savior, Trump is my President,”<sup>63</sup> and many wore flags as capes, including the Savior/President flag.<sup>64</sup>

The “An Appeal to Heaven” flag was also common. One widely circulated image shows it streaming above the massive “JESUS 2020” banner.<sup>65</sup> One of those “An Appeal to Heaven” flags was on a literal pitchfork used as a flagpole.<sup>66</sup> This flag’s message was important to the attackers. One handmade version was explicit: “An Appeal to Heaven: A Cry for Divine Justice.”<sup>67</sup> In an interview, one of the attackers who got to the Senate floor and was part of the infamous prayer singled out the flag, stating, “We appeal to heaven because we — as individuals, we’re powerless.”<sup>68</sup>

The “An Appeal to Heaven” flag has long been popular with Christian nationalists, including preachers.<sup>69</sup> Arkansas state Senator Jason Rapert, who is also a preacher and a legislative sponsor of bills to require the posting of “In God We Trust” in every public school classroom, is very

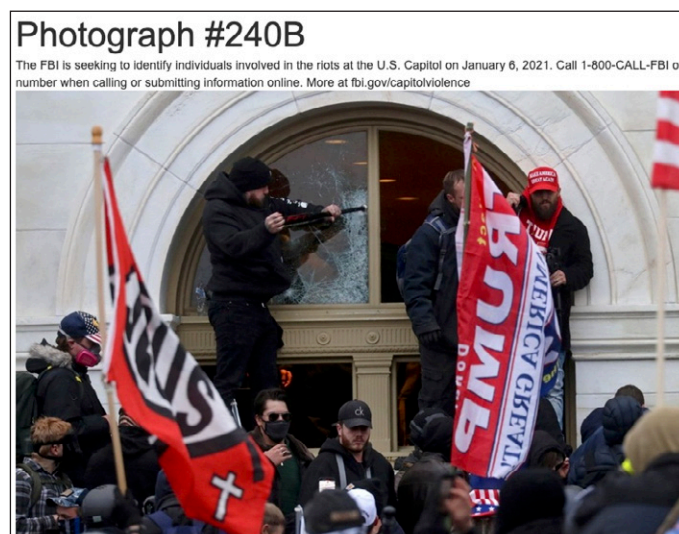
fond of this flag and its message.<sup>70</sup> Rapert posed with that same flag in front of the U.S. Supreme Court on a previous trip to D.C. and regularly has people hold it on stage when he preaches.<sup>71</sup>

Other flags featured the ichthys,<sup>72</sup> a symbol of Christianity colloquially known as the “Jesus fish.” One person carrying such a flag that included the words “Proud American Christian”<sup>73</sup> also wore a sign featuring the Christian dove that symbolizes the Holy Spirit and that also said “WWJD” for “We Want Justice Delivered,”<sup>74</sup> adding the QAnon callsign “WWG1WGA,” meaning, “where we go one, we go all.”<sup>75</sup> At one point, the crowd around one of these proud American ichthys flags began chanting “Trump is president, Christ is king!”<sup>76</sup> An 8-foot long banner with the “Trump is president, Christ is king” slogan featured a Byzantine icon of Jesus, complete with halo and huge Bible with a cross, and it was flown between an American flag and a blue “Keep America Great” flag in front of the Washington monument as the mob marched to the Capitol.<sup>77</sup>

The FBI posted a photo of some of its most wanted perpetrators on January 6 breaking through the doors and windows on the first floor of the west side of the Capitol, and a flag with an ichthys on a red background with crosses in the corner is flying in the foreground of the photo as attackers batter the glass.<sup>78</sup>



Examples of “Jesus fish” flags seen in the January 6 crowd. Below: A photograph shared by the FBI features a flag with the “Jesus fish” and Latin crosses as insurrectionists break windows to enter the Capitol. FBI



### Photograph #240B

The FBI is seeking to identify individuals involved in the riots at the U.S. Capitol on January 6, 2021. Call 1-800-CALL-FBI or number when calling or submitting information online. More at [fbi.gov/capitolviolence](https://www.fbi.gov/capitolviolence)





A new spin on MAGA: “Make America Godly Again.” Tayfun Coskun / Anadolu Agency / Getty Images

Yet other flags included:

- A more explicitly Christian nationalist version of MAGA, “Make America Godly Again,” on an American flag.<sup>79</sup>
- “Born, Raised, and Protected by God, Guns, Guts, and Glory,” which attackers waved as they stood on police vehicles outside the Capitol.<sup>80</sup>
- A black Christian cross and two assault rifles were superimposed over the American flag with the words, “GOD GUNS TRUMP.”<sup>81</sup>
- “Thank You President Trump God Bless America” in white lettering on a blue field with a red border.<sup>82</sup>
- A black, vertical flag with a photo of a large lion’s head, with “TRUMP” written above the head in red letters while below the head read, “The Lion in you NEVER RETREATS. Proverbs 30:30.”<sup>83</sup>
- One pole held three Christian-themed flags: one “An Appeal to Heaven” flag; a “FAITH OVER FEAR” flag; and a flag with a lamb, dove, and lion.<sup>84</sup>
- Another man, also on the march over to the Capitol, waved the flag of Israel above a sign begging the crowd to “Say Yes To Jesus,” featuring Jesus himself kneeling in prayer.<sup>85</sup>

#### 4. Signs, clothing, and Bible verses

Then there were the signs. Printed yellow signs proclaiming “Jesus Saves” stood out everywhere in the crowd, including the mob surging up the steps and into the Capitol itself.<sup>86</sup> Two preachers with the yellow “Jesus Saves” sign — and the same message on sweatshirts and vests — preached to the crowd through a bullhorn.<sup>87</sup> One video shows EMTs rushing an unidentified injured person to an ambulance, pushing the stretcher past a “Jesus Saves” sign and a man holding a “Jesus is my Savior, Trump is my President” flag.<sup>88</sup>

At least one “JESUS 2020” banner was hung by the crowd, many of whom held signs that echoed the sentiment.<sup>89</sup> As mentioned earlier (when it was held near Alex Jones), one sign was in the shape of a cross with the phrase “Jesus Saves.”<sup>90</sup> Another read “Glory to God.”<sup>91</sup> Yet another sign, dotted with crosses, read “TO GOD THE GLORY TRUTH & JUSTICE DEEP STATE EXPOSED TRUMP 2021–24.”<sup>92</sup> Another: “Moultrie Co., IL LOVES JESUS, the CONSTITUTION + TRUMP.”<sup>93</sup>

One hat read “God, Guns, Trump” with a cross after “God” and an American flag on the bill.<sup>94</sup> “God Chose Trump to Save USA,” said one banner.<sup>95</sup> “God’s Word calls Dem out!” proclaimed a sign.<sup>96</sup> One man wore a





One of the many yellow “Jesus Saves” signs seen on January 6 and in the events leading up to the insurrection. Robert Nickelsberg / Getty Images

Black Warrior XII T-shirt, which had Christian crosses on the front and back and American flags on the arms along with the phrase: “Jesus dies for all of us because all lives matter.”<sup>97</sup> A black pickup truck pulled a massive trailer with a white billboard that said in block letters “THOU SHALT NOT STEAL” and “#STOPTHESTEAL.” People signed the billboard and wrote things like, “In God We Trust,” “Free the CHURCH!!!,” “Jesus!,” “1 Peter 1:19–20,” and entire Bible verses.<sup>98</sup>

Bible verses and phrases were as ubiquitous as crosses. Some of the more militant attackers, including at least two in tactical helmets and military-grade gas masks, sported “Armor of God” patches on their camouflage fatigues.<sup>99</sup> The military-style patches feature a large Christian cross and invoke the passage in Ephesians 6:10–17, in which Christians are instructed to “put on the armor of God.” Attacker Samuel Lazar wore face paint and a patch on his tactical gear that bore the words: “Blessed be the Lord, my rock, who trains my hands for war, and my fingers for battle.” [Psalm 144:1 ESV]<sup>100</sup>

Other Bible verses in the crowd included one sign that simply listed Heb. 4:12, Jer. 4:7, Psalm 67.<sup>101</sup> In one video, the mob can be seen moving to breach the east steps of the Capitol while a Christian flag and a “Jesus is my Savior, Trump is my President” flag are visible, as well as the sign with the citations for those three Bible verses.<sup>102</sup> Another sign seen that day read “Ye must be born again. Jn 3:7 [referencing John 3:7 KJV].”<sup>103</sup> One handwritten sign featured citations for 13 Bible verses.<sup>104</sup>

Not only Bible verses, but the book itself was a totem of the crowd. A man wearing skeleton gloves posed for media photos with a Bible in the chaos and then, when the crowd finally breached the building and surged into the doors, that same gloved hand thrust the Bible in the air for the mob to follow.<sup>105</sup>

## 5. White Jesus and religious iconography

Perhaps the best symbol of the day was the modified, syncretic portrait of white Jesus, about four feet tall, that one woman carried. It showed a popular depiction of Jesus — Peter V. Bianchi’s portrait, “I am the Truth, The Light and the Way,” — altered to have Jesus wearing a red MAGA hat with “#WWG1WGA” on his white robes.<sup>106</sup>

Popular American depictions of Jesus depict him with white skin — Bianchi’s portrait and Warner Sallman’s “Head of Christ” are perhaps the most popular — but first-century residents of the Levant did not look like the white man in those portraits. Jesus was not white,<sup>107</sup> nor did Jesus wear a MAGA hat.

One person carried two 5-foot-tall portraits with religious iconography. One depicted a white Jesus standing tall in white robes with a halo of light, hand raised in front of his chest shooting out beams of red and blue light with the words “Jesus, I trust in you.” The image is called “Divine Mercy,” as interpreted by Adolf Hyla and then by Kathleen Weber in 1992. The second painting was of Mary in a gilded frame — specifically, the Virgin of Guadalupe, patroness of Mexico and all the Americas.<sup>108</sup> As the mob occupied the east steps of the Capitol and breached those doors, the two large Jesus and Mary portraits were displayed in the East plaza, framing the territory as clearly as the flags and crosses.<sup>109</sup>



White #MAGA QAnon Jesus is perhaps the best symbol of the day. Tyler Merbler / Flickr





The crowd carried framed paintings, including these two: **Divine Mercy** and the **Virgin of Guadalupe**. Andrew L. Seidel / Twitter



A statue of Mary wrapped in a rosary (lower left) and a banner of Mary as the Virgin of Guadalupe (upper right) are hoisted above the crowd on the east steps. Andrew L. Seidel / Twitter

in a rosary held above the heads of the attackers surging up the steps and attacking the Capitol door.<sup>113</sup> Another attacker can be seen attempting to breach a different Capitol door with his rosary wrapped around his hand, on which a fellow insurrectionist remarked.<sup>114</sup> He wasn't the only one,<sup>115</sup> and one priest said he performed an exorcism in the Capitol.<sup>116</sup>

## In their own words: Christian nationalism

### The prayer in the Senate

The impromptu prayer in the U.S. Senate chamber captured by the *New Yorker* began with one insurrectionist, Michael Roche, praying:<sup>117</sup>

Jesus Christ, we invoke your name, Amen!

The 30–40 other insurrectionists in the chamber echoed with loud “Amens” of their own. In a post-insurrection interview posted to Facebook, Roche said:

My name is Michael Roche. We're here in Washington, D.C. We did get a chance to storm the Capitol. And we made it into the chamber ... We managed to convince the cops to let us through. They listened to reason. And when we got into the chamber. ... [W]e all started praying and shouting in the name of Jesus Christ, and inviting Christ back into our state [sic] capitol.

Roche's brother posted a photo of Roche and one of the most prominent insurrectionists, Jacob Anthony Chansley,



The framed paintings are placed at the foot of the east steps as the mob flooded into the Capitol. ProPublica

Like the eagles the Roman legions carried, the mob carried religious symbols and statuary above their heads, including what looks like a bronze shrine to Mary in the Lady of Peace pose with upturned hands slightly raised and out to the sides, borne atop a pole.<sup>110</sup> There also was a painted Christ child king known as the Infant of Prague.<sup>111</sup> A colorful tapestry of the Virgin of Guadalupe and three angels on the reverse side can be seen in this same mob,<sup>112</sup> as well as a white, marble-esque Mary wrapped





Michael Roche shouts in the Capitol (left) and poses for a photo with Jacob Chansley (right) in a Facebook post shared by Roche's brother. ROBERTO SCHMIDT / AFP / Getty Images

writing, "My brother was shoulder to shoulder praying in Jesus name in the main capital [sic] chamber holding up the Bible."<sup>118</sup>

After Roche shouted his invocation, Chansley suggested a more formal prayer.

The crowd agreed, and many approached the dais as though this were an altar call in a church. Chansley led them in the following prayer:

Let's all say a prayer in this sacred space. Thank you Heavenly Father for gracing us with this opportunity.

[Pause for all to remove hats and bow heads]

Thank you our Heavenly Father for this opportunity to stand up for our God-given unalienable rights. Thank you heavenly Father for being the inspiration needed to these police officers to allow us into the building; to allow us to exercise our rights; to allow us to send a message to all the tyrants, the communists, and the globalists, that this is our nation, not theirs. That we will not allow the America — the American way of the United States of America, to go down.

Thank you divine, omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent creator God, for filling this chamber with your white light of love, with your white light of harmony. Thank you for filling this chamber with patriots that love you and that love Christ.

Thank you divine, omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent creator God for blessing each and every one of us here and now. Thank you divine creator God for surrounding and filling us with the



On the Senate dais, Chansley delivers a prayer over a bullhorn while Roche raises his arms and looks to the ceiling in worship. The New Yorker / YouTube

divine omnipresent white light of love and protection, peace and harmony. Thank you for allowing the United States of America to be reborn. Thank you for allowing us to get rid of the communists, the globalists, and the traitors within our government. We love you and we thank you. In Christ's holy name we pray! Amen.

[All Shout:] Amen!<sup>119</sup>

The idea of the country being "reborn" and specifically reborn "in Christ's holy name," which is how the prayer concluded, is central to Christian nationalism. This is also why Roche described them as "inviting Christ back into our state [sic] capitol." They were seeking to return the nation to a mythical past that does not exist, but that mythical past is central to their identity.



Chansley at an election protest in Arizona just three days after Election Day, holding a sign that says “GOD WINS.”  
Hope O’Brien / Twitter

The BBC interviewed Chansley and reported on January 10 that he believed “he had done nothing wrong and he had truth and God on his side.”<sup>120</sup> He told the FBI that he was only able to get into the Senate chamber “by the grace of God.”<sup>121</sup> In video shot just outside the Capitol after the attack, Chansley explained that he left the Capitol because “Donald Trump asked everybody to go home, he just put out a tweet — it’s a minute long — he asked everybody to go home.”<sup>122</sup> He believed he attacked at God’s behest and left at Trump’s request. Chansley explained that Trump only asked him and the other supporters to leave “because, dude, we won the fucking day, we fucking won.” The victory was “sending a message to the senators and the congressmen” and Vice President Pence, that if they don’t do what the attackers wanted — overturn the results of the 2020 election — then “we will remove them from office, one way or another,” again invoking a violence represented by the gallows. Chansley likened doubters of the January 6 victory to those who doubted the divinity of Jesus: “a lot of people doubted a lot of prophets, saints, and sages — a lot of people doubted Christ. All I can say to those people is haters can hate. I don’t give a shit.”

Chansley exemplifies the stew of identities and ideologies at the insurrection, especially the connections between Christian nationalism and QAnon, hence his *nom de guerre*, “QAnon Shaman.” He was photographed in Arizona on November 6, 2020, just three days after Election Day. Protesting the election results, he carried a sign that said “HOLD THE LINE PATRIOTS. GOD WINS” on one side and “Q sent me” on the other.<sup>123</sup>

### Other prayers on January 6

The prayer in the Senate checked most boxes of Christian nationalist ideologies, but prayer was used in many places that day.

As insurrectionists overran the Capitol, staffers who



A demonstrator prays in Washington, D.C., on January 6.  
Eric Lee / Bloomberg / Getty Images

had barricaded themselves in one of Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell’s offices heard a female attacker “praying loudly outside their door for ‘the evil of Congress to be brought to an end.’”<sup>124</sup> When the crowd arrived at the Capitol after Trump’s speech, they hailed the Proud Boys as “God’s warriors.”<sup>125</sup> They then knelt in prayer, as they had at the rallies in the preceding weeks.<sup>126</sup> The prayer — just like the prayer in the Senate — included typical Christian nationalist rhetoric about returning and revival.<sup>127</sup> Several other groups prayed in the Capitol Rotunda.<sup>128</sup> One of these prayer groups first sang a few lines from the Battle Hymn of the Republic, similar to how they sang along to the song at the Jericho March event three weeks earlier.<sup>129</sup> They then prayed “in the name of Jesus, Amen.”<sup>130</sup> Citizen investigators suggest that at least four of those praying in that particular circle were Oath Keepers. Others knelt in prayer as law enforcement worked to clear the Capitol.<sup>131</sup> The founder of Cowboys for Trump prayed through a bullhorn above the crowd: “Let us pray Second Chronicles, chapter 7, verse 14, over our nation. Let us pray. Our Father says that if we will repent and pray, he will hear our prayers.” The crowd chanted, “Fight for Trump! Fight for Trump! Fight for Trump!” unfurled a flag with “An Appeal to Heaven” on it, and held a “Trump 2020” flag on a pole topped with a white Christian cross alongside another flagpole with a sign that said, “Jesus, I trust in you.”<sup>132</sup>

Another group prayed as the masses of attackers swarmed the scaffolding outside the Capitol.<sup>133</sup> A man in a white shirt emblazoned with a red cross — sold as a “Crusader Knights Templar Distressed Cross T-Shirt”<sup>134</sup> — led a prayer circle outside the Capitol as attackers overwhelmed police.<sup>135</sup> He prayed for a small circle of people while a woman in the prayer circle held aloft a handwritten “In God We Trust” sign. The man was also photographed holding the sign that day, which featured Christian crosses on the corners.<sup>136</sup> The prayers often sought the restoration of a Christian nation that never was.



## Religious music and shofars

During the attack, people blew shofars, as they did at Jericho March events, and chanted, “The blood of Jesus covering this place,” meaning the Capitol.<sup>137</sup> One shofar was painted with an American flag motif.<sup>138</sup> There was also music, including a mobile stage of sorts. “Cry out, I will heal the land, cause only Jesus saves. Yeah, only Jesus saves. Bring peace right now even for the guy that got shot. In Jesus’ name,” they sang.<sup>139</sup> On the march to the Capitol, some paused for an impromptu worship concert.<sup>140</sup> Several women — one wearing a Trump flag as a cape and red MAGA hat — can be seen singing and swaying to worship songs.<sup>141</sup> Five others, including some children in red MAGA hats, kneel and sway to the music as a man in a leather Harley Davidson jacket enters the center of the circle, in front of the speakers, and kneels in praise as the crowd cheers. On the grass just next to the Peace Monument,<sup>142</sup> a 50-plus person Christian choir sings, “believers in Jesus, lifting up our voices to the Lord,” with a Christian flag flying behind them.<sup>143</sup> They appear to be singing a modified version of Robert Gay’s “People of the Lord.” This version of the song begins: “... We are going forth, with His praises on our lips, **and a sword in our hands, we are marching on with power, as we possess this land.**”<sup>144</sup> They also sang, “the Lord will fight the battles for his people when we cry aloud unto him and he will crush the enemy ... .”<sup>145</sup>

Near the end of the insurrection, the leaders of Jericho March sought to control the damage and blame the media for distorting the violent insurrection into something more than a peaceful march. The group posted two videos to Twitter, both taken earlier in the day but — according to the timestamps — they were posted as after-the-fact justifications that evening. One Tweet said, “You won’t see this on #fakenews, but here is what the patriots looked like — singing patriotic songs, praying, and chanting USA. Here they are singing God Bless America.” The accompanying video showed the singing as Christian flags, Trump flags, and American flags flew over the crowd on the west side of the Capitol. At that point, the crowd had already swarmed over police barriers and climbed scaffolding.<sup>146</sup> The video shows the initial stages of the attack on the Capitol in an effort to stop American democracy. Jericho March’s Twitter feed posted another video showing “Catholic patriots praying the rosary.”<sup>147</sup>

As the fallout and second impeachment commenced, those false narratives evaporated. Many of the indicted insurrectionists openly spoke about going to the Capitol to stop the election, boasting that they were Trump’s Jesus-loving patriots.

## Confessions and prior statements

Prayers aside, we have the confessions of many of the attackers themselves. They admit that prayer guided their actions leading up to the fateful day and on the day itself.

The *Wall Street Journal* spoke with one attacker who:

... felt the need to go inside to share his views with Congress but wanted to consult God first. He prayed aloud: “Lord, is this the right thing to do? Is this what I need to do?” He says he felt God’s hand on his back, pushing him forward. “I checked with the Lord,” he says. “I checked with Him three times. I never heard a ‘No.’”<sup>148</sup>

After the attack, insurrectionist Jenny Cudd<sup>149</sup> filmed and posted a video of herself discussing the attack while sipping a beer.<sup>150</sup> A Trump flag is still tied around her neck. “Hey, patriots,” she begins her 25-minute video, “I’m gonna tell y’all what actually happened today.” Cudd closes her video with a textbook example of Christian nationalism:

To me, God and country are tied — to me they’re one and the same. We were founded as a Christian country. And we see how far we have come from that. When they make an absolute mockery of us and pray to some heathen god and say “amen and awoman.” What the fuck is that? We are a godly country, and we are founded on godly principles. And if we do not have our country, nothing else matters.<sup>151</sup>



Top photo: Leo Kelly (far right) stands next to the Senate dais just before the prayer. *The New Yorker* / YouTube  
Bottom photo: Kelly gives an interview to LifeSiteNews in his hotel room that evening. LifeSiteNews

Cudd raised funds for her legal defense on a Christian fundraising website, whose founder claims “everything we do and what our platform delivers is Christ-centered.”<sup>152</sup> In her plea, Cudd explained her actions: “I love my country, President Trump, the Constitution, & the Christian principles our country was founded on. God made me a fighter not a coward. ... If you cannot contribute, please pray. God bless the U.S.A!”<sup>153</sup>

Leo Kelly and Joshua Matthew Black, two of the insurrectionists who invaded the Senate and participated in the Christian nationalist prayer led by Chansley, later recounted the moment. Kelly gave a post-attack interview in his hotel room with LifeSiteNews, a far-right propaganda outlet based in Canada that is “a known purveyor of misleading information” according to Snopes and has been banned from Facebook and YouTube for spreading disinformation about COVID-19.<sup>154</sup> He talked about getting onto the floor of the Senate: “We said a prayer in there ... One guy up there ... said we should pray and some of us did. He was on his bullhorn/microphone thing and he just consecrated it to Jesus.”<sup>155</sup>

Joshua Matthew Black also described the attack and, like Kelly, can be seen in the *New Yorker* video joining the prayer with hands raised in worship after rifling through the desk of Sen. Ted Cruz with several other attackers.<sup>156</sup>



Black rifling through senators’ desks, on the floor of the Senate in camouflage and gloves, and later as he appears in his selfie video. The New Yorker / YouTube

Like Cudd, Black justified the attack in a selfie video while wearing Trump paraphernalia.<sup>157</sup> At the outset, Black explained his goal: “I just wanted to get inside the building so I could plead the blood of Jesus over it. That was my goal.”<sup>158</sup> Black attributed every action he took to a conversation he had with God. First, he wondered, “Why are we just sitting here?” and then:

I started praying. I said, “Lord, I don’t know what to do. What do you want me to do?” You know, he said, “go to the top of the steps,” and I was like, “Lord, it’s packed. I can’t get up in there.” And then he said, “look up,” and I looked up and there’s a bunch of people ... that had been sprayed with mace and they were coming down the steps like blind people with their hands out ... and I just felt my heart go right there. I was like, “Are you sure Lord? Because I’m not a big fan of pepper spray, you know what I’m saying?” And he was like, “no, go.” I said, “okay, Lord.” So I walked over the top and next thing I know, I’m at the door. I don’t know how I got there, but I was at the door and people were — it was a mob rule situation ... the patriots were pissed ... so much anger. So I just kept saying, “praise the name of Jesus. Glory to God. God bless America. Praise the name of Jesus. I plead the blood of Jesus. Glory to God. God bless America.” And next thing I know I’m up there at the police and there’s six of them in this little door.<sup>159</sup>

Black described entering the Capitol and walking around “yelling, ‘Praise the name of Jesus. Glory to God. God bless America. I plead the blood of Jesus.’ ... [W]hen I was talking this, it must have been the spirit of God in me because people tended to do what I said, and I’m not like an imposing figure.” Then he recounted reaching a door he says is marked “U.S. Senate”:

The Holy Spirit just fell on me and I just started weeping ... It was awesome. The presence of God is like the best drug on earth. ... It was awesome ... If I had it to do over again though I would have ... prayed about the evil spirits that were in there. I’d have cast them out. But I didn’t even think of that ... So I got down on my knees, started praying, I started lifting my hands, I was like, “Praise the name of Jesus. Thank you, Lord for the blood of Jesus” ... I’d accomplished my goal. I pled the blood of Jesus on the Senate floor. I praised the name of Jesus on the Senate floor. That was my goal. I think that was God’s goal ... I think the Lord wanted me to be there.<sup>160</sup>

In the video, Black also complains that the Democrats are “anti-Christian,” insinuates that Vice President-Elect Kamala Harris slept her way to the top, announced plans to start a prison ministry, and assures viewers that he’s not a racist for wearing a “Blacks for Trump” shirt because his last name is Black and “it’s an inside joke.” He concluded, “I guess that’s it. God bless America. I don’t know what’s happening next but God wins.”<sup>161</sup>



Other people at the Capitol were just as clear about their motivations. *The Atlantic* interviewed a man from Texas who said “that the country was coming apart and that this dissolution presaged the End Times.”<sup>162</sup> The man told *The Atlantic* editor Jeffrey Goldberg, “It’s all in the Bible ... Everything is predicted. Donald Trump is in the Bible. Get yourself ready.”

Goldberg, who was there and spoke to people in the crowd, explains, “The conflation of Trump and Jesus was a common theme at the rally. ‘Give it up if you believe in Jesus!’ a man yelled near me. People cheered. ‘Give it up if you believe in Donald Trump!’ Louder cheers.”<sup>163</sup>

Stephen Baker livestreamed his invasion of the Capitol, often addressing the audience. “We’re having fun, huh? Repent and believe in Jesus,” he told his viewers.<sup>164</sup> Baker mentioned and may be affiliated with the white nationalist group “Red Elephants,” and he regularly streams Christian content. By July 2021, he was openly defending Christian nationalism, and he wrote a piece titled “Why I’m A Christian Nationalist.”<sup>165</sup>

Joseph Padilla is seen on multiple videos, including police officer body camera video, attacking police lines and trying to breach the Capitol. He posted online about it, believing God was on his side: “I was right there. I have the wounds to prove it. I pushed the rails, I pushed the stairs, and then pushed the doorway. I was beaten unconscious twice, sprayed more times than I care to count, received strikes from batons that should have been lethal (Multiple temple and carotid strikes) except that God was on my side.”<sup>166</sup>

*Christian Chronicle* correspondent and minister Hamil Harris (mentioned earlier) interviewed some people outside the Capitol, and they regurgitated Christian nationalist talking points. “I feel like the Democrats are slapping our Creator in the face: God Almighty ... As a Christian I feel that I need to stand up for my political leaders that are fighting for us. That’s my right, that’s my freedom as a Christian. God calls us,” said Diane McMichael.<sup>167</sup> Her husband Bob added another perfect Christian nationalist encapsulation: “[W]e are certainly founded on, ‘under God,’ ‘one nation under God’ and certainly our roots were there and we’ve turned our back on it.”<sup>168</sup> Another interviewee lamented how the country seemed to be turning back on its godly roots, which is the core of the Christian nationalist narrative. She said, “I remember back in the day, I used to go to church school — I used to be released and be able to go to church school! I remember praying in school. I remember all of that. And when all that started to stop, I think our country just have been slowly, slowly turning away from that.”<sup>169</sup>

William McCall Calhoun Jr. is one of the attackers who kicked in House Speaker Nancy Pelosi’s door thinking the crowd would tear her “into little pieces.”<sup>170</sup> After Calhoun

was charged, his rantings were recounted at one of his hearings: “God is on Trump’s side. God is not on the Democrats’ side. And if patriots have to kill 60 million of these communists, it is God’s will. Think ethnic cleansing but it’s anti-communist cleansing.”<sup>171</sup>

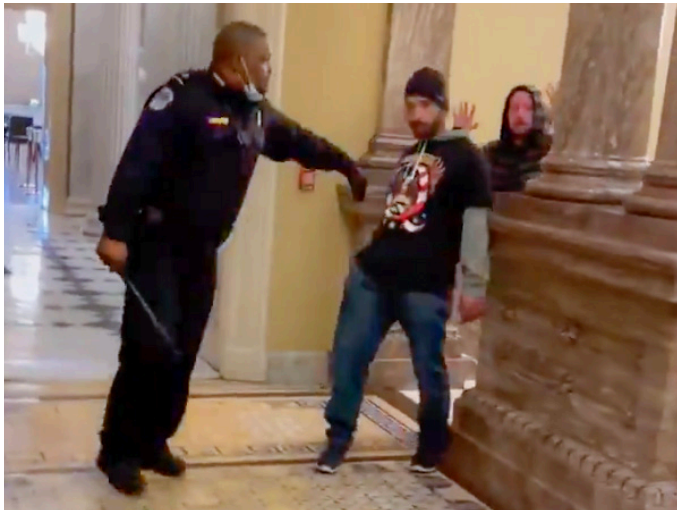
Luke Coffee’s father is a full-time minister who preaches in prisons.<sup>172</sup> Coffee himself is another attacker who admitted in a since-deleted Facebook video to fighting the police, recounting how he tried to break and push against the police line: “I pushed all against the line and was, like, trying to drive them back, and God gave me some supernatural energy.”<sup>173</sup> He added, “And I literally thought I was getting gassed to death like I was in Nazi Germany, a Jew getting gassed to death.” Body camera footage shows Coffee assaulting the police line with a metal crutch.<sup>174</sup> This was right at the moment when officer Michael Fanone of Washington, D.C.’s Metropolitan Police Department was pulled out of a police line and beaten by the mob. Despite ample evidence of his assault on officers, in another since-deleted video, nearly two hours long, Coffee claims: “I was asking people to pray. Because there was chaos. Satan uses chaos to manipulate and tell lies.”<sup>175</sup>

Even if they were not explicitly recounting the Christian nationalist motivations of the day, the link was so clear that other attackers, more serious in their desire to do violence, piggybacked on the ideologies of Christian nationalism. One of the attackers, a self-professed white supremacist who wanted to be a “lone wolf killer,” was on probation, but via text message on the evening of January 4, he convinced his parole officer to let him go to D.C. “to distribute Bibles with ... Gideon International,” which he had done before.<sup>176</sup> He invaded the Capitol wearing a Proud Boys T-shirt, pausing to flash the white power symbol and pose for photos with a Confederate flag.

Infamous photos show an insurrectionist in a black winter beanie and a black shirt with a large QAnon “Q” and eagle over a gray hoodie, advancing through the halls of



The infamous photo of Doug Jensen confronting police officers in the halls of the Capitol. Manuel Balce Ceneta / AP



Officer Goodman lures Jensen and others in the mob away from lawmakers. Igor Bobic / Twitter



Sparks wearing the “Armor of God” T-shirt in his mug shot and confronting officers in the Capitol. Oldham County Detention Center



Mike Sparks (center) and Jensen confront officers. Igor Bobic / Twitter



Sparks (left) with Kevin (center) and Hunter Seefried (right) confronting officers. Kevin Seefried is carrying the Confederate flag. Manuel Balce Ceneta / AP

the Capitol with his arms spread wide.<sup>177</sup> That was Doug Jensen.<sup>178</sup> Jensen was the leading insurrectionist that pursued Capitol Police Officer Eugene Goodman.

To be more accurate, Officer Goodman lured Jensen and the mob away from the Senate, running up stairs to draw the attackers away from members of Congress and into a hallway with police reinforcements. Jensen demanded the officers go and arrest Vice President Pence.<sup>179</sup> Much attention has been rightly paid to Goodman’s heroics and to QAnon’s role in motivating the attackers, as seen on Jensen’s shirt. But Christian nationalism motivated them, too.

Ten days earlier, on December 27, Jensen replied to a Donald Trump tweet that blamed the COVID-19 pandemic on China. Jensen wrote, “God Bless Americans and God Bless President Trump.”<sup>180</sup> The header photo on Jensen’s now-suspended account featured a religious grotto that included a cross, the Divine Mercy image, and a Mary statue holding baby Jesus in an alcove.<sup>181</sup> The grotto is the

Diocesan Shrine of Our Lady of Mount Carmel & Divine Mercy in Des Moines, and it appears to be a photo Jensen himself took and posted, not one pulled off the internet.<sup>182</sup>

The splinter mob Jensen led included Kevin and Hunter Seefried, the father and son duo who carried the Confederate flag, and Mike Sparks, a white Christian, who shouted at Goodman, a Black man, “This is our America!”<sup>183</sup>

Sparks posted on his Facebook page, “A new dawn is coming. Be ready. Just pray and trust in the Lord” and “TRUMP WILL BE YOUR PRESIDENT 4 more years in JESUS NAME.”<sup>184</sup> In his mug shot, Sparks is wearing a T-shirt with two crossed swords and a shield with a stylized cross, which reads, “Armor of God, Ephesians 6:11.”<sup>185</sup>

Another haunting image was the militarized man in black carrying a holstered weapon and zip-tie handcuffs — or “flex cuffs” — photographed as he vaulted railings in the Senate gallery.<sup>186</sup>





Eric Munchel vaulting rails in the gallery with zip ties.  
Win McNamee / Getty Images

Later identified as Eric Gavelek Munchel, he gave an impromptu interview at a hotel after the attack. He explained that he was “just a hidden patriot” and “I am very worried about our country — where it’s going politically, *religiously and, just, morally.*”<sup>187</sup> Munchel took video of the march to the Capitol, along the way passing one of the ubiquitous yellow “Jesus Saves” signs. As he saw it, he commented, “Jesus saves, and so do guns.”<sup>188</sup> At one point, a woman walking close to Munchel — perhaps his mother, Lisa Eisenhart — begins reading the signs out loud. The voice says, “Chinese American Republicans. God bless you people. God bless them.”<sup>189</sup>

In an interview with the British newspaper *The Sunday Times*, Munchel explained that he “wanted to show that we’re willing to rise up, band together and fight if necessary. Same as our forefathers, who established this country in 1776.”<sup>190</sup> He said the attack was “a kind of flexing of muscles” and that “[t]he point of getting inside the building is to show them that we can, and we will.”<sup>191</sup> The pretrial detention memo notes that “agents located approximately 15 firearms, including assault rifles, a sniper rifle with a tripod, other rifles, shotguns, and pistols, and hundreds of rounds of ammunition. Agents also located a drum-style magazine.”<sup>192</sup>

## Christian nationalism was the “driving force”

An NPR journalist who is an expert in American extremist groups was struck by the diversity of the extremism that day:

Am I going to see an Oath Keeper? OK, there’s an Oath Keeper. Am I going to see the Three Percent logo? Definitely saw some of them there. Qanon, huge presence at this one. I saw neo-Confederates in the crowd, all sorts of white supremacist and neo-Nazi insignia, too. And all of the strands of American extremism were there in the same crowd. And what’s wilder is that they were in the same crowd with, you know, a grandmother from Arizona, you know, who fervently believes in her heart that the election was stolen and that her vote didn’t matter.<sup>193</sup>

Yes, the groups were diverse. But it was the Christian nationalism that united them that day.

When writing this report and the epilogue of my book, I spoke with Luke Mogelson, the *New Yorker* journalist who filmed the shocking video of the attack from inside the Capitol. “The Christianity was one of the surprises to me in covering this stuff, and it has been hugely underestimated,” he said. “That Christian nationalism you talk about is the driving force and also the unifying force of these disparate players. It’s really Christianity that ties it all together.”

## Section VII

# CHRISTIAN RESPONSES TO CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM AFTER JANUARY 6

Amanda Tyler

**Amanda Tyler is the executive director of BJC (Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty) and the leader of the Christians Against Christian Nationalism initiative.**

January 6 revealed on a national stage just how dire the threat of Christian nationalism is to our constitutional republic. As I wrote<sup>1</sup> in the aftermath of that day, my horror about the violent attack only increased when I saw photos of the rioters holding up signs like “Jesus Saves” and heard reports that the first invaders to enter the Senate chamber carried a Christian flag. As a Christian, seeing signs of my faith on display during such a violent event filled me with anger and frustration. It was a display of textbook Christian nationalism, an ideology that merges American and Christian symbols, narratives and identities. As shown in section one of this report, white Christian nationalism and Christianity are not one in the same. The rioters, who can accurately be labeled as radical Christian terrorists, used Christianity as a kind of mascot, trying to lend credibility and social acceptability to their terrorism. In the process, they sullied Christianity and Jesus in the hearts and minds of people all over the world.

Dismantling Christian nationalism will take a broad, diverse coalition of Americans working together to understand the ideology and call it out.

Necessary — though not alone sufficient — to that coalition will be a strong response from American Christians, particularly white American Christians and predominantly white Christian institutions, which have contributed to and benefitted from Christian nationalism in the culture. To be sure, some Christians have been sounding the alarm about Christian nationalism long before the January 6 attack. Dr. Anthea Butler and Dr. Jemar Tisby, both contributors to this report, are two prominent Black scholars who have written extensively about Christian nationalism and its problems for Christianity. Individuals and groups who have been marginalized and oppressed because of race and religion — those most directly impacted by white Christian nationalism — have been warning for years about the dangers and deadly potential that the ideology has.

Interfaith coalitions, as well as coalitions between secular and religious groups, are effective in fighting against Christian nationalism as well. This report, which is a joint project of the Freedom From Religion Foundation and BJC, is an example of such an effort. There are also times



when Christians must lead efforts that call out Christian nationalism in a self-critical way. When working to create a coalition back in 2019 to talk about the dangers of Christian nationalism, our non-Christian friends urged BJC and other Christian groups to make the effort ecumenical, but not interfaith. They explained that while they agreed that calling attention to the dangers of Christian nationalism was an urgent priority, they are often targeted and attacked when they take stances against the majority religion, even in the United States.

This section recounts responses from some prominent Christian leaders and groups in the aftermath of the January 6 attack, suggesting a new interest within the Christian community in naming and combatting Christian nationalism.

While the attack unfolded, prominent Christian leaders condemned the violence and called on President Donald Trump to intervene, though their immediate comments for the most part did not name Christian nationalism as a contributing or driving factor. Here is a small sampling of those statements, as reported on January 6, 2021, by reporters from Religion News Service:<sup>2</sup>

“Peaceable transitions of power have marked our Republic since the beginning. It is part of honoring and submitting to God’s ordained leaders whether they were our choice or not. We need you, @POTUS to condemn this mob. Let’s move forward together. Praying for safety.”  
Southern Baptist Convention President J.D. Greear, via Twitter

“This mob attack on our Capitol and our Constitution is immoral, unjust, dangerous, and inexcusable. What has happened to our country is tragic, and could have been avoided. ... President @realDonaldTrump, you have a moral responsibility to call on these mobs to stop this dangerous and anti-constitutional anarchy. Please do so.”  
Southern Baptist ethicist Russell Moore, via Twitter

“Armed breaching of capitol security behind a confederate flag is anarchy, unAmerican, criminal treason and domestic terrorism. President Trump must clearly tell his supporters ‘We lost. Go home now.’”  
California megachurch pastor Rick Warren, via Twitter

Other leaders noted the Christian imagery and language, and they lamented seeing that during the insurrection:

“I don’t know the Jesus some have paraded and waved around in the middle of this treachery today. They may be acting in the name of some other Jesus but that’s not Jesus of the Gospels.”  
Bible teacher Beth Moore, via Twitter<sup>3</sup>

“The rioters who climbed the steps and walls of the Capitol sought to overturn the law, a fair election, and justice, and claimed their motivation was to defend God and their freedoms. They waved banners emblazoned with the words, ‘Jesus Saves,’ but this is not what Emmanuel came to earth to embody. This is a perversion of the Gospel. This should drive all of us to our knees.”

United Methodist Bishop LeTrelle Easterling, leader of the Baltimore-Washington Conference<sup>4</sup>

“The National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) denounces the violence at the U.S. Capitol as well as the nation’s longstanding vices that led to this chaos. Followers of Jesus are peacemakers. Some images from the protests demonstrate a disturbing conflation of Christianity and a nationalist ideology that is far from the way of Jesus.”<sup>5</sup>

Some leaders were quick to identify Christian nationalism with the attack:

“The violence and sedition unfolding at the Capitol today — both inside and outside the building — are an unprecedented, anti-American, and anti-Christian attack on our democracy and on our people, one fueled by white supremacy, Christian nationalism, and the actions of self-serving Republican politicians.”  
Rev. Nathan Empsall, campaigns director, Faithful America<sup>6</sup>

“This seditious mob was motivated not just by loyalty to Trump, but by an unholy amalgamation of white supremacy and Christianity that has plagued our nation since its inception and is still with us today. As I show in my book ‘White Too Long: The Legacy of White Supremacy in American Christianity,’ there remains a disturbingly strong link between holding racist attitudes and identifying as a white Christian.”  
Robert P. Jones, CEO and founder of PRRI<sup>7</sup>

The evangelical magazine *RELEVANT* also collected immediate statements from religious leaders. Introducing those quotes, the editorial team wrote:

Christian leaders from across the political and ideological spectrum weighed in with their thoughts, which were unusually relevant to the situation. The people who stormed the Capitol building did so with “JESUS 2020” signs, “In God We Trust” banners and one enormous cross. It was a Christian Nationalist endeavor from bottom to top, a violent mob adorned in a pop Christian aesthetic. Christians have a responsibility to speak up against a violent movement LARPing as the Church, and some Christian leaders are doing just that.<sup>8</sup>

While we saw many condemn the attack, a small but vocal group of religious leaders continued to perpetuate lies

about who was responsible for the violence at the Capitol. The Rev. Franklin Graham, a prominent evangelical leader, and the Rev. Robert Jeffress, senior pastor of First Baptist Dallas, both referenced Antifa in public statements following the attack.<sup>9</sup> Eric Metaxas did the same, saying on Twitter, “There is no doubt the election was fraudulent. That is the same today as yesterday. There is no doubt Antifa infiltrated the protesters today and planned this. This is political theater and anyone who buys it is a sucker. Fight for justice and Pray for justice. God bless America!”<sup>10</sup>

One example of an organized response to Christian nationalism that predates January 6 is the Christians Against Christian Nationalism initiative at [ChristiansAgainstChristianNationalism.org](http://ChristiansAgainstChristianNationalism.org). Launched in 2019 by BJC and endorsed by an ecumenical group of Christian leaders, Christians Against Christian Nationalism is a grassroots collective of individuals who self-identify as Christians and are taking a public stand against Christian nationalism. As of the publication of this report, more than 24,000 individuals across the country from more than six dozen different denominations have signed the online statement that includes this description:

As Christians, our faith teaches us everyone is created in God’s image and commands us to love one another. As Americans, we value our system of government and the good that can be accomplished in our constitutional democracy. Today, we are concerned about a persistent threat to both our religious communities and our democracy — Christian nationalism.

Christian nationalism seeks to merge Christian and American identities, distorting both the Christian faith and America’s constitutional democracy. Christian nationalism demands Christianity be privileged by the State and implies that to be a good American, one must be Christian. It often overlaps with and provides cover for white supremacy and racial subjugation. We reject this damaging political ideology and invite our Christian brothers and sisters to join us in opposing this threat to our faith and to our nation.<sup>11</sup>

After the January 6 insurrection, Christians Against Christian Nationalism organized an event with Christian leaders and researchers to talk about what happened and what we can do in an event titled “Democracy and Faith Under Siege: Responding to Christian Nationalism.” I moderated the program as we heard from The Most Rev. Michael Curry, Presiding Bishop of The Episcopal Church; The Rev. Elizabeth A. Eaton, Presiding Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America; and Dr. Andrew L. Whitehead, Associate Professor of Sociology at IUPUI (who is also a contributor to this report).<sup>12</sup>

At the event, Bishop Curry noted how Christian nationalism departs from the core teachings of Jesus, which are “moved aside and suppressed for a broad, ambiguous Christ figure who can be adapted to any cultural context.”<sup>13</sup> Curry went on to caution, “Christ is Lord, not Caesar. When Christ is compromised, it’s, ‘Danger, Will Robinson.’”<sup>14</sup>

Bishop Eaton distinguished allegiance Christians hold to God and to government. “Christian nationalism is different from being a patriot. God knows I love my country. But my primary allegiance as a Christian isn’t to my country, but to God.”<sup>15</sup>

Christians Against Christian Nationalism continued to produce resources in 2021 for congregations and individuals interested in interrogating Christian nationalism. In July 2021, the group released a free three-lesson curriculum based on the Democracy and Faith Under Siege webinar.<sup>16</sup> Christians Against Christian Nationalism also held a webinar in 2021 titled “White Christian Nationalism: How Racism Undergirds Christian Nationalism,” featuring Dr. Tisby and Dr. Robert P. Jones, and the group released an accompanying discussion guide for small groups and personal reflection.

Evangelical Christians, as a discrete group, also rebuked Christian nationalism in the wake of January 6. In February 2021, around the important Christian holiday of repentance known as Ash Wednesday, more than 100 evangelical leaders released an open letter, declaring in part:

As leaders in the broad evangelical community, we recognize and condemn the role Christian Nationalism played in the violent, racist, anti-American insurrection at the United States Capitol on January 6. We recognize the damage done by radicalized Christian Nationalism in the world, the church, and in the lives of individuals and communities.<sup>17</sup>

Signers of the letter also lamented the absence of some prominent evangelicals from their coalition. Mae Elise Cannon, executive director of the ecumenical group Churches for Middle East Peace, made the discrepancy clear. “White evangelical brothers and sisters, where are you?” Cannon asked. “There’s a few of us on this call today, but let me tell you how many people said ‘no.’”<sup>18</sup>

Christianity does not and cannot unite Americans under a national identity. Our country is marked by robust religious pluralism, allowing many faiths to flourish and ensuring people of no faith have equal rights. A renewed commitment to the values of religious freedom for all — not just support for a majority religious identity — can bring together all Americans, regardless of religious

beliefs. The Christians Against Christian Nationalism statement lists these values as unifying principles:

- People of all faiths and none have the right and responsibility to engage constructively in the public square.
- Patriotism does not require us to minimize our religious convictions.
- One’s religious affiliation, or lack thereof, should be irrelevant to one’s standing in the civic community.
- Government should not prefer one religion over another or religion over nonreligion.
- Religious instruction is best left to our houses of worship, other religious institutions and families.
- America’s historic commitment to religious pluralism enables faith communities to live in civic harmony with one another without sacrificing our theological convictions.
- Conflating religious authority with political authority is idolatrous and often leads to oppression of minority and other marginalized groups as well as the spiritual impoverishment of religion.
- We must stand up to and speak out against Christian nationalism, especially when it inspires acts of violence and intimidation—including vandalism,

bomb threats, arson, hate crimes, and attacks on houses of worship—against religious communities at home and abroad.

Christian nationalism, which promotes a privileged place for Christianity in American life and government, is antithetical to these values. Identifying, promoting, and recommitting ourselves to these values will help promote equality for all Americans, without regard to religious identity.

The Christian response to Christian nationalism must not only be widespread to be effective; it also must be prolonged. The ideology of Christian nationalism, which has become deeply entrenched in American society over centuries, will take generations to dismantle.

In the year since the attack on the Capitol, many Christians — both clergy and laity — have approached and interrogated the topic of Christian nationalism for the first time. These are important first steps in a long effort to disentangle the identities of “American” and “Christian” as synonymous in a cultural framework. While involvement and interest from prominent Christian leaders is certainly helpful, individual Christians must also take personal responsibility to learn about Christian nationalism and recognize how it shows up in their faith communities and theologies.

# CONTRIBUTORS

Led by Andrew Seidel and Amanda Tyler, this report brought together scholars, experts, researchers, and leaders who study Christian nationalism through a variety of frameworks. The report also benefited from conversations with and insight from many other individuals who are active participants in researching, studying, and speaking out about Christian nationalism.



## Andrew L. Seidel

Andrew L. Seidel is a constitutional attorney and the Director of Strategic Response at the Freedom From Religion Foundation. His first book, *The Founding Myth: Why Christian Nationalism Is Un-American*, was burned by Pastor Greg Locke, who appears in the pages of this report. His second book, *American Crusade: How the Supreme Court is Weaponizing Religious Freedom*, is due out this year. Seidel has won numerous academic awards and holds two law degrees: a J.D. *magna cum laude* from Tulane University Law School and an L.L.M. from Denver University's Sturm College of Law. Andrew has a B.S. in neuroscience and environmental studies from Tulane. Dedicating his life and law degree to keeping state and church separate, he has appeared on Fox News to debate Bill O'Reilly, MSNBC, and hundreds of other media outlets. Follow him on Twitter: @AndrewLSeidel.



## Amanda Tyler

Amanda Tyler is executive director of BJC (Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty). She leads the organization as it upholds the historic Baptist principle of religious liberty, defending the free exercise of religion and protecting against its establishment by government. She also leads the Christians Against Christian Nationalism initiative, bringing tens of thousands of Christians together to stand in opposition to the dangers the ideology poses to the faith and to the country. Tyler co-hosts the [Respecting Religion podcast](#), and she serves on the board of the [Center for Faith, Justice, and Reconciliation](#). A member of the Texas and U.S. Supreme Court Bar, Tyler has experience working in Congress, in a private legal practice and serving as a law clerk for a federal judge. She graduated from the Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service at Georgetown University with a bachelor's degree in foreign service, *magna cum laude*, and earned her J.D. *with honors* at The University of Texas School of Law. Follow her on Twitter: @AmandaTylerBJC.





## Samuel L. Perry

Samuel L. Perry is an Associate Professor of Sociology and Religious Studies at the University of Oklahoma. He received his Ph.D. in Sociology from the University of Chicago. He is among the nation’s leading experts on conservative Christianity and American politics, race, and sexuality. An award-winning scholar and teacher, Dr. Perry is the author of more than 100 peer-reviewed articles and four books, including the award-winning *Taking America Back for God: Christian Nationalism in the United States* (with Andrew Whitehead) and the forthcoming book, *The Flag and the Cross: White Christian Nationalism and the Threat to American Democracy* (with Philip Gorski). His public writing has appeared in *TIME* magazine, NBC News, *The Washington Post*, and *Religion News Service*. His research has been featured in outlets like *The New York Times*, *The New Yorker*, *FiveThirtyEight*, *The Economist*, and *The Times of London*. Follow him on Twitter: @socofothesacred.



## Katherine Stewart

Katherine Stewart is an author and investigative journalist. Her latest book, *The Power Worshipers: Inside the Dangerous Rise of Religious Nationalism*, won first place in the Religion News Association’s Excellence in Nonfiction Books category. *The Power Worshipers* was also awarded a Morris D. Forkosch Award for Best Book in Humanism. In 2012, Stewart published *The Good News Club*, a book about the religious right’s efforts to infiltrate and undermine public education. She has authored articles in *The New York Times*, *New York Review of Books*, *The Washington Post*, *The New Republic*, the *ABA Journal* (a publication of the American Bar Association), the *Daily Beast*, *The Atlantic*, *Religion Dispatches*, History News Network, NBC, and others. Her research interests are in the areas of American politics, the Supreme Court, the U.S Congress, public education, policy, and religion. Follow her on Twitter: @kathsstewart



## Jemar Tisby

Dr. Jemar Tisby is a *New York Times* bestselling author, national speaker, and public historian on a mission to deliver truths from the Black experience with depth and clarity. He is president of The Witness, a Black Christian collective that engages issues of religion, race, justice and culture from a biblical perspective. He also co-hosts the Pass the Mic podcast and is the author of *How to Fight Racism* and *The Color of Compromise: The Truth about the American Church’s Complicity in Racism*. His latest book is *How to Fight Racism: Young Reader’s Edition*. Follow him on Twitter: @JemarTisby.



## Andrew L. Whitehead

Andrew L. Whitehead is Associate Professor of Sociology and Director of the Association of Religion Data Archives (theARDA.com) at the Center for the Study of Religion and American Culture at IUPUI. Whitehead’s research focuses on religion, politics, and power in contemporary American culture. He is the co-author of *Taking America Back for God: Christian Nationalism in the United States* (Oxford University Press, 2020) — along with Samuel Perry — which won the 2021 Distinguished Book Award from the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion. He is the author of more than 45 peer-reviewed journal articles. In 2019, his co-authored article “Make America Christian Again: Christian Nationalism and Voting for Donald Trump in the 2016 Presidential Election” (*Sociology of Religion*, 2018) won the Distinguished Article Award for both the Association for the Sociology of Religion and the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion. Whitehead’s research has been featured across several national outlets including *The New York Times*, *NPR*, *The New Yorker*, and *The Washington Post*, and he has also written for *The Washington Post*, *TIME* magazine, and NBC News. Follow him on Twitter: @andrewwhitehead.

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# ENDNOTES

## Section I

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As Weaver gives the interview, Ali Alexander, the Stop the Steal organizer, walks through the background at 3:40 after delivering his speech from the stage. See also Kristin Kobes Du Mez, *Jesus and John Wayne: How White Evangelicals Corrupted a Faith and Fractured a Nation*. New York: Liveright, 2020.

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36. For instance, on January 10, Brandon Burden preached "Take down the walls of Jericho. The Lord says your Jericho is Washington, D.C. That's your fortified city," at the KingdomLife Church in Frisco, Texas. The church's "Our Mission" page read, "We Are An Army. Second, we are the army of God. As an army, we are committed to training and equipping the generations for their life assignments." <https://archive.is/RRCfK>. Burden is a former city council candidate and the lead pastor at the KingdomLife Church. In this same sermon he preached violence. "We are locked and loaded at the Burden house," he told parishioners, and he then explained the "castle doctrine" and the legalities of shooting people. He said that God had issued an "executive order" to keep Trump in office for eight years, he spoke in tongues, and a woman waved an American flag in front of the altar. See Brandi Addison, *Frisco pastor urges followers to keep guns loaded, stock up on food and water before Biden inauguration*, The Dallas Morning News, Jan. 13, 2021, [www.dallasnews.com/news/politics/2021/01/14/frisco-pastor-urges-followers-to-help-trump-stay-in-office-and-keep-guns-loaded-before-biden-inauguration/?outputType=amp&\\_\\_twitter\\_impression=true](http://www.dallasnews.com/news/politics/2021/01/14/frisco-pastor-urges-followers-to-help-trump-stay-in-office-and-keep-guns-loaded-before-biden-inauguration/?outputType=amp&__twitter_impression=true);

Mike Stunson, *Pastor tells his Texas congregants to keep weapons loaded for Biden's inauguration*, Jan. 14, 2021, [www.miamiherald.com/news/nation-world/national/article248502740.html](http://www.miamiherald.com/news/nation-world/national/article248502740.html).

Snopes.com fact-checked the sermon:

[www.snopes.com/fact-check/texas-pastor-weapons-loaded/](http://www.snopes.com/fact-check/texas-pastor-weapons-loaded/).

A few weeks later, on February 24, the church hosted an event called "How the 2020 Election Was Stolen" that featured guest speaker Paul Davis, who broadcast Instagram videos from the Capitol on January 6 in which he said, "We're all trying to get into the Capitol to stop this." See Dana Branham, *North Texas lawyer unemployed after sharing video saying he was tear-gassed outside U.S. Capitol*, Jan. 7, 2021, [www.dallasnews.com/news/politics/2021/01/07/north-texas-lawyer-unemployed-after-sharing-video-saying-he-was-tear-gassed-outside-the-us-capitol/](http://www.dallasnews.com/news/politics/2021/01/07/north-texas-lawyer-unemployed-after-sharing-video-saying-he-was-tear-gassed-outside-the-us-capitol/).

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Davis, a lawyer, has the Christian nationalist war cry “In God We Trust” over an American flag plastered all over his social media, which also often features Bible verses. See also Paul M. Davis (@fireduptxlawyer), Twitter, <https://web.archive.org/web/20210805205918/twitter.com/fireduptxlawyer?s=09>;

<https://web.archive.org/web/20211229160255/twitter.com/fireduptxlawyer/status/1356282693584084994>.

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43. Rod Dreher, *What I Saw At The Jericho March*, The American Conservative, Dec. 12, 2020, [www.theamericanconservative.com/dreher/what-i-saw-at-the-jericho-march/](http://www.theamericanconservative.com/dreher/what-i-saw-at-the-jericho-march/). Video available at Crossroads with Joshua Philipp, *LIVE from Rallies for Trump/Jericho March in Washington DC (Dec 12)*, YouTube, Dec. 12, 2020, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=vwmz9ipLO7I](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vwmz9ipLO7I).

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## Section VI

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- Seven seconds into this video of marchers heading to the Capitol: [https://d2amdhhgrspxsl.cloudfront.net/s3vids/nsGY09hlePeh\\_converted.mp4](https://d2amdhhgrspxsl.cloudfront.net/s3vids/nsGY09hlePeh_converted.mp4);
- In this video of an Epoch Times interview, it's draped over a red pickup truck: [https://d2amdhhgrspxsl.cloudfront.net/s3vids/fgmY19BqZlj8\\_converted.mp4](https://d2amdhhgrspxsl.cloudfront.net/s3vids/fgmY19BqZlj8_converted.mp4) (you can actually see three separate Christian flags in this one video and other flags with Christian imagery and verbiage, such as "Jesus is my Savior, Trump is my President");

There are two Christian flags in this video: <http://d2amdhggrspxsl.cloudfront.net/s3vids/BKSLTTzLtOu2.converted.mp4>;

Here's another: [www.shutterstock.com/editorial/image-editorial/us-president-trump-supporters-storm-the-capitol-in-nyc-usa-6-jan-2021-11697298al](http://www.shutterstock.com/editorial/image-editorial/us-president-trump-supporters-storm-the-capitol-in-nyc-usa-6-jan-2021-11697298al).

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At the November 14 rally at the Supreme Court, a nearly identical flag read, "JESUS IS LORD." <https://d2amdhggrspxsl.cloudfront.net/s3vids/RizVuHc6OOEX.converted.mp4> at 0:36.

A handwritten sign at that rally also proclaimed "Jesus is King, Trump is president." at 0:25 <https://d2amdhggrspxsl.cloudfront.net/s3vids/yS8nnxnXxf74.converted.mp4>.

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62. The sign accompanying the Christian flag purports to quote Benjamin Franklin, but actually quotes a Facebook post and YouTube video posted one week earlier by Dutch Sheets, a preacher from South Carolina who had been hosting daily prayers on YouTube asking God to intercede and make Trump president again. Dutch Sheets, *The Eagles are Rising I Give Him 15: Daily Prayer with Dutch Day 54*, YouTube, Dec. 30, 2020, <https://youtu.be/pLfeJb7RqUY?t=600>.

Sheets's December 30, 2020, Facebook post is long. He recounts a six-scene dream given to Dan Lynch, a preacher out of Pensacola. After hearing this dream, Sheets prayed specific prayers at several key locations in Washington, D.C., as he believed the dream commanded. The dream involved a flock of eagles at various monuments, including the Washington Monument, Jefferson Memorial, Lincoln Memorial, and Trump Hotel. Of course, Trump was in the dream as well, "holding a Benelli Super Black Eagle shotgun and reloading it with shells" with dead ducks all around him. Outside the Trump Hotel, a statue of Ben Franklin comes to life, "angry and teary-eyed with rage" and condemns mail-in voting with a cryptic comment:

Then, he repeated his famous phrase, "We have a Republic, if we can keep it." He reached out to shake my hand and looked me in the eye as if to say, "Let's make sure we keep it."

Sheets interprets "Franklin's ... oft-repeated quote regarding the republic" as "an admonition and warning to the *ekklesia* to keep fighting." Sheets offers several definitions of *ekklesia* but here means American Christians, and Sheets specifies the fight as "spiritual warfare." The YouTube video has been viewed nearly a quarter of a million times. The reach of the video and certainly the message is considerably broader. For instance, Riverside Full Gospel Church in Lucedale, Mississippi, played the message during its service. See Riverside Full Gospel, Facebook (Live Stream) at 1:04:15, Dec. 31, 2020, [www.facebook.com/watch/live/?v=3646922922021401&ref=watch\\_permalink](http://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?v=3646922922021401&ref=watch_permalink).

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ask for that, Lord ... We thank you for the wonderful nation we've all been blessed to be in and the value systems we've all gotten to experience in our lives. Lord, we pray you continue to uphold and restore these and pray that you provide all of us courage and strength to both represent you and represent our culture well. In His name, Amen!"

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