

## 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>

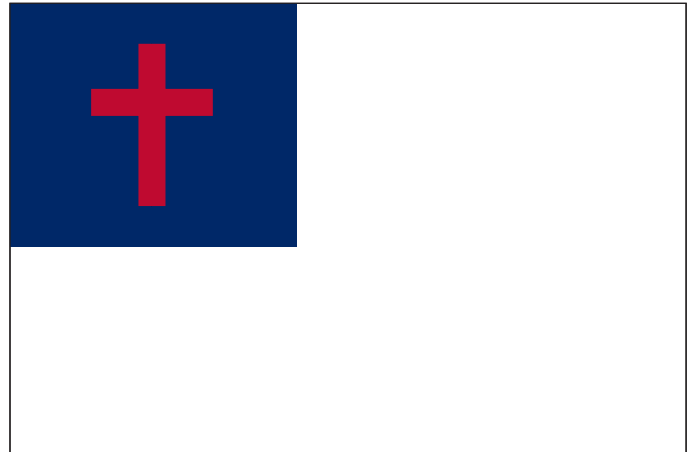
Kevin Seefried carried the flag of white supremacy and traitors into the Capitol that day, but he did more. According to the FBI, Seefried and his son, Hunter, listened to Trump’s speech, marched to the Capitol and watched as lumber 2x4s and riot shields were used to break windows.<sup>55</sup> They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

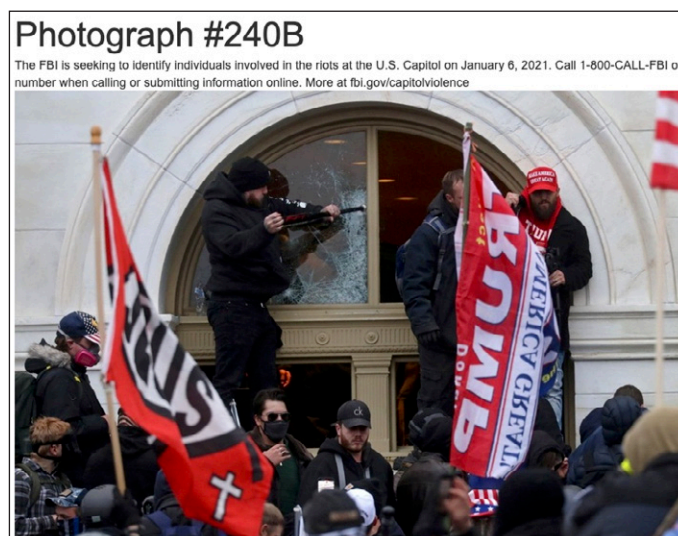
fond of this flag and its message.<sup>70</sup> Rapert posed with that same flag in front of the U.S. Supreme Court on a previous trip to D.C. and regularly has people hold it on stage when he preaches.<sup>71</sup>

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://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>

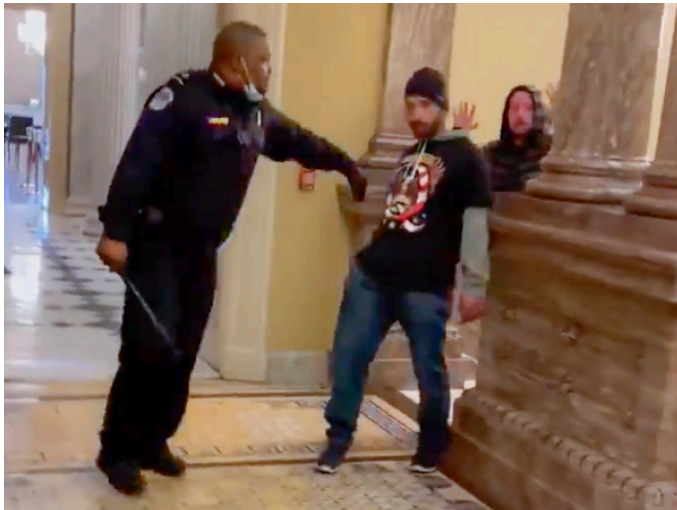
Luke Coffee’s father is a full-time minister who preaches in prisons.<sup>172</sup> Coffee himself is another attacker who admitted in a since-deleted Facebook video to fighting the police, recounting how he tried to break and push against the police line: “I pushed all against the line and was, like, 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.”