On Friday, August 12, 2022, within my diocese in Rochester, NY, the *ReAwaken America Tour* came to town. Like a parody of the Methodist camp meetings, there were baptisms - except these rituals were inspired by hate. None of Francis Asbury's lineage showed up to preach the gospel this time. In his place were Trump allies Roger Stone, Michael Flynn, (Pillow Man) Mike Lindell, Eric Trump, and an anti-Roman Catholic pastor from Tennessee named Greg Locke. The entrance price was $**250**. After baptisms in red-white-and-blue and calls to holy war against the enemies of God, the pastor closed the meeting with a prayer:
"Father God, we're asking you to open the eyes of President Trump's understanding that … he will know how to implement divine intervention, that you will surround him with none of this Deep State trash, none of this RINO trash … in the name of Jesus."
[1]

On August 28, 2022, the senior pastor of the 80,000-member Second Baptist Church of Houston, Ed Young, proclaimed a cynical sermon. He cherry-picked passages from the book of Revelation to inspire Christians to *jihad*, holy war, against the enemy destroying America by allowing lawlessness, sexual immorality, and ungodly ways of being, and he called his congregation to use their power to destroy that enemy and take back America. He characterized it as a war against "woke-ness." In naming the enemy, he described as traitors those who cooperate with efforts to secure civil rights for

those who don’t already have them.
[2]

Pastor Young's autumn sermon series exemplifies the American form of White Christian Nationalism. He began with a classic dog whistle, calling for an aggressive campaign to incarcerate violent criminals. Next, he trumpeted White Supremacy under the guise of a critique of critical race theory. Third, he described policies aimed at greater civic inclusion of transgender persons as Satan's attack on the family. Fourth, he railed against efforts to address growing inequities in our country's wealth and power distribution as evil Marxism that threatens to destroy American democracy. Finally, he reached new depths of woefulness in lamenting how the 'Deep State' now holds Americans in Orwellian bondage, stealing the fundamental freedoms for which sainted martyrs died in earlier generations' battles against communism and socialism.
[3]

On October 30, 2022, Texas megachurch pastor Robert Jeffress, famous for his pageantries that fuse patriotism and Christian devotion, declared himself a White Christian Nationalist. It's time for Christians to "impose their values" on the nation to "return our country to its Christian foundation."
[4]

These three examples highlight critical characteristics of White Christian Nationalism. There is the conflation of the divine with the American nation-state, the identification of the nation with those who honor Anglo-Protestant cultural normativity, the fusion of religious and civic zeal and ritual, the rehearsal of a Lost Cause narrative, a litany of transgressions by others who lead America astray, and the sacred call to participate in the blood of Jesus through metaphorical and literal religious warfare.
This rhetoric is a staple of the nationalist playbook used throughout the world. Those who cling to dominant power dress up as saviors - the righteous defenders of the constitutions they subvert. They paint themselves as victims. Through *apocalyptic* rhetoric, they sow chaos and inspire violence from the followers they seduce. Then they use the disorder they sow to justify their return to power with cynical rhetoric about law and order. Inexorably, the weary populace voluntarily empowers the tyrant, enabling him to disassemble liberal democracy plank by plank. In recent decades, we've seen this nationalist playbook executed in Serbia, Croatia, Hungary, Myanmar, India, Syria, and Russia. It's the template for how minorities cling to dominant power.
[5]

White Christian Nationalist preachers play essential roles in

executing the nationalist playbook. They don't emphasize either the Way of Love or the Jesus Movement. Instead, they preach the myth of a Lost Cause that America was once great and would be great again if only good Anglo-Protestants take back - with *jihad* if necessary - that which was stolen and turned America into a Christian state once and for all.

Given the imagery and tensions we've felt since the January 6 rioting at our national capitol, this rhetoric no longer shocks. There's just sadness and determination to meet the challenge the rhetoric presents. Yet it is always tragic and ironic to see Americans baptized while dressed in Stars and Stripes and called to restore liberty by violence if necessary. Our baptism vows call us to "respect the dignity of every human being." All political liberty begins with believing in all humans' inherent worth and dignity. The logic by which any ideology justifies an assault on our liberal institutions leads invariably to the denial of this fundamental baptismal claim as it asserts that some persons are inherently worthier of ruling others.

In contrast, the logic that embraces Christian baptismal vows ultimately affirms some form of ordered liberty for all persons. White Christian Nationalism is called by Presiding Bishop Michael Curry the greatest threat to American democracy of our era.

[6] Indeed, it is the greatest threat to American democracy ever made in the name of the Church. Therefore, as the Apostle Paul encouraged, "Sleepers awake!" (Eph 5:14). This is a time for us to be "strengthened by the Lord and his powerful strength" (Eph 6:10) in opposing the evil White Christian Nationalism generates.

The first step is to recognize and understand it. As we shall see, there are many American nationalisms and multiple species of American Christian nationalism. American White Christian Nationalism is not as easy to identify and isolate as some pundits suggest. Cancel culture cannot cure it. We must deconstruct it to understand why its stories are so compelling to millions of Americans. We will defeat it only by inspiring Americans to imagine and embrace a better story. That's the aim of this series.

This glossary is part of my series, Deconstructing Christian Nationalisms: Imagining a Better Story.

Americans must resist Christian Nationalisms. To resist effectively, we must understand Christian Nationalisms thoroughly. But it's easy to talk past each other because crucial terms have a spectrum of connotations in our discourse. I begin by suggesting the following terminology which I will use throughout this series.

Culture

Culture consists of the descriptions of reality accepted as given by a people, their consequent behavioral norms, values, and ethical commitments, as well as the symbols and practices that signify and perform these things. It's essential to recognize that these descriptions of reality include givens concerning political and economic orderings, but also much more than that. Culture includes normative descriptions of

life and death, anthropology, creaturely relations (including familial orderings), humor, courage, health, nutrition, respect, honor, friendship, and many other concerns. Culture includes both religious and ideological components but is neither exhausted by nor subsumes them.
[1]

Ethno-Tradition

Christian Nationalism seeks to unify people around their shared commitment to what Eric Kaufmann calls their ethno-tradition.

[2] While Kaufmann doesn't define it, Alisdair MacIntyre helps us to see that an ethno-tradition is the tradition of an ethnic group; hence it is that group's *shared practices that are the context within which all reasoning and innovation take place, a context "constituted by a continuous argument" concerning how human communities flourish*.[3] It's similar to what Aristotle called *doxa* and what Richard Hooker denoted when he spoke of the dialectally-discerned localized account of natural law as 'tradition." It's the community's local tradition. For example, White Christian Nationalism (see below) has distinctive religious beliefs and ideology are components of an ethno-tradition that defines for White Christian Nationalists what it means to be an American.

Ideology

Ideology denotes a web of normative conceptions about how we order society and politics. Examples of ideologies include communism, fascism, classic liberalism, socialism, and civic republicanism.

[4] As we seek to understand Christian Nationalism, we must recognize that elements of ideology are acultural - that ideas are somewhat independent of culture. For example, civic republicanism is an idea we discover in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* and has meaning in many distinctive

Western and Asian cultures. This insight will become important when we consider the White Christian Nationalist claim that American democracy depends on the normativity of Anglo-Protestant culture in American life.

Religion

> In our Western context, religion names a structure of valuation, beliefs, and practices "predicated on the absolute value of God and the relative value of creatures, an infinite relationship of exchange between the one and the many."

[5] Religion, as such, has to do with the relationship between creatures and our Creator. Defining religion in terms of this vertical focus on the relationship between the divine and creatures is vital because Christian nationalism fuses the vertical with the horizontal, religion with ideology.[6] In describing Calvinism, Charles Taylor notes that "the good order of civility, and the good order of piety, didn't remain in separate uncommunicating compartments. They to some extent merged and inflected each other."[7] A key question in our exploration of Christian Nationalism is the extent to which its vertical element is consistent with biblical accounts of the exchange relationships between God and creatures and the relative value of all creatures before God.

Nationalism

> Nationalism denotes a set of beliefs about how we order society. It is an **ideology** found in most large nation-states; it flourishes when nation-states experience significant demographic change or threats from beyond their borders. We shall see that nationalism is a hotly contested term, with some defining it narrowly and negatively and others defining broadly and neutrally or positively. Later on I will define it as a created good that is more commonly found in distorted forms. Generally, however, I will adopt Paul Miller's

definition of nationalism as a set of beliefs, including "that humanity is divisible into mutually distinct, internally coherent cultural units defined by shared traits like ethnicity, language, religion, or culture; that these groups should each have their own governments; that one of the purposes of government is to promote and protect a nation's cultural identity; and that sovereign nations with strong cultures provide meaning and purpose for human beings."

[8] Nations, tribes, and peoples are synonyms denoting these cultural units.

American White Christian Nationalism

American White Christian Nationalism is a unique cultural framework that justifies a nationalist ideology with a Christian claim to divine sanction and conceives its national membership based on boundaries of a White Anglo-Protestant ethnoreligious identity, American nativity,

[9] and subscription to Jacksonian religio-populist ideals, values, and myths.[10] It is neither merely a species of evangelical Christianity nor repackaged White Supremacy.[11] Instead, it is a multi-racial ethno-tradition that conflates Christian and national identity and generates values and consequent ethics, including claims about what behaviors and policies are American, who counts as an American, and who has the power to decide.[12] Moreover, American White Christian Nationalists contend that local, state, and federal governments must sustain and defend the primacy of their cultural identity (understood not in racial but ethnotradition terms) to honor our American heritage, protect our democracy, and ensure God continues to bless the United States.[13]

To understand Christian Nationalisms, we must ask whom Christian Nationalist groups see as the bearer of the

existential threats they resist. That question will, in turn, require that we attend to their critiques of secular humanism, which, in the West, predominantly manifests as a competing *post-Christian nationalism*.
14

White Christian Nationalism and post-Christian nationalism are ideologies in tension with a Christocentric understanding of love, power, and justice. As Christian leaders, our task is to out-narrate both by telling a more compelling story of how God is acting here and now to teach us how to flourish in holy friendship with God and each other by walking with us along the way of love.
Our first step is to understand contemporary American variants of Christian Nationalism. What are they? What are their most common beliefs and agendas? I'll do a deep dive into those questions throughout the following chapters.
1
Paul D. Miller and David French, *The Religion of American Greatness: What's Wrong with Christian Nationalism* (IVP Academic, 2022), 9–12.
2
Eric Kaufmann, *Whiteshift: Populism, Immigration, and the Future of White Majorities*, 1st edition (ABRAMS Press, 2019), 9.
3
Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory, Third Edition* (University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 204–25.
4
Miller and French, *The Religion of American Greatness*, 9.

5
Jonathan Tran, *Asian Americans and the Spirit of Racial Capitalism* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2021), 14. Paul Miller reminds us that "ideologies emerge from prior religious commitments," and also take on the characteristics of religions. See Miller and French, *The Religion of American Greatness*, 9

6
"…the "Christianity" of Christian Nationalism represents something more than religion… it includes assumptions of nativism, white supremacy, patriarchy, and heteronormativity, along with divine sanction for authoritarian control and militarism." Philip S. Gorski, Samuel L. Perry, and Jemar Tisby, *The Flag and the Cross: White Christian Nationalism and the Threat to American Democracy* (Oxford University Press, 2022)

7
Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Belknap Press, 2007), 105

8
Miller and French, *The Religion of American Greatness*, 30.

9
Andrew L. Whitehead and Samuel L. Perry, *Taking America Back for God: Christian Nationalism in the United States* (Oxford University Press, 2020), 14

10
Miller and French, *The Religion of American Greatness*, 167

11
Gorski, Perry, and Tisby, *The Flag and the Cross*, 20

12
Whitehead and Perry, *Taking America Back for God*, 16. See also Miller and French, *The Religion of American Greatness*, 29–30

13
Whitehead and Perry, *Taking America Back for God*, 16. See also Miller and French, *The Religion of American Greatness*

14
Luke Bretherton and David Brooks, “Christian Humanism,” Comment Magazine, October 6, 2022, https://comment.org/christian-humanism/.

In my experience, most Americans never heard of an ideology called “Christian Nationalism” until its opponents accused them - or others across the political spectrum - of it. Indeed, it’s apparent that many pundits and politicians on the political left who have created a cottage industry to bombard the political right with such accusations have not actually done the work to understand sufficiently what American Christian Nationalisms are, how they function in communities, and with whom and where they flourish. They mean well, but they’ve done harm to the resistance by politicizing and misdefining it, turning the name of a pernicious ideology most Americans had never heard of into a badge of honor for the political right. Moreover, by carelessly naming all nationalisms evil, they curse created goods through which God lifts up oppressed peoples, confusing them with common distortions of those goods through which Sapiens chronically oppress each other. To resist American Christian Nationalisms effectively, it’s essential to give Americans words to discriminate between that which helps us achieve our country and that which curses us. Because careful discrimination is essential, the first step in resisting them is to deconstruct them.
I will be attempting that deconstruction - with the aim of

equipping Americans with words to discriminate as needed - throughout this series. Before diving into that task, I'd like to foreshadow a few ideas I'm exploring to orient the reader to where this series is going. I promise to unpack them fully in the articles that will follow.

1. Many pundits on the political left and right presuppose a popular definition of nationalism that, contrary to the academic literature on the topic, is arbitrarily narrow, circular, and politically self-serving.
2. Contrary to such usage, nationalisms can be either creative or destructive tools by which peoples imagine and organize themselves. It is essential to preserve the creative and resist the destructive ways we imagine and organize ourselves. Therefore, discriminating between creative and destructive nationalisms is essential civic work.
3. American nationalisms are plural and dynamic, evolving dialectically in response to public discourse concerning events within and beyond American borders.
4. American *Christian* nationalisms are plural, diverse, and oxymoronic. Like different cancers, they must not be targeted generically but with treatments appropriate to their particularities. A generic cure is just as likely to kill us as heal us.
5. American *White* Christian nationalism is a sub-species with diverse variants reflecting spectra of group- and self- consciousness, cultural and political beliefs, and racialized militance. Most American White Christian

nationalists won't recognize themselves in generic descriptions and therefore will see no cause for repentance.

6 Paradoxically, American White Christian nationalisms are insufficiently Christian or American, and White-Christian denotes a particular American cultural ethos that is neither exclusively White nor exclusively Christian. It is a major error to reduce White Christian Nationalism to White Racism. It's far more complex.

7 Though American Christian nationalism is inherently oxymoronic, a Christocentric theology provides the tools to imagine a nationalism that would be authentically Christian and American.

I will develop all of these thoughts in detail throughout this series. In the articles that immediately follow, I will turn to the task of deconstructing Christian nationalism that I've said is essential to resisting it.

What is a White Christian Nationalist?

"My opinion of a White nationalist, if somebody wants to call them a White nationalist, to me, is an American. It's an American. Now, if that White nationalist is a racist, I'm totally against anything that they want

to do, because I am 110% against racism."[1] - U.S. Senator Tommy Tuberville

Tommy Tuberville, Alabama's senior senator, stepped into controversy during a recent CNN appearance in which he insisted on distinguishing between a White nationalist and a racist. The media and his political opponents denounced him for defending White nationalism. A more charitable reading is that he stumbled in his effort to condemn what he views as identity politics that polarizes the nation. For Tuberville, "White nationalist" is the latest epithet used by the political left to caricature the political right as racist. For him, a nationalist is a patriot, and a white nationalist is a white patriot. In his view, a white nationalist is a good American, but a white nationalist who is also racist is not.

I begin with that episode not because I am inclined to defend Tommy Tuberville. I've not forgiven him for the many times his Auburn Tiger football team embarrassed my LSU Tigers, and he and I disagree significantly concerning how we achieve America. I begin with that episode because it nicely demonstrates how confused Americans are by the burgeoning use of White Christian Nationalism and its derivatives as the latest critique of the political right.

In October 2022, the Pew Research Center reported that most Americans surveyed (54%) had never heard of Christian Nationalism, and almost two-thirds (63%) of Republicans had never heard of it. Majorities from both dominant political parties had either not heard of it or did not know enough to have an opinion about it (GOP - 73%, Democrats 51%).[2] The

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[1] Wolf, Zachary, "Here's What Sen. Tommy Tuberville Actually Said about White Nationalists," *CNN Politics* (blog), July 11, 2023, https://www.cnn.com/2023/07/11/politics/white-nationalists-tommy-tuberville-what-matters/index.html.

[2] Smith, Gregory, Rotolo, Michael, and Tevington, Patricia, "Views of the U.S. as a 'Christian Nation' and Opinions about 'Christian Nationalism,'" *Pew Research Center* (blog), October 27, 2022, https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2022/10/27/views-of-the-u-s-as-a-christian-nation-and-opinions-about-christian-nationalism/.

Tuberville episode highlights two important points. First, the jargon surrounding White Christian Nationalism has become politicized, with leaders on the political right starting to claim or defend the description as a badge of honor and the media and elite on the political left using it to accuse their opponents of racism. Second, most Americans, including United States senators, experience the naming of Christian Nationalism as new and unfamiliar.

I call attention to the recent politicization of the discourse concerning White Christian Nationalism because it impedes efforts to resist it. Christian Nationalism is a clear and present danger to American Christianity and liberal democracy. We need Americans on the left and right cooperating in its renunciation. Politicization presents it as a less pernicious caricature, feeds it, and magnifies its polarizing effect. Throughout this series, I will challenge the political left and right to avoid impeding our resistance by reductively deploying Christian Nationalism as a weapon in our American cultural wars.

I call attention to its relative obscurity in our public discourse because - like Senator Tuberville - most Americans don't know what Christian Nationalism is or why we should be concerned about it. Answering those questions is my focus in this and immediately following articles. In a subsequent article, I'll share some concerns about quantitative Christian nationalism research (QCN research) that cause me to urge caution in embracing some of its conclusions.

So who, what, and where are Christian nationalists? Christian Nationalism turns out to be a diverse genus with multiple species. To answer these questions, start with the species that tripped up Senator Tuberville, White Christian Nationalism.

Like Senator Tuberville, persons on the political left and right commonly misconceive "White" or "White Christian" with plain adjectival meanings clarifying the type of nationalism in view. For

Tuberville, a "White Nationalist" is simply a nationalist whose racial category is White, and a "White Christian" is a nationalist whose racial category is White and whose religion is Christian. But, as we will see, QCN research shows that's a significant misconception. In 2023, "White-Christian" should be hyphenated to signal that it denotes neither a racial nor a religious grouping but the set of citizens who conform to Anglo-Protestant values and practices. A White-Christian Nationalist, in a self-contradictory fashion, illiberally sees such conformance as normative for American political identity.

American White Christian Nationalism is identity politics for what Samual Huntington infamously defended as our majority *Anglo-Protestant* tribe.[3] While the Anglo-Protestant ethno-tradition has historically been a dialectical discourse between practicing Protestant Christians of Anglo-Saxon descent, that's no longer true. In 2023, "Anglo-Protestant" no longer denotes Anglo-Saxon descent, Protestantism, or Christian practice. Instead, it signifies those who embrace the normativity of the received Anglo-Protestant ethno-tradition for daily life. A people bound voluntarily by mutual subscription to a shared ethno-tradition, White-Christian community membership now includes persons of all colors, a plurality of non-Protestant Christians, and non-Christians.[4]

Except for immigrants, White-Christian community consciousness is generally pre-rational and pre-voluntary, a given generated by heredity, geographic and historical context. Because of assimilation pressures, immigrant and native non-White and non-religious persons often rationally and voluntarily embrace that community consciousness while simultaneously embracing their originating community's consciousness.

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[3] Paul D. Miller and David French, *The Religion of American Greatness: What's Wrong with Christian Nationalism* (IVP Academic, 2022), 12.

[4] Andrew L. Whitehead and Samuel L. Perry, *Taking America Back for God: Christian Nationalism in the United States* (Oxford University Press, 2020), 29.

Assimilated, they cherish the dominant Anglo-Protestant ethno-tradition while sometimes suffering, often illiberally excluded from the societies it spawns. To the extent that it respects the rights and liberties of all persons and communities and works cooperatively in civic friendship with other American communities toward the common good under the rule of law, the American White-Christian community is rightly ordered. Consistency in such communal ordering is, of course, the hope of the American experiment. Tragically, such consistency remains evasive.

American White-Christian Nationalism should not be understood as just the latest word for racism, for it is more pernicious than that. It is identity politics for the community whose social identity and cooperation arise from mutual subscription to the Anglo-Protestant ethno-tradition. It is a complex and disordered sociopolitical phenomenon that divinizes that community, rendering its claims to power absolute while marginalizing others and inviting the American government to enforce the priority of its ethno-tradition by law. It is its blasphemous illiberality that makes White-Christian Nationalism deplorably oxymoronic.

In ___, I suggested that White-Christian Nationalism should be conceived as a hyphenated term because, empirically, the sociopolitical phenomenon is neither White nor Christian. Instead, it is a disordered politics practiced by a subset of the community whose social identity and cooperation arise from mutual subscription to the Anglo-Protestant ethno-tradition. I noted that, in 2023, the community includes persons of all colors, a plurality of non-Protestant Christians and non-Christians.

How do I know that? It's demonstrated in the prolific

academic and popular work of sociology scholars whose field is known as Quantitative Christian Nationalism (QCN) research.

In response to the increasing polarization of American society, especially after the election of Donald Trump, a rapidly growing thread in social science and journalistic research focuses on American Christian nationalism. Andrew L. Whitehead, Samuel L. Perry, and others have pioneered QCN research. They have published a growing body of scholarly and popular books, articles, podcasts, and panel discussions that raise the alarm about a rising tide of American Christian Nationalism. The political left boosts QCN scholars' work in the media aggressively because at its heart is the claim that Christian Nationalism *causes* a wide range of right-wing positions in America's culture wars.

At the heart of QCN research is the Christian Nationalism Scale, an index by which QCN scholars identify the probability of and intensity with which persons hold cultural and political views that QCN researchers associate with Christian nationalism. The scale is constructed by scoring survey respondents' answers to six questions and adding the scores to compute an index value ranging from 0 to 24, from strong disapproval to strong support for Christian Nationalism.

QCN researchers deploy separate statistical models of political and cultural attitudes against the scale to demonstrate that higher Christian Nationalism scores predict right-wing responses to an ever-growing range of culture war

questions, including support for Trump, racial equity, and gun, gay, and gender rights. They conclude that Christian Nationalism predicts such attitudes better than religious affiliation, religious commitment, or political party. Most importantly, they claim that Christian Nationalism *cau*ses these right-wing political behaviors.[5]

It's important to note that the six scored questions were not designed to measure Christian Nationalism. On the contrary, QCN researchers created their scale by redeploying scale items originally deployed in a Baylor and University of Chicago study to capture Americans' views on the separation of church and state.[6] That explains the absence of any mention of Christian Nationalism in the questions scholars use to classify respondents as Christian Nationalists. In other words, QCN researchers' key - and I think their weakest - methodological move is to assume respondents' attitudes about the separation of church and state accurately predict the presence of Christian Nationalism. I mention this because most the vast majority of accounts of Christian Nationalism are based on sociological work by Philip Gorski, Andrew Whitehead, Stephen Perry, and their collaborators, and so the biases of their methodology drive our descriptions and shape our Americans' understanding of what an American Christian Nationalist is.

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[5] Andrew L. Whitehead and Samuel L. Perry, *Taking America Back for God: Christian Nationalism in the United States* (Oxford University Press, 2020), 44.

[6] Jesse Smith and Gary J. Adler, "What *Isn't* Christian Nationalism? A Call for Conceptual and Empirical Splitting," *Socius: Sociological Research for a Dynamic World* 8 (January 2022): 237802312211244, https://doi.org/10.1177/23780231221124492, p 5.

Survey participants were asked to answer six questions with the prompt, “To what extent do you agree or disagree…” They could respond that they strongly disagree, disagree, undecided, agree, or strongly agree. Here are the questions:

1. “The federal government should declare the United States a Christian nation"

2 "The federal government should advocate Christian values"

3 "The federal government should enforce a strict separation of church and state"

4 "The federal government should allow the display of religious symbols in public spaces"

5 "The success of the United States is part of God's plan"

6 "The federal government should allow prayer in public schools"

Generally, QCN researchers divide the 24-point Christian Nationalism scale into quartiles, labeling them Rejectors, Resisters, Accommodators, and Ambassadors. They claim that the most supportive group, Ambassadors, who score from 17-24 on the scale,

> “believe that the United States has a special relationship with God, and thus, the federal government should formally declare the United States a Christian nation and advocate for Christian values. Ambassadors support returning formal prayers to public schools and allowing the display of religious symbols in public spaces.”[7]

From a quantitative perspective, this is QCN researchers’ definition of a

[7] Whitehead and Perry, 36.

Christian Nationalist. Note that, by this definition, Christian Nationalism invites the government to privilege the Christian ethno-tradition but is silent on who counts as an American or a citizen. Later I will argue that this definition is poorly theorized.

With those preliminary observations, let's dig into the QCN data. The data below can be found in Whitehead and Perry (26-29).

A Summary of QCN Survey Data

- 52% of Americans agree with all or most questions QCN researchers use to categorize individuals as Christian Nationalists.
    - 88% of this 52% identify themselves as white evangelical Protestants
- Only 13% of Black and 33% of all persons of color scored in the top half of the Christian Nationalism scale.
- 55% of respondents' scores mark them as the most passionate adherents, and, of these *Ambassadors*:
    - White evangelicals (55%), Catholic (19%), Mainline (11%), Black Protestant (10%)
    - 55% are women
    - 50% live in the South and 21% in the Midwest
    - 70% are white
    - The mean age is 54
    - 93% did not graduate from college
    - 56% have household incomes less than $50,000
- Among the 32% who scored in the 12-17 range on the 24-point index (the *Accommodators*):
    - White evangelicals (33%), Catholic (32%), Mainline (12%), Black Protestant (9%)
    - 57% are women
    - 39% live in the South, and almost 28% live in the Midwest
    - 63% are white
    - 17% have college degrees

- 54% earn household incomes less than $50,000
- 23% earn household incomes less than $20,000

A Few Data-Driven Observations

Whiteness is the Key

QCN researchers claim that the Christian Nationalism scale accurately predicts respondents' views on various policy questions regarding race, discrimination, immigration, xenophobia, and justice. Those who score highest on the Christian Nationalist scale do not support government policies aimed at lifting the poor, welcoming the resident alien, or eliminating social barriers based on race or gender. As Episcopal Church Presiding Bishop Michael Curry noted, this suggests that their politics are ordered based on criteria other than those taught by Jesus.[8]

In contrast, those on the bottom half of the scale (*Rejecters* and *Resisters*) support such policies.[9]

Interestingly, 25% of Blacks either accommodate or passionately support Christian Nationalist beliefs, indicating they think highly of the role of Christianity in our national politics and governance. One might think their high scores - identifying them as Black Christian Nationalists - would predict that their expectations concerning discrimination and their preferences for public policy would mirror those of White Christian Nationalists. That's not the case, however. Black *Ambassadors* and *Accommodators* share expectations concerning discrimination and preferences for public policy with their Black *Resisters* and *Rejecters*. The intersection of one's Christian Nationalism score and race, not one's

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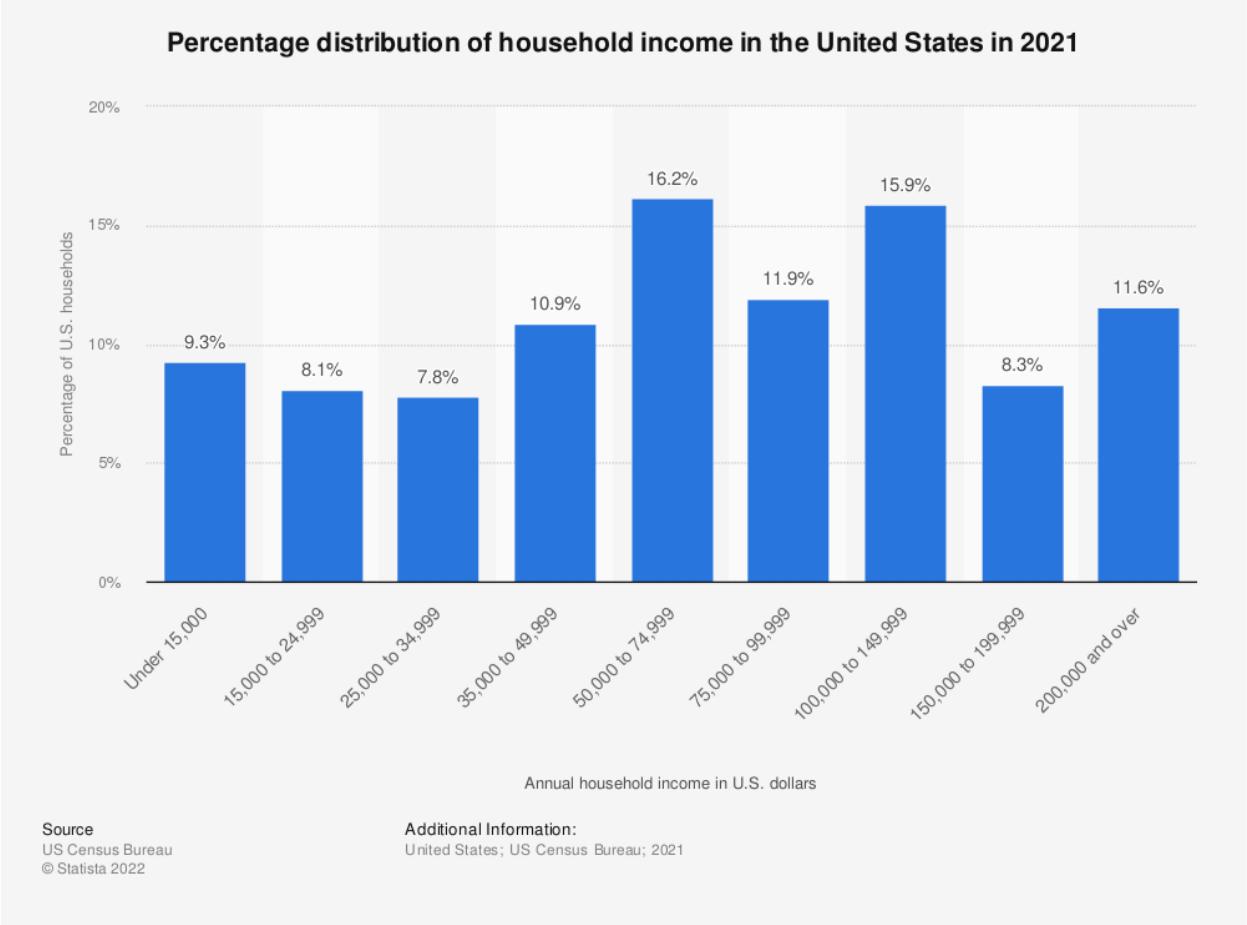
[8] Egan Millard, "White Christian Nationalism Is Not Christianity, Presiding Bishop Says during Panel Discussion," *Episcopal News Service* (blog), October 27, 2022, https://www.episcopalnewsservice.org/2022/10/27/white-christian-nationalism-is-not-christianity-presiding-bishop-says-during-panel-discussion/.

[9] Whitehead and Perry, 18.

Christian Nationalism score alone, predicts one's public policy preferences. To extend Bishop Curry's logic and language, per QCN research, Black Christian Nationalists align their politics with Jesus, but White Christian Nationalists do not. *Whiteness* is the key variable.

The Exploitation of Poor Whites

The data reveal another characteristic that heightens ethical concerns and provides insight into potential responses to this phenomenon. Those who score in the top quartiles of the Christian Nationalism scale are predominantly the least economically privileged American citizens. Indeed, those with household incomes less than $50,000 disproportionately score higher on the Christian Nationalist scale, including 56% of *Ambassadors* and 54% of *Accommodators*. In contrast, those earning household incomes less than $50,000 constitute only 36.1% of the U.S. population. This puts into sharp relief the $250 entrance fee demanded and merchandise sold by promoters of the ReAwaken America Tour and other organized religio-populist gatherings. These are phenomena in which the most economically privileged in the population actively call the least privileged into a religio-populist movement parodying the Great Awakenings that displays characteristics of both sect and cult, transfers wealth from the poor to wealthy evangelists, generates political power for those evangelists, and promises salvation to the poor based on their blood sacrifice.



Distribution of household income U.S. 2021[10]

These 21st-century spectacles through which elite White business people cultivate an alliance with low-income Whites through the unashamed affirmation of White Supremacy evoke a pivotal bargain in American politics. Shortly after the passage of the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments and the collapse of Radical Reconstruction, hope that we would achieve the promise of those amendments remained due to a new alliance between Black and White farmers. This populist movement based on shared socioeconomic concerns of poor farmers lasted well into the 1880s. Planter-class Whites, faced with an extreme labor shortage arising from the emancipation of enslaved workers, broke the

[10] Statista, "Distribution of Household Income U.S. 2021," Statista, September 30, 2022, https://www.statista.com/statistics/203183/percentage-distribution-of-household-income-in-the-us/.

alliance by actively cultivating relationships with lower-status White farmers. They proposed that poor Whites secure their participation in the social, economic, and political fruits of a new post-Reconstruction social order in exchange for their political cooperation with elite Whites. The new race-based coalition gave elite Whites an enduring majority, enabling the passage of the Jim Crow laws that ensured the commodification of Black labor for another century.[11]

As in the 1880s, the 21st-century bargain is a great business for the elite White sponsors of Christian Nationalist events like the ReAwaken America Tour. They exploit poor Whites economically and obtain political leverage enabling them to shape public policy that generates riches for their patronage networks.

But what do less privileged Whites obtain in exchange? Sociologists tell us it's not about economics. The primary good obtained is the promise of protection from ethnic change from immigration that, as Eric Kaufman notes, "unsettles the existential security of conservative and order-seeking whites."[12] The insecurity is less about economics and more about preserving status and social respect: "Well, I may be poor, but at least I'm not Black."[13] On this account, less privileged Whites embrace White Christian Nationalist religious ritual, rhetoric, and political allegiance in exchange for the this-worldly goods of respect,

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[11] Craig Uffman and Kevin Boyle, "How and Why We Birthed Jim Crow," Conversations: Race on the Rocks, n.d., https://www.christianhumanistmission.org/p/how-and-why-we-birthed-jim-crow-3b7#details.

[12] Eric Kaufmann, *Whiteshift: Populism, Immigration, and the Future of White Majorities*, 1st edition (ABRAMS Press, 2019), 672.

[13] A. Renee Staton, William Evans, and Christopher Lucey, "Understanding Social Class in the United States," in *Social Class and the Helping Professions*, ed. Debbie C. Sturn and Donna M. Gibson (New York: Routledge, 2012,28. Pamela Cooper-White, *The Psychology of Christian Nationalism: Why People Are Drawn In and How to Talk Across the Divide* [Fortress Press, 2022], 26.

security, and fellowship in response to existential threats from ethnic change.

Let me re-frame this last observation so we may more readily connect it with concepts we will develop downstream. Less privileged Whites place their faith in an account of human flourishing grounded in the normativity of the Anglo-Protestant ethno-tradition based on the promise that such an ultimate concern will provide this-worldly rewards like status, security, and fellowship.

In Mining Quantitative Christian Nationalism (QCN) Data, I noted above that digging into the tabulations of the QCN data leads me to believe that Christian Nationalism simultaneously manifests sect-like and cult-like characteristics. I think it is sect-like when one focuses on behaviors of less privileged Whites and non-White adherents and cult-like when one focuses on its higher social status adherents.
It is sect-like to the extent that it promotes and creates schism within the American body politic through the promise of a purer otherworldly faith that will restore the American *civil religion* to greater tension with the emerging norms of the Digital Age. If it is indeed sect-like, religion sociologists tell us it's best understood as a movement of those in "lower social standing" resisting cultural pressures from those embracing transformation of the body politic by the tides of cosmopolitan thought and demographic change.

[1] The sectarian promoters appeal to those of lower social standing not by offering something

new but by emphasizing the "old, familiar culture."[2] To the extent the movement is sect-like, its attraction to the less economically privileged is the promise not only of otherworldly rewards but also this-worldly rewards they find scarce in their daily lives, such as social status, self-esteem, fellowship, entertainment, wealth, health, and security.[3]

Those are the themes Michael Flynn and the Trump machine emphasize in their star-spangled baptisms of their *Reawaken America Tour* and festive campaign rallies. "They don't respect you, but we do." "We will protect your jobs from immigrant competition." "We are one, and together, we will defeat those that bedevil us and make America great again!" In sect-like fashion, the rallies, which entertain and inspire, create an ecstatic sense of unity by celebrating participants' identity as the "Real Americans" who must not allow themselves to be contaminated by the infectious liberalism of the Othered communities who disrespect and oppress Real Americans.

But how can we think of the 37.7% of *Ambassadors* and *Accommodators* whose household incomes rank them in the top third of the U.S. population?[4] How is it that the privileged and well-educated among us are willing to accept irrational conspiracy theories, defend demonstrably false claims about events, and see no contradiction in the hierarchies of human value they support politically and the baptismal vows they proclaim at the altar? Perhaps the answer is that the movement can also be understood as a cult rejecting the norms of American *civil* religion. The movement is cult-like to the extent that it rejects mainstream civil religion and promotes a new faith, a new way of seeing the world that appeals to those who feel they deserve more wealth, privilege, and freedom than they already enjoy.[5] That new faith promises holy war against an abstract enemy (socialism!) and access to transcendent values insufficiently mediated through wafers and wine or feel-good sermons filled with pop psyche clichés. *A de-historicized Jesus is hard to die for. As an alternative, the new faith infuses the nation-state with transcendence worthy of sacrifice.*

Suppose we understand the White Christian Nationalist movement as a sect. In that case, it is a movement from the bottom-up - a yearning of the least privileged among us for current goods like wealth, fellowship, and security of place and status. Our narrative should offer an account of human flourishing that addresses those this-worldly rewards.
On the other hand, suppose we understand the movement as a cult. In that case, it expresses a broader yearning led by the more privileged for delivery from isolation, meaningless, and death. It suggests that the dominant form of American civil religion no longer plausibly embodies the transcendent. In that case, our narrative should address how our alternative account of human flourishing fulfills our universal hunger for the transcendent.

American Christian nationalists, in general, believe that the American founders intentionally created a Christian nation, that we've always been a Christian nation, and that Christians have a sacred duty to restore America's identity as a Christian nation; moreover, they see restoring and maintaining their version of Christian cultural identity as the federal and state government's responsibility.
American *White*-Christian Nationalism identifies a segment of *White-Christian* culture with that of our entire nation of 330 million people. It remembers an Anglo-Protestant national origin and sees the restoration of White-Christian rule as a matter of Christian faithfulness; to secure God's blessing on America and ensure freedom reigns, the government must guarantee and protect the priority of our White-Christian culture.
American White Christian Nationalists also believe that defending

White-Christian culture is identical to defending freedom and democracy. They believe White-Christian culture is essential for generating and sustaining free and democratic institutions; without that culture's dominance, liberty and democracy will perish.
American White-Christian Nationalists have long believed freedom and democracy are essential to sustaining White-Christian culture. But, notably, as demographic changes signal the approaching minority status of White Americans by 2042, White-Christian Nationalists are increasingly questioning whether liberal democracy is necessary to sustain Anglo-Protestant culture.
White-Christian culture is hegemonic in the South and much of the Midwest but does not have a monolithic ethno-tradition. As with all natural law traditions, its habits of thought are localized, varying along geographic and socioeconomic lines. Nonetheless, White-Christian Nationalists identify their local variant of the Anglo-Protestant ethno-tradition as normative for American identity. Their ethno-tradition sees White supremacy and patriarchy as part of the divinely sanctioned social order.
As a species of Christian Nationalism, American White-Christian Nationalism conflates divine and political identities. Key White-Christian Nationalist conflations of religious and political identities include:

- America consists of a sacred land and a culture worthy of martyrdom.
- God ordained racial and gender hierarchies of human value.
- God calls Christian nationalists to exercise dominion.
- God justifies violence by those in authority, whether governmental or citizen, to enforce divine laws.
- God embedded the divine law in the Anglo-Protestant ethno-tradition and the societies it generates (often described in terms of our "heritage").

about the rise in American Christian Nationalism. The *ReAwaken America* tour, which featured historic fascist symbolism and pageantry, anti-democratic vitriol from an American general, and advocated a fusion of a particular brand of Christianity with the state, prompted me.

The reactions of friends from my Navy days and family from my native Deep South deepened my concern. Most folks had no idea what Christian Nationalism is, but a large plurality defended some of its positions.

At about that time, I read popular literature that addressed the topic. The most comprehensive and helpful was Paul Miller's *The Religion of American Greatness: What's Wrong with Christian Nationalism*. But he relied heavily upon Quantitative Christian Nationalism (QCN) research that Samuel Perry and colleagues popularized. Perry and Andrew Whitehead published *Taking America Back for God: Christian Nationalism in the United States* in 2020. Perry and Philip Gorski followed that in 2022 with *The Flag and the Cross: White Christian Nationalism and the Threat to American Democracy*. I began my study of Christian Nationalism with those three books, a learning journey that, so far, led me to digest more than 200 scholarly books, journal articles, and podcasts by sociologists, political scientists, historians, economists, philosophers, and theologians. It's the most complex phenomenon I've ever studied.

One of the motivations for this ever-deepening journey was that a few claims I read and heard from Stephen Perry and his collaborators did not fit my life experience as a Christian from the Deep South who served as a pastor in the American heartland, mid-Atlantic, and New York.

The QCN researchers claimed that 52% of Americans agree with all or most questions that categorize individuals as Christian Nationalists and that 33% of all persons of color support Christian Nationalist beliefs. Moreover, they claimed that almost a third (32%) of Americans are in the group they categorized as Christian Nationalist Accommodators. Of this group, Evangelical Protestants and Roman Catholics constitute roughly a third each, with Mainline and Black Protestants, Others, and No Affiliation making up the final third. Support for Christian Nationalism is also distributed across political ideologies and parties; 56% of Accommodators self-describe as either politically Moderate or Liberal, and 60% identify as Democrats or Independent. Indeed, Democrats and Independents are 44% of Ambassadors, the group with the most substantial Christian Nationalist affinities. Significantly, 69% of Ambassadors self-described as politically Conservative, so at least half of the Democrats and Independent Ambassadors identify as Conservatives.[14]

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[14] Andrew L. Whitehead and Samuel L. Perry, *Taking America Back for God: Christian Nationalism in the United States* (Oxford University Press, 2020), 26-35.

As I noted above, QCN researchers' rhetoric and the evident rising tide of Christian Nationalism inspired both alarm and commitment to resist. Still, I also needed help with their data. It didn't fit my deep experience with Americans throughout the South and Midwest, where two-thirds of Ambassadors and Accommodators live. I knew Christian Nationalists in both regions, but I could not fathom the claim that 52% of Americans supported Christian Nationalism. The claim that such support was broadly distributed among Christian denominations, political ideologies, parties, and persons of color seemed counterintuitive.

It seemed counterintuitive because, like many students of 20th-century history, I interpret the term "Christian Nationalism" through the lens of the 1930s German Church that tragically lost its way and then its identity to the Nazi regime led by Adolph Hitler. We see evidence of the Russian Orthodox Church losing its way similarly in cooperating with Putin's war against the Ukrainian state. I understand "Christian Nationalism" instinctively through a historically-informed political theology lens. The German Christian Church is the archetype, not Christendom.

We comprehend the meanings of terms like Christian Nationalism by contemplating the actions they denote. Here's what we learn from a study of the German Church's tragic history. Christian nationalism, theologically, is when Christians abdicate their mission to carry on Jesus's ministry, yielding to the State their charge to interpret and share the Word faithfully and courageously. Christian nationalism is when Christians polytheistically divide the world into spaces, assigning the Word authority within consecrated spaces and the State authority over all other spaces as though God's Word does not reign over all time and all space. Christian nationalism is when Christians divinize the State, identifying its policy and action as God's Word and its citizens as God's preferred people. Christian nationalism is when Christians divinize the Church, subordinating the State and identifying the Church's policy and action as God's Word and its members as bona fide citizens. Christian nationalism combines the great sins of sloth in its unfaithful fearfulness, concupiscence in its will for power, and hubris in its trust in the State rather than the Word. Doing so sets the stage for horrific communal creations like Jim Crow, Apartheid, and the Holocaust. Christian Nationalism is a quite serious thing.

That's why I struggled with the QCN researchers' claim that 52% of Americans are Christian Nationalists. Suppose the 1930s German Church is the exemplar. How could every second person we meet be either a supporter or advocate of Christian nationalism? That's what the Christian Nationalism Scale suggests. I am professionally attuned to people's religious sensibilities and beliefs, and my experience tells me that Christian Nationalism, as exemplified by the 1930s German Church, is a great concern (particularly among young males), yet it remains the exception and not the norm in

American Christianity. It seemed that QCN researchers' definition of Christian nationalism was not meaningfully discriminating, or their measurement and analysis were faulty. I knew Christian Nationalists and had been surrounded by politically conservative Christians most of my life. The scale's advocates put these groups in the same bucket, declaring both leaners or committed advocates of Christian nationalism. That's a significant error. To deny the distinction between right-wing movements and conservative Christian groups "denies the possibility of moral distinctions at all." [Neiman]

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After a year's study, I report confidently that my intuition was correct. The Christian Nationalism Scale, upon which most QCN research and media reporting is based, overstates the percentage of Americans we can accurately describe as Christian Nationalists. The Christian Nationalism Scale does not do what its name suggests. Its theoretical formulation and empirical method are flawed, rendering it unreliable as a measure of the presence or intensity of Christian nationalism. Theoretically, it hypothesizes that Christian nationalism causes right-wing phenomena, then postulates a debatable definition of Christian nationalism and broad conceptions of its sociological forms and function in groups. Empirically, multiple design flaws render the scale unable to identify who does or does not fit what it purports to measure. These cumulative design defects effectively conflate "Christian Nationalist" with competitive religiopolitical and non-religious phenomena, which is why the Christian Nationalism Scale misleads us into believing that most Americans either "lean toward accepting" or are "wholly supportive of Christian nationalism" [Perry 2020:33-34]. 21st-century American Christianity is much more complex.

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[[NEED CLOSING THAT EXPLAINS WHY ANY OF THIS MATTERS]]

Distinction because different approaches to distinct sociological phenomena all of which are bound up in White Supremacy

Whitehead and Perry begin with a debatable definition of Christian nationalism. Acknowledging that nationalism and Christian nationalism are contested terms, they postulate that Christian nationalism is "an ideology that idealizes and advocates a fusion of American civic life with a particular type of Christian identity and culture" (ix). That definition does not tell us much since, if you omit "American," it's simply an apt description of Christendom locally expressed. Indeed, the idea that the world can be divided into a sacred sphere in which God reigns and a civic sphere in which God does not reign is polytheistic and, therefore, theologically problematic. Jesus taught disciples to pray "on earth as it is in Heaven." Advocating transformation of the civic does not make one a Christian nationalist. On the contrary, as the German Church's story

teaches, the failure to advocate such transformation sets the stage for Christian nationalism.

Fortunately, the authors clarify that their adjectival use of Christian does not refer to a particular "doctrinal orthodoxy or personal piety" but explicitly denotes "beliefs about historical identity, cultural preeminence, and political influence" as well as implicit ideas about how national boundaries are cast by one's religious affiliation, ethnicity, nativity, and political beliefs (ix). In their theory, "the 'Christianity' of Christian nationalism...includes assumptions of nativism, white supremacy, patriarchy, and heteronormativity, along with divine sanction for authoritarian control and militarism" (10). That Christianity is Christian nationalist to the extent that its adherents insist their nativist, racist, patriarchic, and homophobic brand of Christianity has always been normative for American citizenship and that America must "keep it that way" (10).

I don't find this part of their theory persuasive. It's undebatable that nativist, white supremacist, patriarchic, and heteronormative Christian institutions have a long history in America and exist today. As a theologian, I'd name their sins of exclusion heretical and destructive. To the extent they claim divine sanction for such exclusions, I'd also call them blasphemous. But the institutions that make such political claims may or may not embody Christian nationalism. Such rotten fruit grows in many soils.

Christian nationalism's soil is constituted by what Thomas Aquinas called unbelief, the idolatry in which humans trust not in God but in created things. Either Christians divinize the State and misidentify its proclamations as God's Word to the Church, or they divinize the Church and seek its totalizing power over the State. Sins of exclusion flourish when Christians divinize either the Church or the State.

Whitehead and Perry may mean to exclude the divinization of the Church from their definition of Christian nationalism. They claim to exclude "theocracy," which they say is when Christians "want the Bible principally to inform our national laws" and when "religious leaders, even clergy in some manifestations, play a central role in governance" (x). But, again, Christendom's natural law tradition presupposes that the laws of the polis reflect the wisdom gained as we live in friendship with God and each other. Wanting laws to reflect Scriptural tenets does not make one a Christian nationalist or a theocrat. The totalizing political claim that one's particular religious practices and beliefs are mandated by God for the rule of the polis makes one so. The desire to distinguish such totalizing claims from Christian nationalism is dubious. Moreover, whether Whitehead and Perry achieved such a distinction in their modeling needs to be clarified.

If we accept that QCN scholars exclude divinization of the Church from their theory of American Christian nationalism, that leaves divinization of the nation. Christian nationalists divinize the people and misidentify its proclamations as God's Word to the

Church. When national leaders speak, they speak on behalf of God, and their proclamations add to the Word of God. The most tragic example of this is when the German Church embraced the Nazi ideological claim that is revelatory and gave it co-equal authority alongside Scripture. On theological grounds, we expect QCN scholars to identify Christian nationalism with the sanctification of a people and the co-option of Christian forms and institutions in service of the State.

But we find something else:

> "We do not strictly mean [nationalism] in the chauvinistic sense of blindly believing that one's nation is superior to others.... We mean something more like "Christian nation-ism" or what sociologist Rogers Brubaker calls "Christianism," a commitment to a vision of American life and polity as closely intertwined with an identitarian, politically conservative strain of Christianity" [x].

Here's clarity. For Whitehead and Perry, Christian nationalism is constituted neither by divinization of the Church nor of the nation. It's no longer characterized by ecclesial leaders' widespread apostasy and blasphemy. It has no specific theological substance. Instead, they redeploy its historical freight - infamously epitomized by the Weimar era German Church in its capitulation to the Nazi regime - to name an illiberal right-wing politics dressed in red, white, and blue Christian garb.

Where QCN Theorists Took a Wrong Turn

It would have been more fruitful to do what Brubaker did: follow Philip Gorski's adoption of Andrew Sullivan's term, "Christianism."

First, it would have preserved "Christian nationalism" as the key concept with which we comprehend mass apostasy on the level of tragic failures such as the Church's complicity with King Cotton's enslavement practices, Jim Crow Apartheid, the Nuremberg Race Laws, and South African Apartheid. In each of these, disastrous theology fueled catastrophic evil by Christians.

Second, naming the phenomenon they wished to study "Christianism," as Brubaker did, might have led them to recognize, as Brubaker does, that the phenomenon is best theorized as a right-wing-*populist* movement. While Christian nationalism indeed competes in the American public square, it's trumped by a much larger White-Christian populist movement for which Christian symbols no longer signify Christian faith but instead signify membership in the authentic American people who have been exploited vertically by elites and threatened horizontally by domestic and foreign "others."[Brubaker 2017:30-31] For Brubaker, "Christianism" operates not as a religious but as a cultural marker, like a team jersey, identifying its bearer as one of the exploited 'real' Americans needing deliverance [Brubaker 2017:16 note 26]. Had Whitehead and

Perry followed Brubaker's analysis more deeply than their throwaway citation, their theory might have led to a more fruitful model of the phenomenon.

Instead, they inappropriately named their object of study "Christian nationalism," and, stripping that concept of its theological substance, reduced it to a label that describes illiberal right-wing politics with "implicit...symbolic boundaries" marked by Christian and American imagery. However, that presented additional theoretical problems. How is their version of Christian nationalism distinguished from garden-variety conservative Christianity? How does their brand of Christian nationalism operate as a social phenomenon so that it impacts American politics?

According to sociologists Jesse Smith and Gary J. Adler, the QCN Scale exemplifies what Gabriel Abend calls "a 'theory2' theory" (2, citing Abend 2008:178). Abend clarifies that such a theory seeks to explain "a particular social phenomenon." It's a "causal explanation." The QCN researchers claim that the concept they've theorized causes a host of social phenomena, including support for Trumpism, racism, nativism, Islamophobia, authoritarian control, and heteronormativity (Whitehead and Perry 2020: 15-17). They do not claim their concept is correlative; they posit a causal relationship between scoring high on the QCN scale and a wide array of right-wing political behaviors. However, the strength of causal theories lies in constructing the independent variable, which is their conception of Christian nationalism. If the specificity of the dependent variable is weak, the theory is likewise lacking in its explanatory power.

As we have seen, the QCN scholars defined Christian nationalism as "a commitment to a vision of American life and polity as closely intertwined with an identitarian, politically conservative strain of Christianity" that "includes assumptions of nativism, white supremacy, patriarchy, and heteronormativity, along with divine sanction for authoritarian control and militarism" (10). So, the independent variable - in their theoretical formulation - includes the behaviors it claims to cause. It needs to be better constructed: the logic is tautological and circular.

Suppose my theory defines a Navy fan as a football fan who wears a Navy jersey, and we discover that folks wearing Navy jerseys tend to be Navy fans. In that case, I've not shown a causal relationship. It only explains a little about Navy fans; my theory could be better conceived. That's a significant flaw in the QCN theory. Christian nationalism is conceived in terms of illiberal conservative political attitudes. It does not cause those attitudes; they're baked into the independent variable's theoretical construction.

Perhaps because QCN scholars' definition of Christian nationalism is poorly conceived, they've also struggled to theorize how it operates. If it is a phenomenon that causes illiberal conservative political attitudes, how does it cause them? Once again, QCN scholars cast a wide net to include all the standard sociological suspects. Smith and Adler (2022) provide a summary: it has been categorized as an "ideology,... cultural framework,... a social identity,... a constellation of beliefs, malleable set of symbols,... myth,... discourse,... movement,... political theology,... and politicized religion...." As they point out, these technical terms denote sociological phenomena that operate differently, so Christian nationalism "might be all of these, but...cannot be each of these for a given person at a given moment" (3).

QCN scholars claim Christian nationalism moves people to adopt illiberal conservative political views. However, the sociological phenomena they present to explain how Christian nationalism moves people don't drive beliefs and attitudes at a mass scale.

For example, social identities don't begin with ideas that logically cause other ideas in the way that QCN scholars suggest Christian nationalist beliefs drive political beliefs. Instead, social identities may or may not lead people to adopt beliefs based on affinity relationships, conforming their views to those they admire. Belongingness, not prior convictions, drives ideas in the social identity phenomenon.

Similarly, cultural toolkit theory "assumes a causal disconnection between meaning and action" and holds that a cultural framework does not function as a "'mover' of social action" (4). Christian nationalism may operate as a cultural framework, but that does not explain how it causes illiberal political views.

Ideology is the most common explanation of how Christian nationalism operates. But that explanation is also problematic. Ideology can drive social activity, but "most Americans are not consistent in their beliefs,... value social tolerance over ideological purity,... and ideologically motivated action is a powerful, but rare, occurrence,.. appearing among a relatively small network, often of elites" (4). Since QCN scholars claim Christian nationalism is supported by over 50% of Americans and most adherents are non-elites, ideology theory seems insufficient to explain its function. That disparity raises questions about the propriety of the linear QCN scale, which researchers interpret as a scale of ideological intensity.

More importantly, the inability to specify theoretically how Christian nationalism causes illiberal conservative views raises questions about current QCN empirical models. Smith and Adler note, "If [Christian nationalism] is a complex and multimodal phenomenon, as seems likely, there should be greater focus on when it takes one form or another, why, for whom, and with what consequence."

Given that QCN researchers strip Christian nationalism of its theological content and redeploy the term to describe a perspective that generates illiberal right-wing political views, it should not surprise us when their thin definition catches about half the American population in its wide net. Their theory treats common illiberal conservative Christian views as proof of Christian nationalism. But that disregards the historical diversity of American Christianity.

One may hold illiberal views on questions of interest to researchers and yet cherish American doctrine separating Church and State. Similarly, one may have conservative views on sexuality and patriarchy and value progress toward equal treatment under the law. Many may oppose what they view as increasing secularity in our culture while defending what they understand as the Judeo-Christian standard of a color-blind society. Others may protect national symbols and rituals - such as standing at attention during the national anthem - with a heightened reverence for national and cultural symbols while still celebrating freedoms of speech and worship. Given QCN researchers' overly broad definition, though survey respondents oppose the Church-State fusion, their illiberality on some questions could land them in the Christian nationalism net.

Other scholars of right-wing social movements prioritize distinguishing Christian nationalism from competing forms of American civil religion. They strive to account for qualitative differences in its diverse forms of expression, including the intensities with which beliefs are held and how the intersection of race and religion drives how American identity and America's enemies are conceived. Right-wing social groups can seem similar because their stories about America's past and future share a standard plot structure. The founding myths they treasure reflect an ignorance of our history and a nostalgia for a golden age to which America can and should return. The stories are declension narratives that yearn for heroes to emerge who will conquer the enemies who stand in the way of our return to simpler times. Though the tales share that familiar plot (Make America Great Again!), their content varies, with different heroes, enemies, and values that must be restored. Right-wing groups share a nostalgic perspective, yet the myths they tell have essential differences that generate their different agendas. Chief among these differences are how race and religion intersect in imagining America's past and future. It's vital to discriminate between Christian nationalism and right-wing groups with common ground and yet significant differences.

A case in point is the Tea Party movement. During the Reagan era, the Religious Right co-opted the "Judeo-Christian America" narrative that arose after WWII as Christians sought to express inclusiveness and solidarity with Jews. However, the Religious Right movement blended that lexicon into their narrative of American exceptionalism so that the key to American chosen-ness was its preservation of ethical

resources embedded in its Judeo-Christian ethno-tradition. In their account, "Judeo-Christian" was simply another term for the Anglo-Protestant ethno-tradition and devotion to readings of the United States Constitution that favor that ethno-tradition. The Tea Party of the 10's adopted that narrative, blending it with libertarian principles, a putatively "color-blind" reading of the Constitution, and conservative fiscal principles. They claimed American democracy and capitalism depend on a restored commitment to that ethno-tradition in response to threats from radical secularism and pluralism. Without the priority of that ethno-tradition, American democracy and capitalism would collapse.

If White Christian Nationalism is overtly exclusive, the Color-blind Judeo-Christian Nation narrative sees itself as inclusive. It counts Martin Luther King, Jr. and Rosa Parks as heroes. It sees the Constitution and the Civil Rights legislation of the 1960s as race-neutral and growing inequalities not as proof of unfairness under the law but as proof that some citizens refuse to embody American values of freedom, self-reliance, and the Protestant work ethic.

But the Color-blind Judeo-Christian Nation is blind not to color but to the cynical logic by which it absolves itself of exclusionary practices. In truth, it converts race into a cultural rather than racial category. It broadens the set of those it recognizes as part of that culture to include anyone who embraces the Judeo-Christian ethno-tradition. How could it be racist since it condemns discrimination based on racial categories? It redefines American-ness in terms of consent and conformity to the Anglo-Protestant ethno-tradition that privileges conservative political values like freedom, individualism, independence, and self-reliance. This enables those shaped by this story to claim and believe they practice color-blind and religiously tolerant inclusivity while sustaining established practices of exclusion and privilege.

Christian Nationalist groups and groups shaped by the Color-blind Judeo-Christian narrative share much in common. They both tell declension narratives in which their groups are victims and those called to rally Americans to restore needed commitments. But their differences are significant. The critical difference is that the former groups seek to eliminate the separation between Church and State. In contrast, the latter groups see that as shredding the Constitution they revere. Both groups may share illiberal political attitudes on the cultural issues that polarize Americans. But their differences matter. Treating all right-wing social movements as a monolith is a failure of moral discernment.

This is likely the most troubling lacuna in QCN theory. It fails to account for the diversity of Christian contexts that may lead some to share conservative views while celebrating religious freedom and the separation of Church and State. Its theologically thin and ideologically broad brush will inevitably register a high level of false positives, insufficiently discriminating between malignant and banal forms of conservative Christianity. Indeed, when we pivot to its empirical design and results, we will see that is

just what happens. It obscures more than it clarifies what's happening in right-of-center Christian segments.

If Christian Nationalism does not explain what's happening among conservative American Christians, what's really going on?

Scholars of right-wing social movements recognize the need to distinguish Christian nationalism from competing forms of American civil religion. In studying Christian nationalism, they have only recently begun to account for qualitative differences in its diverse forms of expression, including the intensities with which people hold such beliefs and how the intersection of race and religion drives how American identity and America's enemies are defined.

Christian nationalism is not a monolith. Right-wing social groups can seem similar because their stories about America's past and future share a standard plot structure. The founding myths they treasure reflect an ignorance of our history and a nostalgia for a golden age to which America can and should return. The stories are declension narratives that yearn for heroes to emerge who will conquer the enemies who stand in the way of our return to simpler times. Though the tales share that familiar plot, their content varies, with different enemies and values that heroes restore. Right-wing groups share a nostalgic perspective, yet the myths they tell have essential differences that generate their competing agendas. Chief among these differences is how race and religion intersect in imagining America's past and future (Braunstein, 2021).

Christian Nationalism is real. It was famously on display on the national mall during the January 6th assault on the Capitol. But, contrary to popular accounts, most conservative Christians are not Christian nationalists.

Baylor sociologists of religion Ruiqian Li and Paul Froese argue that QCN scholars confuse Christian Nationalism with Church Statism and project that segment's traits onto conservative Christians in general. They overlook a significant "society-centric and socially inclusive" segment they call "Religious Traditionalists. This more inclusive segment "reject[s the] overt nativism, racial antipathy, and religious intolerance" that characterizes the MAGA movement. Church Statists and Religious Traditionalists are distinct groups with "different, even opposite, attitudes concerning American membership" (Li and Froese 2023: 25). Li and Froese found that Religious Traditionalists are "more civic and moderate" than Church Statists.

Why do Perry, Whitehead, and others misdiagnose with their overly broad diagnosis of Christian Nationalism? Li and Froese theorize that QCN scholars overlook the

longstanding history of an inclusive American civil religion. Liberals and conservatives are co-heirs to this discourse, though they relish it for divergent reasons. For conservatives, this inclusive heritage generates national like-mindedness and Anglo-Protestant civic order. For liberals, it expresses shared commitments to social justice and the common good. Li and Froese's 2023 study of the same dataset used by QCN scholars confirms that Religious Traditionalists continue to claim this inclusive heritage and connect it with patriotism (Li and Froese 2023:25).

Their study confirms that what QCN scholars theorize as Christian Nationalism confuses at least two divergent right-wing visions for America. Church Statists embrace the attitudes Perry and Whitehead attribute to Christian Nationalism, including establishing a White Christian nation," nativism, and racism. In contrast, inspired by Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech, Religious Traditionalists envision an inclusive "color-blind Judeo-Christian nation" that prioritizes personal responsibility, religious competition, democracy, and capitalism.

The Religious Right embraced the "Judeo-Christian America" narrative that arose after WWII to express inclusiveness and solidarity with Jews. However, they blended that language into their narrative of American exceptionalism. Hence, the key to American chosenness was preserving ethical resources embedded in Judeo-Christian ethno-tradition. "Judeo-Christian" is simply another term for the Anglo-Protestant ethno-tradition and devotion to legal interpretations that favored that ethno-tradition. It claims American democracy and capitalism depend on a restored commitment to that ethno-tradition in response to threats from radical secularism and pluralism. Without the priority of that ethno-tradition, American democracy and capitalism will collapse (Braunstein 2021).

The "Color-blind Judeo-Christian Nation" discourse is the key to understanding why Religious Traditionalists often support illiberal policies while seeing themselves as inclusive. It also explains why they feel so disrespected when attacked as 'racist,' 'xenophobic,' or Christian Nationalist. That is significant because their emotional reaction to being disrespected is one of the central reasons they often support MAGA populism.

The "Color-blind Judeo-Christian Nation" discourse converts race into a cultural rather than ethnic category. It broadens the set of those it recognizes as part of that culture to include anyone who embraces the Judeo-Christian ethno-tradition. The grand narrative redefines American-ness in terms of consent and conformity to that ethno-tradition that prioritizes conservative political values like freedom, individualism, and self-reliance. This subtle conversion from a racial to a cultural category operates as a form of exclusion, enabling those shaped by this narrative to claim and believe they practice color-blind and religiously tolerant inclusivity (Braunstein 2021) even when they

support public policies that sustain racialized structures.

American Christianity has long valued freedom of religion, which historically manifests as a religious free market where religions compete for mindshare, and atheism is a valid option. The Constitution's establishment clause prohibits the State from putting a finger on the scale in this competition. Christian traditionalists continue to value religious freedoms highly, a trait that distinguishes them from Church Statists. However, as White Protestants lose their majority status, White Christian anxiety about cultural change may cause them to seek government safeguards of their cultural power. It may cause Religious Traditionalists to drift toward Church Statism (Li and Froese, 2023).

Braunstein, Ruth. 2021. "The 'Right' History: Religion, Race, and Nostalgic Stories of Christian America." *Religions* 12 (2): 95. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12020095.

Li, Ruiqian, and Paul Froese. 2023. "The Duality of American Christian Nationalism: Religious Traditionalism versus Christian Statism." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, August, jssr.12868. https://doi.org/10.1111/jssr.12868.

In today's vernacular, *Nation*, *People*, *Body Politic*, and *State* are often used interchangeably without sacrificing clarity in everyday conversations. However, in political theology, we must differentiate between these terms because their confusion historically has enflamed conflicts between groups competing for dominant power. Yet such differentiation requires first clarifying the distinction between *community* and *society*.[15]

A *community* is distinct from a society. The common object that generates a community's social identity and cooperation is pre-rational and pre-voluntary in that it is received by and exists independently of the person. Community consciousness is primarily collective and generated by heredity, geographic, and historical context, and persons receive community identities as givens. Groups based on shared habitat, region, origin, language, socioeconomic class, and caste are communities. In contrast, the shared object that generates a *society's* social identity and cooperation is rational, voluntary, and spiritual. The creation of a society is deliberative, and the free consent of its members precedes participation in its cooperative work. Society consciousness is primarily personal and generated by the person's and group's shared commitment to an idea or cause. Groups - such as businesses, labor unions, scholarly guilds, and political associations - based on

[15] These descriptions are based on the analysis of the Thomist philosopher Jacques Maritain in his *Man and the State*, New edition (Washington, D.C: The Catholic University of America Press, 1998), pp. 1-27.

shared ideas, visions, missions, or ends are *intermediate* societies.

A *Nation* (or *People*) is a community, not a society. It is a community constituted as an acephalous, amorphous web of autonomous communities whose relation is generated and sustained by a shared ethnic-social foundation in a treasured land, history, tradition, and collective consciousness.

The *Body Politic* is a society humans create for cooperative work towards the *common good*. Its form is not a social contract but a covenant in which persons mutually pledge their lives in civic friendship, committing to work toward the common good, united by devotion to the Body Politic and the justice and the rule of law that are its ends.

The *Body Politic* spawns an intrinsically pluralistic *national community*, containing all the *Body Politic*'s communities and societies, including families, ecclesial bodies, and cultural, educational, and economic institutions. The *Body Politic* is pluralistic in that it contains many national communities or peoples, respecting their rights and freedoms so that justice enables their incorporation into a single national community without erasing their secondary national communities or peoples. The United States, for example, is simultaneously a confederation of national communities or peoples (e.g., First Nations, New Yorkers, Texans) and a single national community constituted by many peoples.

The *State* is a *society* created by the *Body Politic*, an agency specializing in promoting the common good, maintaining the law to which the people covenant to be bound, and administering the *Body Politic*'s affairs. As such, it is *not the head* of the *Body Politic* but its *instrument*, invested with authority solely for and as required by the common good.

In any *Nation*, multiple competing narratives describe the *Nation's* story in terms of who counts as members, how persons and communities relate to the *Body Politic* and the *State*, and how each relates to neighboring *Nations*. Narratives that respect the rights and liberties of all persons and peoples are rightly ordered. However, they are disordered when they divinize a particular national community within the *Nation* and render its claims to power absolute while marginalizing others and/or when they identify the *State* with the *Nation* and invite the *State* to enforce by law the primacy of one of its constituent national communities over others. We distinguish such disordered narratives from rightly-ordered narratives, aptly naming them as “nationalism."

Paul Miller illustrates this aspect of Christian nationalism with an extended reflection on German philosopher Johan Gottlieb Fichte. He was a contemporary of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling when France controlled Germany due to Napoleon's military successes. Fichte reflected on "what it meant to be German, what made a nation, and what defined national identity" in his *Addresses to the German Nation* in 1807 and 1808.[13]
In those addresses, Fichte asserts that only that which outlasts individual life is immortal. Therefore only a *people* and not a person is immortal. To love that which is worthy, we must love the immortal. Consequently, we have access to the eternal only through our participation in and love of one's people/nation.[16] This is the divinization of the nation.
Having identified the nation as the temporal locus of the eternal, Fichte emphasized the

importance of protecting its purity, urging citizens to carry on "without admixture of, or corruption by, any alien element." [17] Moreover, Fichte, reflecting on the loss of German nationhood due to Napoleon, calls the citizenry to sacrifice "the last drop of blood" if necessary to ensure the great gift of national identity is passed onto posterity.[18] Fichte concludes citizens should and will fight to preserve their nation for its higher purpose, but they ought not and will not fight for its constitution or creed.
Christian nationalism divinizes the nation; it co-opts Christian "symbols, liturgies, rituals, and messianic fervor" in an idolatrous movement where "... the religious is secularized, and the national sanctified." [21] Christian nationalism fuses with a community's religious faith to re-direct it to a new object of faith: the nation becomes its ultimate concern, co-opts Christian forms and institutions, and subordinates the Church. The Church's role is displaced; its purpose is merely to affirm the State, using its religious authority in service to the purposes of the State.

For Rogers Brubaker, a UCLA sociologist esteemed for his research on nationalistic movements, the questions - "What is a nation?" - and its correlate - "What is nationalism?" - are inappropriately formed. They presuppose that the things involved are phenomena having constant realities behind the words that name them, and comprehension consists of discovering the correct descriptions of their essences. However, if we want to understand "nation" and "nationalism," we need to begin with the recognition that they are not substances but practices, not - as in common parlance - "collectivities, entities, communities" but, philosophically, categories.[16]

Suppose we recognize that "nation" is a category. In that case, we can embrace what Max Weber meant when he taught that "nation" is a "*Wertbegriff*, a concept that belongs to the sphere of values (1964, 1992, pp. 675, 677; 1978 [1922], pp. 922, 925)".[17] "Nation" denotes practices, whether actualized or imagined, not entities. "Nation" does not describe a constant reality,

> "an ethnodemographic or ethnocultural fact; it is a political claim. It is a claim on people's loyalty, on their attention, on their solidarity...it is used...to change the world, to change the way people see. themselves, to mobilize loyalties, kindle energies, and articulate demands".[18]

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[16] Rogers Brubaker *, “In the Name of the Nation: Reflections on Nationalism and Patriotism1,” *Citizenship Studies* 8, no. 2 (June 2004): 115–27, https://doi.org/10.1080/1362102042000214705, 116.

[17] Rogers Brubaker *, “In the Name of the Nation: Reflections on Nationalism and Patriotism1,” *Citizenship Studies* 8, no. 2 (June 2004): 115–27, https://doi.org/10.1080/1362102042000214705, 116.

Our use of "nation" concerning a people is a political claim that others may or may not validate.

Suppose we recognize this. In that case, we can also acknowledge that "nationalism" is not a substance, entity, or something we can name as essentially good or evil. On the contrary, nationalism is a "particular language, a political idiom," a manner of speaking about nations.[19] It's a time-bound narrative about nations, *an imagining practice* that also belongs to the sphere of values. As political idioms, nationalisms are not intrinsically good or evil; we have to inquire about each to assess whether it's a narrative practice that can be supported or that should be nurtured or whether it's "at best an anachronistic, at worst a dangerous practice".[20]

Our use of "nation" can be part of our address to imagined communities that are not coincident with the geography or citizens of an existing state. It can also be part of our external address as we seek validation of political claims by other states and institutions. Such narratives usually involve the demand for an organized and recognized political society that is of, for, and by that community. 20th-century post-colonial movements in Asia and Africa and post-Cold War movements after the fall of the Soviet Union in Central and Eastern Europe epitomized such story-telling practices. Such political claims addressed supposed community members, competing with other peoplehood narratives to shape their self-understanding and identity as an existing or new nation.[21] "You are Tamil, not British." "You are Indian, not merely Tamil." "You are Israeli," "you are Palestinian," "you are Spanish," "you are Catalan," "you are Turk," "you are Kurdish." In each of these movements, distinct political idioms - nationalisms - sought to foster communal solidarity sufficient to claim that which the United Nations recognizes as a fundamental human right - a people's right to self-determination.

While peoplehood narratives can be used inclusively to foster reciprocal cooperation, mutual responsibility, and solidarity among citizens and residents of a nation, they can also be used exclusively. Peoplehood narratives - nationalisms - can

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[19] Rogers Brubaker *, “In the Name of the Nation: Reflections on Nationalism and Patriotism1,” *Citizenship Studies* 8, no. 2 (June 2004): 115–27, https://doi.org/10.1080/1362102042000214705, 116.

[20] Rogers Brubaker *, “In the Name of the Nation: Reflections on Nationalism and Patriotism1,” *Citizenship Studies* 8, no. 2 (June 2004): 115–27, https://doi.org/10.1080/1362102042000214705, 116.

[21] Rogers Brubaker *, “In the Name of the Nation: Reflections on Nationalism and Patriotism1,” *Citizenship Studies* 8, no. 2 (June 2004): 115–27, https://doi.org/10.1080/1362102042000214705, 117.

declare possession of political societies by peoples who form only part of states. Often such peoples are shaped by distinct ethno-traditions that they claim should be protected by the state; they also claim the state should be of and for their people, excluding other ethnoreligious, ethnolinguistic, or ethnocultural groups from full ownership of the state. This is the case, for example, for White Supremacists in the United States and Hindu nationalists in India. Given that the United Nations charter affirms national identity as a fundamental human right, such exclusive political narratives can be considered destructive.[22]

French scholar Ernest Renan, commenting on the loss of German-speaking Alsace-Lorraine to German after the 1870 Franco-Prussian War, defined "nation" as "an 'everyday plebiscite' (Renan, 1996,[1882]" (115).[23] That captures well the always-in-the-present practice of political idioms by which Sapiens dialectically imagine our peoplehood. At any moment, we pass through a brief equilibrium in our national discourse about who we are becoming and how we will get there.

In that discourse, our nationalisms can be creative or destructive, stuck in the past, or propel us toward a fruitful future. They are the political languages with which we negotiate our national identity. It's a category error to think we can banish them. In the encounter with an evil nationalism, our only way forward is to out-narrate it.

The news bulletin was orange with big gold lettering. Memory is dim concerning the exact wording, but it etched with permanent markers two things in my mind. A date. April 4, 1968. And an event that I intuited was historic based on my parents' reactions. Someone killed Martin Luther King, Jr.

I didn't know who he was, but I knew we weren't ever supposed to say his name in our house. I knew that because Keith said Mamma told Marie that. Marie didn't say anything but just kept ironing and humming as though it was the most natural mandate in the world. Their relationship was complex.

Dad once explained that the man was a troublemaker, which he often called me. He didn't like that I talked back, and I guessed that he thought the same of the dead man.

But he didn't say that when that orange bulletin interrupted *Daniel Boone*.

Urgency. "Grace! You need to see this!" Mom was washing dishes while we men watched TV. When Chet Huntley came on and told the world what happened, they seemed stricken. It was as though they knew we lost something precious that night because we desperately needed the

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[22] Rogers Brubaker *, "In the Name of the Nation: Reflections on Nationalism and Patriotism1," *Citizenship Studies* 8, no. 2 (June 2004): 115–27, https://doi.org/10.1080/1362102042000214705., 117.

[23] Rogers Brubaker *, "In the Name of the Nation: Reflections on Nationalism and Patriotism1," *Citizenship Studies* 8, no. 2 (June 2004): 115–27, https://doi.org/10.1080/1362102042000214705, 115.

trouble that troublemaker caused.

I remembered MLK as I sat recently with several scholars and bishops discussing nationalism. Our task is to advise the Episcopal House of Bishops on how to respond to the reported rise in Christian nationalism. We unanimously see Christian nationalism as sinful.

However, several colleagues go further. They repeat a claim I read often on social media. They claim that all kinds of nationalism are intrinsically evil.

I don't see it this way. In theology-speak, nationalism is a created good. It's not God's creation; it's something humans create as we cooperate with God in sustaining everyday life. As with all things, we can use it for good or evil.

Recognizing this is important for two reasons:

- We create nationalisms to resist tyranny
- Healthy nationalisms are the only way to cure unhealthy nationalisms

I'll explain these below, but first, it's essential to recognize where my colleagues err. They presuppose that nationalism and, implicitly, its correlate, "nation," are things with fixed realities behind the words that name them.

It's the same mistake some make with Scripture: they assume reading Scripture consists of isolating the single meaning behind the text that is true for all times and all contexts, as though Scripture is a univocal, static thing rather than a Living Word that speaks to us in our moment.

Americans often use nation and State interchangeably, but they are distinct. The State is a government entity devoted to the service of, by, and for the people. In my usage, people and nation are interchangeable terms.

"Nation" and "nationalism" are not substances but practices. Once we get that, we get why suggesting either is inherently evil is wrong.

Nations are not "collectivities, entities, communities" but philosophical categories. To say a group is a nation is to make a political claim on people's fidelity, identity, and cooperation to mobilize them to change their world.[24]

As the current Gaza War reminds us, it's also a claim that third parties must validate. They do that by observing the people's behaviors.

Like a church, a nation is not something a people are but something they perform. Or at least imagine themselves performing. Just as "We will know they are Christians by their love," we recognize nations by their shared commitment to mutual flourishing.

When we recognize nations are not entities but practices of large-scale mutual flourishing, it becomes clear that "nationalism" is not a substance, entity, or something we can name as essentially good or evil.[25] On the contrary, nationalism is a peoplehood story, a symbolic

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[24] Brubaker, Rogers. 2004. "In the Name of the Nation: Reflections on Nationalism and Patriotism." Citizenship Studies 8 (2): 115–27. https://doi.org/10.1080/1362102042000214705.

[25] Brubaker, Rogers. 2004. "In the Name of the Nation: Reflections on Nationalism and Patriotism." *Citizenship Studies* 8 (2): 115–27. https://doi.org/10.1080/1362102042000214705.

discourse with which we speak about nations.[26] It's a time-bound narrative about nations, *an imagining practice* that belongs to the sphere of values.[27]

As political idioms, nationalisms are not intrinsically good or evil; we must inquire about peoplehood stories to assess whether they are narrative practices that we should support or revise or whether they are "at best an anachronistic, at worst a dangerous practice."[28]

While we can use peoplehood narratives inclusively to foster reciprocal cooperation, mutual responsibility, and solidarity among citizens and residents of a nation, we can also use them exclusively. Peoplehood narratives can declare possession of political societies by groups who form only part of states. Often, such groups are shaped by distinct ethno-traditions that they claim should be protected by the State; they also claim the State should be of and for their people, excluding other ethnoreligious, ethnolinguistic, or ethnocultural groups from full ownership of the State.

Such is the case, for example, for White Supremacists in the United States and Hindu nationalists in India. Given that the United Nations charter affirms national identity as a fundamental human right, we rightly judge such exclusive political narratives as destructive.7

Our nationalisms can be creative or destructive, stuck in the past, or propel us toward a fruitful future. They are the political languages with which we negotiate our national identity. It's a category error to think we can banish them. In the encounter with an evil nationalism, our only way forward is to out-narrate it.[29]

Mom and Dad thought MLK was a troublemaker. But by their shock at his death, my 8-year-old brain discerned their sense of loss. He troubled their hearts with his non-stop talk of Beloved Community. With that discourse, he invited Black Americans to resist tyranny. By retelling America's story, he told a better story about how all Americans can practice the shared commitment to mutual flourishing we claim as the cause of our Constitution.

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[26] Smith, Rogers M. 2015. *Political Peoplehood: The Roles of Values, Interests, and Identities*. Reprint edition. University of Chicago Press.

[27] Brubaker 116

[28] Brubaker; Smith.

[29] Smith, Rogers M. 2020. *That Is Not Who We Are!: Populism and Peoplehood*. Yale University Press. See also Calhoun, Craig. 1998. *Nationalism*. First Edition. Minneapolis: Univ Of Minnesota Press; Calhoun, Craig. 2017. "The Rhetoric of Nationalism." In *Everyday Nationhood: Theorising Culture, Identity, and Belonging after Banal Nationalism*, edited by Michael Skey and Marco Antonsich, 1st ed. 2017 edition. Palgrave Macmillan; Marback, Richard, ed. 2016. "Lincoln and Obama: Two Visions of Civic Union." In *Representation and Citizenship*, by Rogers M. Smith. Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press.

Death of MLK

Baton Rouge

Role in Story

Sets up idea of a positive form of nationalism and its contrast with violence

Related Characters

Chet Huntley

Season

April

Unique Features

Description

Sights

The orange background and white print of the News Bulletin, interrupting our Thursday night programming

Mom doing dishes

Sounds

Sounds of shock from parents

Smell

Notes

I began work on this series thinking this would be a straightforward account of the Christian nationalism on display on January 6, 2021. I soon discovered that it's far more challenging to collaborate with others concerning Christian nationalism because folks begin with various unexamined assumptions about nationalism, Christian nationalism, and, relatedly, White-Christian populism. Furthermore, part of the reason is that we disagree on the meanings of these concepts.

Nationalism and populism are contested terms because research has led to significant developments in our understanding of them over the last sixty years. Nationalism became a focus of study in the early 20th century. Early theorists saw it as a significant historical force, arising first in Europe and spreading globally, driving transformations of societal, political, economic, and cultural structures into modernity. Populism studies emerged seventy years ago, and its theorists saw its movements, in contrast to nationalism, as occasional, isolated, temporal, and aberrant events; they considered populist movements to be on the fringe. Because of these initial theories, nationalism and populism were seen as entirely different phenomena ([30]).

However, two significant shifts have caused scholars to conceive both phenomena differently. First, they no longer see either as an engine of modernity. Today, they recognize nationalism as an enduring and omnipresent feature of 21st-century nations. Similarly, the current scholarly consensus views populism as an enduring and regularly

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[30] Brubaker 2020:1-2

occurring feature of democracies. Second, most political theorists now see both phenomena as *performative discourses* or constituted by characteristic narratives, myths, and symbols by which leaders help people imagine their peoplehood [31].

Both phenomena are mixed discourses, with some emphasizing populist claims within nationalisms and others emphasizing nationalist claims within populisms ([32]). Indeed, today's 21st-century populisms usually integrate nationalist or "civilizationist" claims ([33]).

What is Populism?

Like nationalism, populism is a contested term, with historians and social scientists using it to describe a host of movements across the world. One reason it is not easy to define is that few people or movements self-describe as such. Most scholars can agree on populism's illiberal dimension in which a leader claims to represent the authentic people over and against others within the polis, usually described as unscrupulous and unjust. Usually, populists describe these others as establishment "elites," but sometimes, they additionally target historically marginalized groups or minorities ([34].

Summarizing the current scholarship on populism, Takis Pappas helpfully proposed that we best comprehend 21st-century populism with a minimalist definition: populism = democratic illiberalism [35]. In addition to achieving broad consensus, that minimalist definition invites us to focus on populism's two constitutive elements, *democracy* and *illiberalism*.

Let’s briefly review those two constitutive terms.

Comparative politics theorist Adam Przeworski defines democracy minimally as "a system in which incumbents lose elections and leave office when the rules so dictate" [36]. That simple definition may surprise Westerners who routinely conflate democracy with classical liberal values. Nevertheless, the key to democracy is the location of sovereignty with the people. Karl Popper noted that democracy is "the only

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[31] (Moffitt 2019:9-25)

[32] Brubaker 2020:2-6; Freeden 2016; Pappas 2019

[33] Brubaker 2017a

[34] Moffitt 2019:10)

[35] (Pappas 2019:33)

[36] (Przeworski et al. 2000: 54)

system in which citizens can overthrow their rulers by peaceful electoral means" [37]. Populism minimally embraces democracy.

My favorite definition of liberal democracy comes from philosopher Michael Walzer, who points out that the adjectival use of "liberal" is vital: "liberal" modifies and complicates the nouns it precedes; it has an effect that is sometimes constraining, sometimes enlivening, sometimes transforming. It determines not who we are but how we are who we are—how we enact our ideological commitments" (Walzer 2023:4). That leads to Walzer's description of how liberal democrats act: "Liberal democrats will defend a state where power is constrained, where the common life is pluralist and inclusive, where the right of opposition is protected, where teachers make sure that the curiosity of children is cultivated rather than repressed, and where every man and woman is a political agent, able to join any and all meetings and movements and free to stay home—the equal of all the others" [38].

Takis Pappis aptly and succinctly summarizes Walzer's expansive description of liberal democrats' actions. A liberal democracy is a polity that presupposes "a plurality of conflicting interests," and seeks to mitigate and resolve conflicts through a shared commitment to "commonly agreed institutions, the rule of law, and the protection of minority rights." Furthermore, if any of these three shared mutually reinforcing commitments is lacking, the polity may be democratic, but it ceases to be liberal ([39].

With these definitions in view, we can now say more about populism. Given our minimalist definition of populism as the politics of illiberal democracy, it is clear that populists compete in elections and leave office according to the rule of law. They reject at least one of liberalism's three mutually reinforcing commitments. They reject the mediation of established institutions, the rule of law, or the protection of minority rights, or perhaps multiple of these. We aptly describe political discourse as populist if (and only if) it embraces competitive elections and rejects at least one of the fundamentals of liberal democracy.

Because populism is by definition democratic - meaning it embraces elections that it sees as conveying the sovereign people's authority, but also illiberal, it is intrinsically unstable. Like a pendulum, it swings between the poles of liberalism and autocracy. Remove its commitment to democracy, and it becomes authoritarianism; heal its illiberal ways, and liberal democracy may re-emerge.

Pappas' minimal definition helps us recognize populism when we see it, and it also

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[37] (Popper 1945 in Pappas 2019:1)

[38] (Walzer 2023:28)

[39] Pappas 2019:2)

helps us define what it is not populism. Because "populism is always democratic but never liberal," movements that embody either political liberalism or nondemocratic autocracy are, by definition, not populist.

How Populism Operates

Populist movements are creations of the human imagination. Charismatic leaders are their architects.

Greek populist leader Andreas Papandreou summarized a vital distinction between liberal and populist democracy when he said, "There are no institutions - there's only the people" ([40]. He expressed the populist perspective well, but he was wrong. All democracies have two sides. On one side are institutions that are, by design, "impersonal, universally applicable, and characterized by continuity" ([41]). On the other side is the body politic, a dynamic community constructed and shaped by competing and evolving narratives about who and what constitutes the people and where they are going.

Democracies are, like all communities, creations of the human imagination. Liberal democracies are crowd-sourced rational constructions, but charismatic leaders architect populist democracies. That is because liberalism seeks to locate political power in liberal institutions that oversee, transmit, and adjudicate general rules for communal life. In contrast, charismatic leaders create narratives through symbolic action that bypass and delegitimatize liberal institutions, promote alternative priorities, address the people's emotions rather than their reason, and defend their ethnotradition rather than prescribe detailed policies.

Populist movements grow in soil fertilized with localized mixes of "economic inequality, social injustice, and political exclusion ([42]). These are "relational" and participatory grievances and not epistemic facts that can be remedied merely with institutional rationality. At stake is the people's identity and relationship to the collective. When the people do not get the love, respect, and care they believe is their due, resentment germinates. Resentment functions like race, class, religion, and language as the tie that binds individuals into a political movement. Resentment is contagious and transcends physical boundaries. When democracies undergo significant cultural and economic changes, the dysfunction or absence of needed liberal institutions becomes painfully visible. Populist entrepreneurs pounce on the grievances that result, gathering

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[40] cited in Pappas 2014a:28)

[41] Pappas 2019: 107

[42] Pappis 2019: 109

people into a political movement where the tie that binds is their resentment.

Charismatic leaders construct a new populist group identity through symbolic action that names the causes of shared resentment and promises deliverance. Populist "entrepreneurs" construct populist discourses not with policy prescriptions but with symbolic actions, metaphors, and slogans that address voters at the emotional rather than the rational level. Charismatic leaders' chief method is to frame the existence that generates resentment in such a way that it enables individuals to organize and articulate emotions about their situation. Simple framing, constantly repeated, voices, validates and mobilizes anger. It inspires individuals to see themselves as part of a movement demanding change and united behind their populist leaders.

Populist leaders speak on behalf of "the people," a concept ambiguously denoting ordinary working-class people, a discrete group that sees itself as the state's constituting community, or all its citizens. Populists speak against those above - and sometimes below - "the people." This vertical dimension describing "the people" as threatened by internal elites above and other internal groups below is the essential feature of populist politics ([43]). This is why populist discourse is always illiberal.

At the same time, populists speak against economic, political, and cultural threats outside the polity. This horizontal "us" and "them" opposition is the nationalist dimension by which peoplehood narratives describe who counts as a member. Today's populists typically portray elites as outsiders who are also "on top" of the people ([44]).

Sociologist Rogers Brubaker conceives this fundamental element of populism as a "two-dimensional discursive space" ([45]). The vertical dimension reflects the populist account of the distribution of "power, wealth, [and] institutionally consecrated prestige." The horizontal dimension reflects the nationalist "inside-outside" account of the polity, with internal insiders, "internal outsiders," and "external outsiders." "The people" and their legitimate (populist) leaders are the insiders. "Othered" groups of low power or prestige and (hypocritical, uncaring, out-of-touch) elites are internal outsiders.

Low prestige groups may be othered for ethnoracial, cultural, or moral reasons. Populists often marginalize non-elites who possess wealth, power, and prestige due to their lifestyle, gender, or sexual identity. These groups are internal outsiders, meaning that populists acknowledge their technical membership within the polis but exclude them from "the people" due to low prestige or social marginalization. External outsiders include non-elite ethnocultural migrants or refugees, "global capital, cosmopolitan

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[43] Berman 2021; Brubaker 2017a; Hawkins et al., 2017; Margalit 2019, Smith 2020

[44] Brubaker 2017a; Brubaker 2017b; Brubaker 2020; Margalit 2019

[45] Brubaker 2020:56; Brubaker 2017a

culture, [and] powerful outside states or organizations" ([46].

Populists claim to speak for "the people" and bi-vocally against the "elites" and "outsiders" who threaten them. As the 2016 presidential campaigns of Bernie Sanders and Donald Trump remind us, populist politics are phenomena we see on the Left and the Right. What distinguishes them is not their form but their substance. Their two-dimensional narrative that locates elites above and outside "the people" renders their politics populist.

The People, the Elite, and Outsiders

If populism is democratic illiberalism, it also could reasonably be described as the claim that political sovereignty arises from, for, and is exercised by "the people" and not from, for, or by mediating institutions or those outside "the people." Restating the concept of populism this way helpfully sets our eyes on a related concept: "the people." Populism conceives "the people" in ways detrimental to the interests of liberal democracy.

"The people" is a dynamic, contingent social construct, not an ontological reality. Better put, its reality is a social and temporal construction. "The people" do not preexist. The discourse they respond to, self-identifying with its claims, gathers them into a single indivisible people who see themselves as the exclusive owners of the nation's history and, therefore, as the "ultimate deciders" in whom the nation's sovereignty rests. As individuals, they are diverse, but populist discourse constructs a fictional and fluid homogeneity that claims precedence over all "outside" its union [47].

Much of that is true about the group the people oppose, "the elite," or, sometimes, "the establishment." Both groups are social constructions with fluid and flexible memberships. The "elite" - often including elected officials, the courts, legislators, law enforcement, scholars, and the media - are those responsible for abandoning, disrespecting, and incompetently serving "the people."

A person is not populist; a political style or discourse is. Populism is an attribute of the discourse that generates "insiders" and "outsiders" in a person's political imaginary, inspiring them to identify as "insiders." Because populism is an attribute of a discourse, leaders perform it through symbolic words and actions.

Populism, like Christianity, is a performative discourse that generates and connects communities. Within that discourse, charismatic leaders draw upon a repertoire of symbolic language and actions to construct a significant following who see themselves

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[46] Brubaker 2020:56)

[47] (Freeden 2016:4)

as the authentic people in whom sovereignty is vested, to distance themselves from other elites to disrespect establishment norms that offend "the people," to transform institutional failures into crises and to convey threats of action that will follow if establishment leaders do not meet "the people's" demands.

Pappas names four fundamental claims populist movements make about those they denote as "the people": their ability to act as a political majority, their putatively homogeneous and native character, their shared oppression by "impersonal institutions," and their superior moral authority. These claims are not incompatible with democracy (etymologically, *demokratia* means the *demos* (people) *kraiten* (rule). However, these claims contradict fundamental principles of modern liberal democracy learned through reflection on the tragedies of World War II: averting what James Madison called "the tyranny of the majority," encouraging fruitful coexistence of multiple peoples within a polis, safeguarding institutional checks and balances by prioritizing them above self-interests; and pursuing the common welfare peacefully rather than resolving conflict by violent assertion of group or individual rights ([48].

How to Recognize Populist Discourse

Rogers Brubaker suggests we conceive common populist forms with the metaphor of repertoire ([49]). He names six elements that characterize populist politics, emphasizing that their populist aspect may be recognizable due to general or granular similarities. Not all movements exhibit all features; the blend of multiple elements makes such political styles populist.

The populism repertoire features recurring elements that elaborate the vertical opposition between "the people" and the elite and the horizontal opposition between inside and outside. Brubaker names five elements.

The first is "antagonistic re-politicization," in which the movement re-asserts the people's control over matters seen to be controlled by elites ([50]). For example, claims that the Supreme Court controls women's health through judicial regulation of abortion or unaccountable administrative agencies create unbearable regulatory burdens have triggered movements on the Left and Right to re-politicize those matters by returning them to legislative branches of the state and federal governments, respectively.

The second is "majoritarianism," enforcing the majority's will against minorities, challenging benefits, practices, and recognition of minority, marginalized, and elite

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[48] Pappas 2019:33)

[49] Brubaker 2017b:7-10

[50] Brubaker 2017b:14

groups ([51]. Examples include populist movements against affirmative action programs, the failure to reduce the flow of immigrants, and the bailouts of central banks.

The third characteristic feature is "Anti-institutionalism." Populist movements commonly doubt and discredit established institutions that serve mediating functions ([52]). Sometimes, their skepticism targets their own party's established order, as happened with Trump's takeover of the Republican party and with Progressive's efforts to control the Democrat party's platform. In recent years, we have witnessed populist efforts to discredit the Justice Department, the FBI, and the press.

Fourth, populists practice "protectionism." They promise to protect "the people" from all enemies, foreign and domestic, which translates into policy commitments that seek to insulate "the people" from economic, security, and cultural threats to their ways of life ([53]). Examples include promises to impose retaliatory tariffs on China, to stop all immigration flows from the U.S. southern borders, and to halt federal critical race theory training.

The fifth element of populist politics is the strategic use of a "low" communication style that deliberately transgresses the "high" rhetorical and behavioral norms of the established order to convey the populist's proximity to the people, provoke elites, and attract attention ([54]). Trump's performative vulgarity, rejection of political correctness, and conspicuous crudity epitomize the populist politics of contrast through a "low" communications style.

Why Populism Ebbs and Flows

Brubaker notes three elements of populist discourse that render it "self-limiting." He dubs the first "poaching." Other political agents readily and commonly appropriate populist styles and substance. Sometimes, this is by allies, and the movement carries on. However, sometimes, it is done by opponents who combat populist politics by co-opting its themes and prescriptions, effectively robbing the populist movement of oxygen.

Second, other political agents can successfully oppose populist crises with "non-crisis." That is, they declare that the issue populists describe as a crisis is not a crisis at all and can be addressed within established institutions and ways of being. Since

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[51] Brubaker 2017b:15)

[52] Brubaker 2017b:16

[53] Brubaker 2017b:17

[54] Brubaker 2017b:18

populist movements depend on sustained crisis psychology for their political energy, they are self-limited by their capacity to persuade the public that the sky is falling.

Third, populist leaders depend on the public's "enchantment," their capacity to sustain the trust that they represent the people exceptionally better than elites even after being entrusted with the power to fulfill their promises ([55].

Populism ebbs and flows because, as with any discourse, people respond. Opponents co-opt, establishment leaders defuse crises, and empowered populists struggle to deliver once empowered. Populist moments pass. It’s crucial to take them seriously, but equally important to expect them to give way to moments of peace, stability, and prosperity once their stimuli have been addressed.

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Personal Economic Insecurity Does Not Cause Populism

Saved

Political scientist Yotam Margalit argues that the standard accounts exaggerate the role played by economic insecurity in determining electoral support for populism. First, he finds that those who emphasize economic insecurity as a causal factor in recent elections confuse "outcome significance" and "explanatory significance." Election data show that economic insecurity marginally impacted election outcomes and did not explain why people voted for populist candidates.

Second, Margalit's research shows that economic insecurity did not drive voters' anxiety about immigration. Though immigration was a significant driver of their vote, its perceived impact on their financial position did cause their concerns with massive immigration flows.

Finally, Margalit contends that those who see populist voters' cultural resentment as mainly a product of economic changes understate the discrete contribution of cultural concerns for populist voters. Moreover, such arguments often get the causal arrow backward: populist voter resentment often is not due to their loss in economic standing wrought by economic changes but their perception of how those changes will affect their community's cultural and social life.

One standard account of the populist movements in the USA focuses on the so-called "China Shock," the loss of manufacturing jobs resulting from China's admission to the World Trade Organization in 2001. As one who lived in Northern Indiana from

2007-2010, I can attest to the hardship endured in the Midwest due to the systemic restructuring of the global economy as plant after plant laid off workers. This argument points to that hardship and proposes that the consequences of trade liberalization drove affected workers into the populist movement.

Similarly, a second argument focuses on how the Digital Age has caused American employers to pivot from manufacturing to service provision, outsourcing low-skilled and manufacturing jobs abroad while expanding the hiring of middle- and high-skilled workers. This argument points to the dislocation of low-skilled workers and the increasing inequality between low- and high-skilled workers, claiming this trend adversely affected workers ripe for populist appeals.

The Great Recession wiped out significant wealth of homeowners and investors. It caused massive layoffs and loss of income for average Americans. Many argue that the bailout of global financial institutions and major manufacturers while middle-class workers suffered hardship disenchanted middle-class voters by prioritizing elites' needs while ignoring the less-privileged's needs. This disenchantment led them to distrust the established leadership of both major parties. It readied them for populist appeals of anti-establishment candidates.

While other arguments focus on the economic impact of jobs transferred off-shore, the final view emphasizes the competition for remaining jobs by foreign workers. Proponents observe that immigration - whether temporary or permanent - puts downward pressure on wages and threatens jobs currently held by citizens. Moreover, the costs of providing social services to legal and illegal immigrants and processing massive waves of immigrants at our borders strain local, state, and federal budgets and present an undue burden on taxpayers. This account argues that job competition and overwhelming pressure on public services make border-state voters particularly receptive to populist appeals.

Analysis of the 2016 presidential vote in states constituting the Democrat's "Blue Wall" in Pennsylvania, Michigan, and Wisconsin shows that the economic shock from rapid growth in trade imbalances with China was small but statistically significant. Hillary Clinton would have won the election were it not for the impact of the China trade shock.

However, the claim that Trump won the election because of the economic effects of the China shock confuses outcome significance with explanatory significance. It is like saying that a football team lost a tight Super Bowl game because of a missed kick after a touchdown. In reality, it impacted the outcome, but it does not explain why the game was so close and ignores the impact of all the other plays in the game. The China shock had a small but significant effect on the election. However, the overwhelming cause of the result is partisanship: most Americans voted for the same party in 2016 that they voted for in 2012 (Margolit 2019: 155-6).

The preceding does not imply that the China Shock or other factors related to economic insecurity had no impact on the election; the point is that it is a mistake to explain the growth in American right-wing populism by suggesting that economic insecurity causes populism.

While most scholars agree that economic factors cause waves of immigration, that is not true concerning the claim that the financial costs of receiving and absorbing immigrants cause populism. Scholars have commonly assumed that native workers perceive immigrants as a threat to their income and that their sense of economic insecurity due to the arrival of immigrants drives them to support populism.

Other scholars have noted the correlation between education levels, ethnocentrism, and tolerance of outgroup members. Lower levels of education correlate with higher ethnocentrism and less outgroup tolerance; higher education levels correlate with more positive attitudes toward immigration. These scholars conclude that opposition to immigration is caused not by economic insecurity but by cultural insecurity - the concern

that immigration threatens their White-Christian cultural homogeneity.

In contrast with the theory that natives' economic insecurity drives opposition to immigration, empirical studies show that natives do not oppose the immigration of workers with competitive skills. Higher-educated natives are more likely to support immigration of both high- and low-skilled workers.

Empirical experiments show that if economic factors contribute to an individual's opposition to immigration, it is rarely due to a sense that immigration will diminish one's financial wellness. It almost always concerns anxiety about the economic burden on the collective.

The studies confirm that while opposition to immigration is vital to most populist voters, anxiety about White-Christian homogeneity and power and the economic burden on society and not personal economic insecurity drive that concern.

Multiple empirical studies of the "losers of globalization" - those who self-identify "as harmed by trade openness and those more like to favor protectionist trade measures" - show that one's occupation, skill set, employment status, and global competitiveness of one's industry have marginal outcome effects and negligible explanatory effects on their views of international trade (Margalit 2019:164).

One's education, which correlates with one's ethnocentrism, is the only occupational characteristic "that is robustly associated with trade attitudes" (Margalit 2019:164).

Repeated empirical studies testing the effect of economic insecurity on attitudes

towards various issues that are common populist concerns - such as free trade, international trade zones, and immigration - show that anxieties about those policies' implications for cultural change better explain public discontent.

In short, long-term emancipatory politics have brought about significant structural changes in society, including open access to higher education, the greater valuation of ethnic diversity as an end, the commercialization of agriculture and consequent urbanization of work, and the rethinking of gender roles. These changes have moved historically "outside" lifestyles, religions, and cultures to formal "insider" status, changing American culture's power dynamics. The United States is transitioning from a relatively homogeneous people governed by a democracy ruled by and mainly for its White-Christian super-majority into a land of many peoples governed by the world's first multiethnic, multicultural liberal democracy.

The changes in the normativity of historically marginalized lifestyles, religions, cultures, and cultural power dynamics have enriched American life. However, they have also caused some to perceive these changes displace their values and dilute their collective power. White males, older generations, the least educated, and religious conservatives especially perceive this as accurate.

Beyond the polis, structural economic changes have intensified trade globalization's effects and magnified foreign nations' impacts on our culture and economy. Massive unrelieved immigration waves have done the same. These outside influences compound the perception by these same groups that their beloved American culture and their social and economic power are under attack.

As a consequence of these changing cultural and economic dynamics, many Americans - and especially older White males and the least educated of both sexes - resent the highly educated, wealthy, and prestigious elites who have promoted and presided over the changes rather than protecting "the people" from their effects. Their

resentment fuels nostalgia for a "Golden Age" when America's power dynamics favored them. Populist entrepreneurs construct their populist movement by voicing their resentment.

Various ethnographic studies clarify how perceived distance from elites causes those who believe long-term cultural changes dilute their cultural power to feel the elites' "disregard, disrespect, or condescension." Their emotional sense that they have been abandoned, in turn, drives their attitudes towards policy issues, "such as the idea that government resources are allocated unfairly, the notion that urban residents (and particularly minorities) get more than their fair share of resources, or the strong conviction that immigrants are a major drain on the government budget" (Margalit 2019:166).

All suggestions
Nothing can stop you now!

Derive from this sermon:

202210300245 Sermon Notes for 30 Oct

#Sermons

- One of the hard things physicians have to do is explain to folks why they are dying. "It's because you've smoked for the last three decades." "It's because you've pickled your innards with alcohol for decades." My wife, and other oncologists, serve during our American epidemic of obesity; they regularly have to explain to folks with BMI's over 50 that when our bodies become filled with too much adipose tissue, we tend to generate so many mutated cells that we grow within ourselves cancer that kills us. So if we are dying of certain kinds of cancer, the most likely explanation is that our obesity created the conditions for deadly mutations to flourish and ultimately crush the healthy organs we need to live. **The point is, if we are dying, it’s our thick habits that are the cause of our own demise**.
- ALTERNATIVE INTRO
- As some of you know, I was appointed to the Theology Committee of the House of Bishops of the Episcopal Church. We had our first meeting last

week. Our purpose is to provide the bishops with a rich understanding of a prescription for the Church's response to White Christian Nationalism. Today I want to share with you one of the questions I raised. We know the blossoming of White Christian Nationalism is a response of fear to something going on in the USA. But what do White Christian Nationalists fear. The answer is that they fear being displaced by a competing people. They call them the Coastal Elites.But here's the thing. What's causing the polarization we're experiencing in our country is two different nationalisms competing for hegemony in the United States. Most of us are not White Christian Nationalists though we may have family members who are. But here's the thing. Many of us may have bought in to some of the tenets of this second form of nationalism. And to the extent the Episcopal Church has, that may explain why our bishops all across the country are immersed in shutting down parishes and merging dioceses as the Episcopal Church experiences a tragic decline in membership.

- Richard Hooker, in his masterpiece that made him the Father of Anglicanism, emphasized the importance of the Church always being the **mystical *visible* body of Christ**. We've spoken at length about the 'body of Christ' part. We, the Church, are called to be the living hands of our risen Lord as He carries out his ministry of reconciling the created order to our Creator. We construct lives with Jesus as the center; our daily lives center on living in relationship with Jesus through the Holy Spirit and trying in every moment to follow Him along the Way of Love because we understand that as our mission, as the means through which we participate in His life and are thereby connected to the Vine; it's how we are grafted into and become part of Israel and carry on our mission of living in such a way that we draw the world into holy friendship with God. We've also often spoken about the mystical part... How the Spirit acts upon us to make Jesus present in certain practices that he commanded us to perform, and how, when we perform them, Jesus the Christ is **really** present. He comes alongside us and schools us himself so that we learn what it means to walk the Way of Love. But Hooker also emphasized the visible part - **the importance that our mystical union be visible to the world**. For it is **only when we are visible** that we perform our mission of drawing the world into Christ's body; **it's only when we are visible** that we pass on the gift of identity in Christ to others so that they become part of that body, too. It's only when our mystical body **is visible** that the world is invited into the blessing of being schooled mystically by Christ himself concerning what it means to flourish in the fullness of our humanity. Hooker pointed out that, If we are merely the mystical *invisible* body of Christ, we impede the work of Christ, **and so ought to expect that the Spirit will allow us to wither and die**. Because we then become like an organ designed for human flourishing that is so caked with adipose tissue that it can no longer do its part, and so mutations metastasize and the body

dies. When we turn to the doctor and ask why we are dying, the answer is that we stopped being the mystical visible body of Christ and the mutations we generated killed us.

- Which leads me to our American war between competing forms of nationalism. We've spoken quite a lot here about White Christian nationalism. A key insight is that it begins with supersessionism. Europeans displace the Jews in their narrative of our life with God. The Europeans take the role of Israel as the chosen people through whom God is acting to reconcile the world, and the Jews are re-cast, becoming the new gentiles. It's a dehistoricising move: in that supersessionist move, Israel's crucial part of the story is erased. It effectively no longer matters. The Hebrew Scriptures become the Old Testament, and the Apostolic Scriptures become the New Testament. Israel's history becomes irrelevant. What remains, what get carried forward and emphasized so much that it dominates our narrative, is the story that Jesus died for our sins. But Jesus's incarnation is also effectively erased, because all that really matters is that he died and rose. Jesus is the name we give to the one who saves us, but both Israel's history and his concreteness aren't visible. When we tell the story of how we know what it means to be human, we no longer look to the hills; it's no longer God who became man to teach how to flourish, no longer Jesus who recapitulates Israel in his life who teaches how to flourish. No, in Christian nationalism, Israel and Jesus are effectively erased from the story except to the extent that Jesus is the name we give to the one who saves us from a destiny in Hell.
- So how do we know what human flourishing looks like? We look at ourselves. That's where the White nationalism comes in. Because instead of pointing to Jesus, white Christian nationalism points to a received tradition, a received set of ideals of how a good citizen of our nation lives. And so the answer to the question of how we flourish is that we pattern ourselves on our portrait of the ideal American, who turns out to be a derivative of a White European Male mixed with Andrew Jackson's frontier individualism.
- We've been talking about White Christian nationalism so much because 25% of Americans now identify as such, and they are angry. The question I want to place before you is why are they angry? **From whom do they want to take their country back?** And the answer is that they feel they are being displaced themselves by a competitive account of human flourishing. Like White Christian Nationalism, this account also looks not vertically to God but horizontally to humanity to answer the question about what it means to be human. This account is also a form of nationalism in that sense. We might call it Post-Christian Nationalism. It's the ideology that dominates our elite academic institutions and our national media. Again, if you ask the question, how do we humans learn what it means to be fully human, Post-Christian Nationalists don't point to Jesus. They point to an abstraction called Rational Man, who turns out

to look a lot like a White European, too. Only this is Enlightened Man. Scientific Man. **The person who's progressed in history so much that they are wise enough to leave all the myths and superstitions of religion behind them**. Religion has no place in the public square. Post-Christian Nationalism is paradoxically cosmopolitanism, globalism. **It's the liberalism that emphasizes Reason in the public square and autonomy in private life**. But it's actually a form of nationalism in the sense that Post-Christian Nationalists **are tribal, too. If you don't agree with their standards of reasonableness, then you are excluded, canceled**. The criteria for membership in their tribe is subscription to their model of Enlightened Man.

- But what I want you to see this morning is that, as with White Christian Nationalism, the story of Israel and the concreteness of Jesus is also erased. When answering the question about how we humans flourish, the Hebrew and Apostolic Scriptures are not relevant. What is relevant is the portrait of the Cosmopolitan Rational Man elevated as the ideal American at our elite universities and in our media. That's the enemy White Christian Nationalism seeks to eradicate. Both are nationalisms. Both are at war for the American soul.
- To what extent are we Post-Christian Christians? One diagnostic question to consider is this: in the encounter with other world religions or in the encounter with the Nones, how do you think about Jesus? Is Jesus merely our way of thinking about human flourishing and other ways are to be seen as alternative paths that equally valid? To what extent is Jesus actually your exemplar? To what extent do you contemplate the life and teachings of Jesus and pray for his Spirit to guide you as you seek to become fully human? Or are you effectively a supersessionist who is friendly to Jews but sees Israel's story as irrelevant to the way you live? To what extent have you erased the relevance of Jesus in your life except to the extent he's the name you give to the person who saved you from Hell?
- The Post-Christian Christian is so infected by Post-Christian nationalism that **they substitute cosmopolitan Man for Jesus' role.** If asked about the tie that binds us, the answer is our common habitation of the earth, rather than our common commitment to follow Jesus' Way of Love. If asked about how we know what it means to be fully human, they fall into the **abyss of relativism**. In their humility, they make the same move as White Christian Nationalist: Israel's history and Jesus' history effectively are rendered meaningless.
- Yet if Jesus' concrete history is meaningless to you in your encounter with other world religions and the Nones, then you are part of the mystical body of Christ but you've - in that moment - rendered that body **invisible**. And when that habit of thought thickens, it can metastasize in our fellowship and render our part of the Body of Christ no longer capable of fulfilling our role. **We ought**

not be surprised if the Spirit allows us to wither like the grass in winter.

- There is another way. First, remember always that **Truth is ontologically absolute, yet epistemologically relative.** The right move is not to declare the faith of other world religions or the Nones are alternative paths to human flourishing in accordance with the cosmopolitan nationalism that feigns humility while insisting upon its Eurocentric model of Reasonable Man. No, the right move is to recognize that Christ the Governor General of the World is in all things. **He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life**. If you shy away from affirming that, and lapse into the idea that Truth is relative, you stand with Pilate and not Jesus. **Truth is ontologically real. It's our knowledge of Truth that's relative**. So the task is not to judge the other as *merely* different nor as one who worships a different but equal God, for that makes you a polytheist and contradicts your baptismal vows. No, the essential thing is not to erase the histories of Israel and Jesus by acting as though they are irrelevant - that's what White Christian Nationalists do - but to recognize that Truth is absolute but our knowledge of it is relative. And so the task in contemplating one of a different faith or no faith is to engage them as a gift through whom God speaks, a gift through whom God hopes to bless you, to teach you more about what it means to be human and to live together with the One True God. The move that makes the mystical body of Christ visible is neither to deny Jesus' Lordship of the World nor to imperialistically press your own relative knowledge of how to live with God upon them. Rather, the move that makes the mystical body of Christ visible is to see them with a curiosity and a hunger to be joined with them in solidarity - not merely because they share the earth with you but because they too are ones whom God loves and sends to you as blessings.
- My prayer is that each of us will be provoked by the Spirit into recognizing the extent to which our lives are shaped by either of these two nationalisms, and to repent of them. And that we will turn back to our mission of making Christ - recapitulated Israel who is reconciling Creation to our Creator - visible in every moment of our lives.

Ambiguous Wording of Survey Questions

One of the challenges in using a data source not designed to assess Christian nationalism is that the survey designers – not QCN researchers – developed the questions and worded them to achieve a different purpose. From the standpoint of measuring Christian nationalism, the survey questions introduce an unacceptable level of ambiguity. Smith and Adler (2022:5ff) document several concerns.

First, they observe that it is problematic that a survey used to assess Christian nationalism mentions Christianity in only two of six questions. This absence presents a significant flaw in QCN empirical design that I will consider in detail below. Second, question 3 refers to "strict separation of church and state" but leaves it to the respondent to determine what that means. Multiple respondents could affirm or oppose that while having different and contradictory interpretations about such separation.

Question 5 does not mention religion or ask about religion's role in public life. Nonetheless, QCN scholars score it as though respondents interpret the question as a reference to "national adherence to conservative Christian morality (e.g., Whitehead and Perry 2015). However, respondents might just as easily interpret it as a theological affirmation of God's grand design inevitably unfolding in history."

Question 6 asks about support for prayer in public schools. However, the question does not make distinctions that most Americans make between mandated "organized Christian prayer" and the freedom to pray. There is reasonable cause to be skeptical of QCN scholars' correlating respondent support for prayer in schools with Christian nationalism.

Smith and Adler (2022:5) observe that the reference to Christian values is vague. It does not say what it means, leaving respondents to interpret "Christian values" however they see fit. They note that such interpretations are diverse and that such values are not universal. Non-Christians could desire their promotion, too, without embracing Christian nationalism.

Gorski and Perry (2022) justify the use of the innocuous survey questions in their scale by claiming that the questions, though ambiguously worded, stimulate respondents' recollection of "contentious political debates (Gorski and Perry 2022:17). However, even if we grant the premise that the questions evoke such memories, there is reasonable cause to be skeptical of the suggestion that multiple-choice responses to them are evidence of Christian nationalism.

Does Not Measure the Intensity of Christian Identity

There is a second significant flaw in the scale's empirical design. It does not measure a trait essential to Christian nationalists: a powerful commitment to Christianity that equates Christian identity with national membership. QCN scholars claim their scale measures the intensity of one's support for Christian nationalism. However, as George Yancey observes, it

does not do that. Instead, the QCN scale assesses the degree to which a respondent - whether Christian or not - believes Christian values are worthy and should have a role in shaping American civic life. The flaw is that it does not measure a respondent's loyalty to Christianity - the extent to which Christianity is their ultimate concern. As I noted above, only a third of the questions explicitly mention Christianity. While demographic data collection gathers information about church affiliation, attendance, and frequency of prayer, none of the questions ascertain the intensity of a respondent's Christian identity or the extent to which they conflate Christian identity with American identity. That omission determines its "face validity" - whether the QCN scale measures what QCN researchers claim it measures. It does not. The QCN scale measures only how much a respondent believes Christian values should be encouraged in civic life, independently of the respondent's religious identity. That is why about a fifth of Jewish respondents scored high on the scale. Any non-Christian who shares political attitudes with conservative Christians would presumably rank similarly. As Yancey concludes, the QCN scale "is not a solid measure of anything we would reasonably call nationalism" because the scale "fails to assess whether [respondents] have a strong Christian identity" (Yancey 2021).

Yancey illustrates the impact of this defect with a sports analogy involving his alma mater, the University of Texas. "Let's say I wanted to capture loyalty to my alma mater — the University of Texas. So I developed an index based on dislike of Texas A and M and University of Oklahoma. Clearly such an index would correlate with loyalty to the Longhorns since these schools are seen as rivals. An antipathy towards the Sooners and Aggies is likely a core element of identifying as a Longhorn. But although it would capture some elements of Longhorn loyalty it would do so in an incomplete manner since there will be many who do not like those two schools (say those loyal to Baylor or Texas Tech) who also score high on the index but have no loyalty to the Longhorns. The face validity of the index indicates this is a measurement of attitudes towards Aggies and Sooners instead of Longhorns."

The QCN scale claims the capacity to predict whether a person manifests Christian nationalism. Christian nationalism denotes an ugly illiberalism that rejects vital American values of liberty and equality for all and constitutes apostasy and blasphemy by Christians. However, the QCN scale does not assess faithfulness, fidelity, or any other measure of the intensity of respondents' Christian identity. Nor does it capture a respondent's conflation of Christian and American identity.

Recognizing that a respondent who scores highly on the QCN scale may not identify as a Christian or desire to subordinate other religious traditions but may merely share Christian political attitudes matters for two reasons. First, it is essential to represent American social dynamics scrupulously - the model's purpose is to reflect reality accurately. Second, Christian nationalism is a severe charge because it connotes bigotry and puts one in the semantic constellation of right-wing extremist groups such as White Nationalists. Because it lacks any assessment of Christian identity or intensity, QCN scholars irresponsibly assign moral judgments by falsely claiming their index measures Christian nationalism. Truth-in-advertising concerns notwithstanding, their index is narrowly helpful because they can reasonably argue that the QCN scale predicts the probability that a respondent supports political policies often associated with conservative Christianity and Trumpism.

The Opacity of the Additive Scale

QCN researchers introduced multiple flaws by expressing their response variable, Christian nationalism, as a single-dimension additive scale. They created a linear scale by adding results from the six survey questions. A respondent's Christian Nationalism score is the sum of their six responses. One benefit of this approach is the ease of identifying extreme views. Because the score is the sum of six responses, we can confidently estimate how low and high-scoring respondents answered the six questions. The highest score, 24, reflects someone who scored four on all six questions. A low score of 6 reflects someone who received the lowest score, 1, on all six questions. We identify these extremes by inference, however. We cannot make accurate inferences except at the extremes. That is because the QCN score obscures each response's part in the result, rendering it unfeasible to analyze distinctions between respondents with similar scores. This opacity of item responses leads to the flaws I will discuss below.

Nicholas Davis (2021) conducted a factor analysis on the QCN data used by Whitehead and Perry. With that advanced statistical technique, he discovered that their single-dimension additive scale obscured the presence of two factors. First, respondents vary on whether they feel America is a Christian nation with Christian values. Second, depending on the first factor, respondents vary on the extent to which public displays of religion are tolerable. Davis' analysis shows that those who do not firmly believe that America is a Christian nation have a significant distribution of attitudes about whether public

displays of religiosity are tolerable. In contrast, those who strongly judge that America is a Christian nation also strongly support public displays of religion.

Davis' advanced statistical techniques show that "almost 28% of all respondents are misclassified using the threshold scale imposed by the additive Christian nationalism index." He reports two significant design flaws in the QCN index. First, the additive scale misreports respondent attitudes because it obscures the two dimensions fundamental to the collected data. Davis notes that adding the responses "will necessarily interject measurement error into the scale...[and] mechanistically result in misclassification errors, where scores are added together in ways that violate the underlying pattern of responses" (Davis 2021:11). Second, the division of the one-dimensional scale into four thresholds is arbitrary. For example, four distinct sets of responses generate a score of 12, putting all such respondents in the "Accommodator" category despite significant differences in political attitudes. The categories imply substantive differences between respondent attitudes. Still, there is no rational basis for claiming that those who score six are substantively different from those who score seven or that those who score eleven are substantively different from those who score twelve. Davis concludes, "The continuous scale does a poor job identifying who is and who is not a Christian nationalist" (Davis 2021:11-13).

The QCN scale crudely combines Christian nationalism identity and beliefs into a single measure rather than separating them for empirical clarity. This design generates unhelpful interpretative ambiguity. It also obscures the presence of peoplehood narratives that compete with Christian nationalism. I will say more about those two flaws below. However, the result of this design flaw is clear: the middle ranges of the QCN index incorrectly attribute Christian nationalism to respondents when other factors are at play. As Nicholas Davis observes, "The consequence is the creation of a Maslow's hammer, in which anything resembling conservative expressions of religious-political belief appears to be evidence of "Christian nationalism."

Mid-Range Ambiguities

As noted above, the design choice to use a single-dimension additive scale generates ambiguity in the mid-ranges of the index. Because individual question scores are opaque, we cannot discriminate between respondents with the same score even though they may have answered some questions differently. Different

sets of responses could achieve the score. Consequently, ambiguity attaches to scores in the middle range (Smith and Adler 2022:8).

For example, a respondent may simultaneously hold religiously conservative and civic republican views. Gorski points out that a religious conservative might support anti-abortion laws and oppose the legitimation of same-sex marriage while not embracing Christian nationalism (Gorski 2017b). Similarly, Davis shows that respondents could support the idea that the government should ensure a place for Christian values in civic life and also support religious pluralism in the public square. He notes, "that is a hallmark of religious tolerance, and some respondents appear to think this way" (Davis 2021:8). The QCN scale one-dimensional additive score, particularly in the middle range of scores, obscures such examples of tolerance. QCN scholars count such respondents as Accommodators and part of the 52% of the American population they say support Christian nationalism when, in fact, they oppose it.

Smith and Adler suggest we might reasonably construe respondents scoring in the middle range as civic republicans (Smith and Adler 2022:6). Relatedly, Ruth Braunstein (2021) observes that QCN scholars conflate two complex peoplehood narratives that recount distinctive myths about America's founding as a Christian nation, and, most importantly, differ in their accounts of what constitutes and threatens American identity. Li and Froese propose that the mid-range scores reflect the two factors Davis, Smith/Adler, and Braunstein hypothesized. Noting this segment's inclusiveness contrasts with the exclusiveness of a second segment, they dub those respondents Religious Traditionalists and distinguish them from more nativist Church Statists (Li and Froese 2023:25). I will detail the implications of this finding below. For now, the important takeaway is that the QCN scale's middle range obscures and conflates competing narratives about American identity and erroneously indicts them both with the bigotry implied by the charge of Christian nationalism.

Given the significant empirical design flaws brought about by the choice of a single-dimension additive scale, is the QCN scale helpful? Smith and Adler, in a thoughtful review of QCN researchers' claims, observed that perhaps the most beneficial outcome of QCN research is not about Christian nationalism. Instead, they believe QCN researchers may have unexpectedly verified that certain survey items identify "a separationist or secularist orientation operate[ing] in American politics" that is not merely a reaction against Christian nationalism (Smith and Adler 2022: 12). In other words, the value in the QCN scale

is at its lower extreme. The QCN index reliably identifies "radical secularists" who do not want Christian values to shape American civic life (Smith and Adler 2022:6).