CHAPTER 1

FOUR AMERICANS

> I believe we were founded on Christian principles, so, yes, I believe that, in essence, how we were created was the principle of Christianity. It's Christian beliefs. That's where we come from.
>
> —Trina, *Ambassador*

> I would agree that it was founded on Christian values, and maybe it was founded as a Christian nation. But today, presently, I don't know . . . That's a harder question to answer, right?
>
> —Luke, *Accommodator*

> I don't feel comfortable identifying the United States as a Christian nation even though I know that Christianity has been a major part of the history of this nation.
>
> —Deb, *Resister*

> No, I do not think the United States is a Christian nation. We are founded on a godless and secular Constitution.
>
> —Donald, *Rejecter*

In the weeks leading up to the "Freedom Sunday" service at First Baptist Church, Dallas, on June 24, 2018, senior pastor Robert Jeffress arranged for two billboards advertising the event to be posted on the North Dallas Tollway. While it is certainly not uncommon for churches to hold events like this around Independence Day, what ignited some controversy was his "special message" for the occasion, prominently displayed in all caps: "AMERICA IS A CHRISTIAN NATION."

Within a few days, a Jewish columnist at the *Dallas Morning News*, Robert Wilonsky, blasted the billboards, arguing that Jeffress "is among this city's most divisive voices" and "preaches a gospel that has been

repeatedly debated—and disproved—by scholars and researchers." Jeffress's "gospel," in his own words, is that "the vast majority of men that founded our nation were evangelical Christians." Wilonsky also reported comments from Dallas Mayor Mike Rawlings. An outspoken Christian and the grandchild of Nazarene ministers, Rawlings also criticized the billboards. "I don't mind someone being proud of the Christian tradition in America—it's obviously there. But one of the strengths of Dallas is our faith-based community [and] it's the strength that makes us a city of love verses a city of hate." He went on to distance himself further from Jeffress: "That's not the Christ that I follow. It's not the Dallas I want to be—to say things that do not unite us but divide us. I never heard those words, that voice come out of Christ. Just the opposite. I was brought up to believe: Be proud of yours [religious heritage], but do not diminish mine."[1] Shortly after Wilonsky's column was published, the billboard company informed First Baptist Church that they were taking the billboards down. A visibly indignant Robert Jeffress immediately went on Fox News (for whom he is a near-weekly contributor) and the Christian Broadcasting Network to publicly excoriate Mayor Rawlings for what he called a blatant example of liberal government suppression of religious freedom that was potentially "illegal." Less than a week before the event, Jeffress boasted to the *Dallas Observer* that he planned to put up not just two but *twenty* new billboards advertising the event, having reached an agreement with another billboard company.[2]

This incident depicts a variety of orientations toward the interweaving of Christianity and American civil society that reflects where many Americans find themselves. Like Robert Jeffress, some Americans endorse the idea that Christianity and our national identity are inextricably bound together. Those who disagree with him are "seculars" and "liberals" blinded to the truth and out to suppress religious freedom. Robert Wilonsky, a man of Jewish heritage, represents another subset of Americans who flatly reject the idea that the United States is somehow distinctly Christian. Wilonsky and others also reject what Jeffress's gospel implies—that America has some sort of obligation to privilege its Christian heritage and population while

other non-Christian groups are merely tolerated as an afterthought. Finally, Mike Rawlings, a professing Christian who is quick to affirm that America has a "Christian tradition" that is "obviously there" exemplifies many other Americans. But unlike Jeffress, Rawlings is clearly uncomfortable with pronouncements that Christianity holds an exclusive claim to America's national self-concept. Rather, he sees his Dallas community, and America by extension, as fundamentally built upon principles of unity and acceptance of others.

In this chapter, we explore the variation in Americans' orientations toward Christian nationalism. While Americans hold diverse views on this question, we can sort them into four broad categories: Ambassadors, Accommodators, Resisters, or Rejecters, based on our 24-point Christian nationalism scale (see Figure 1.1).

Around 21.5 percent of Americans are *Rejecters,* most likely either disagreeing or strongly disagreeing with each statement on the Christian nationalism scale.[3] As we touched on in the previous chapter, a substantial percentage of respondents answered "Strongly Disagree" to each of the six questions, resulting in an overall score of zero on the Christian nationalism scale.[4] That is, more than seven percent of Americans—over a quarter of the Rejecters—oppose Christian nationalist ideology as strongly as possible. *Resisters* are the second-largest

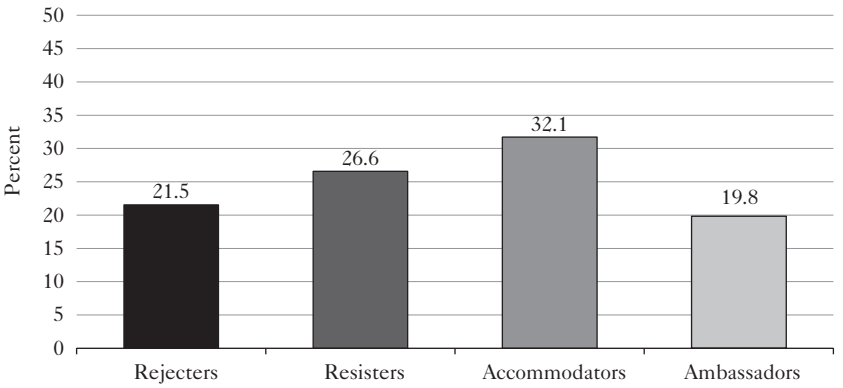

FIGURE 1.1.
Percent of Americans who are Ambassadors, Accommodators, Resisters, or Rejecters of Christian Nationalism

Source: 2017 Baylor Religion Survey.

of the four groups at around 27 percent of the population. Resisters are those who score between 6 and 11 (the average) on the Christian nationalism scale. *Accommodators* are the largest of the four groups, encompassing almost a third of all Americans (32.1 percent). Accommodators range from a score of 12 to a score of 17. Lastly, on the far right of the spectrum, *Ambassadors* make up about a fifth of the United States population (19.8 percent). They are the smallest group, consisting of respondents whose score ranges from 18 to 24 overall.

Are Ambassadors precisely who we are talking about when we refer to "Christian nationalists" in our study? Yes and no. On the one hand, these are indeed the Americans who appear to espouse Christian nationalist views most fervently. Yet on the other hand, we found that many men and women who scored as "Accommodators" often espoused strong Christian nationalist beliefs when they were able to explain themselves. These four categories are meant to be useful shorthand. Each is highly predictive of different views on various social and political issues. But to be clear, no system of categorization can perfectly capture the diversity of Americans' views on this subject.

Rejecters

> Is the United States a Christian nation? No. It explicitly states that the United States was founded in no way on the Christian religion in the Treaty of Tripoli.[5] Christianity is not mentioned in the Constitution. The major movers and shakers, when it comes to creating our governing structures, were mostly deists. Thomas Jefferson cut everything out that he didn't like from the Bible, and there wasn't a whole lot of it left.
>
> —Patrick, *Rejecter*

Rejecters generally believe there should be no connection between Christianity and politics. As Donald told us, "We are founded on a godless and secular Constitution. We were the first nation in history to refuse to acknowledge a deity in that Constitution and to separate state and church." Rejecters oppose declaring the United States a Christian nation or favoring Christian values in public policy. One

Rejecter told us that in a pluralist democratic society like the United States, Christianity shouldn't shape social policies *at all*. Rejecters object to any efforts to institute the official practice of religious behaviors in public schools or allow the display of Christian religious symbols in public places. Rick, a professing evangelical Christian and Rejecter, told us how fights over displaying the Ten Commandments in courthouses is a "false battle" that the church likes to fight. "I think as a believer I should be more concerned about what a Muslim feels when he sees that [the 10 Commandments], because I'm not sure how that affects my faith one way or the other." Rejecters do not recognize any narrative that proposes a special relationship between the United States and the Christian God or some other higher power. For Rejecters, the wall of separation between church and state is high and impenetrable—or at least should be.

Rejecters display some interesting socio-demographic characteristics (Table 1.1). Rejecters are younger than the overall sample—43 years old versus 49. They are disproportionately male. Whites make up three-quarters of this group, while African Americans compose only four percent, even though they are 10 percent of the whole sample.

Rejecters are more highly educated than the three other groups. A third have engaged in some level of postgraduate studies, well above each of the other groups. In total, 80 percent of Rejecters have at least some post–high school education. Rejecters also report higher yearly earnings than the sample as a whole. Rejecters are most likely to be found in cities and suburbs, as well as in the Northeast or West regions of the country.

It would be easy to assume that Rejecters are completely nonreligious and politically liberal.[6] However, when we examine the religious and political contours of this group we see a slightly more complicated story.

One-third of Rejecters affiliate with a Christian religious tradition, either Protestant or Catholic, while one-half are unaffiliated (see Table 1.2). Half of Rejecters believe in some form of higher power, with one-quarter believing in God and a third identifying as atheist. Rejecters, as a group, do not completely reject common expressions of religious behavior, even though most Rejecters never attend religious services, pray,

Table 1.1. Socio-demographic Characteristics of Ambassadors, Accommodators, Resisters, and Rejecters

	Rejecters (21.5%)	Resisters (26.6%)	Accommodators (32.1%)	Ambassadors (19.8%)	Whole Sample
Age					
Average age (years)	43.2 [b, c]	45.3 [b, c]	49.8 [a, b, c]	54.3	48.8
Gender (%)					
Women	45.4 [b, c]	48.6 [b]	57.4	55.3	52.0
Men	54.6	51.4	42.6	44.7	48.0
Race (%)					
White	75.0 [a, b]	61.3 [c]	63.1	69.9	64.8
Black	4.2 [a, b, c]	9.5 [b]	14.5	11.0	10.1
Hispanic	10.3 [a, b]	20.1	15.7 [c]	11.4	15.0
Other race	10.5	9.1	6.8	7.7	10.1
Marital Status (%)					
Percent married	49.0 [a]	45.2 [b]	56.0	52.2	50.2
Education (%)					
Less than high school	4.4 [b]	8.6	9.4	7.2	9.1
High school graduate	15.2 [a, b, c]	24.6 [b, c]	32.3	38.7	27.6
Some college	26.9 [c]	32.7	28.8 [c]	37.1	31.6
College graduate	20.9 [c]	16.0 [c]	17.2 [c]	7.2	15.2
Postgraduate	32.6 [a, b, c]	18.1 [b, c]	12.3	9.8	17.5
Income					
<$20k	13.5 [a, b, c]	22.3	23.1	20.2	21.0
$20–35k	9.1 [b, c]	10.1 [b]	14.0	19.4	13.6
$35–50k	13.3	16.8	16.5	16.8	15.0
$50–100k	24.8	27.0	27.3	30.3	27.1
>$100k	39.2 [a, b, c]	23.8 [c]	19.1 [c]	13.4	23.3

Table 1.1. Continued

	Rejecters (21.5%)	Resisters (26.6%)	Accommodators (32.1%)	Ambassadors (19.8%)	Whole Sample
Size of Place					
City	26.2 [c]	24.6 [c]	27.1 [c]	16.2	24.1
Suburb	35.0 [b, c]	31.0 [c]	25.9	23.7	28.6
Town	29.6 [c]	34.4	32.0 [c]	39.5	33.7
Rural	9.2 [b, c]	10.0 [b, c]	15.0	20.6	13.6
Region					
Northeast	28.2 [a, b, c]	18.4 [c]	13.4	10.1	17.5
Midwest	16.2 [b]	19.8 [b]	27.8 [c]	20.6	21.5
South	26.7 [b, c]	32.3	38.7 [c]	49.9	37.2
West	28.9 [b, c]	29.6 [b, c]	20.1	19.5	23.8

[a] Significant difference compared to Resisters.

[b] Significant difference compared to Accommodators.

[c] Significant difference compared to Ambassadors.

or read sacred texts. However, one in 10 report attending religious services at least once a month, and close to a quarter pray at least once a week. While majorities identify as politically liberal or align themselves with the Democratic Party, 40 percent classify themselves as Independents, and a quarter respond that they are politically moderate (see Table 1.3).

Resisters

> Is it a Christian nation? I'm trying to think. I would say no. I think of it more as the melting pot right now, right? With all religious beliefs, creeds, colors of people, right? Everyone's welcome. So, I think it was founded on a lot of the beliefs, but I don't know if that's what defines it.
>
> —Brett, *Resister*

This quote from Brett, a 38-year-old Baptist from South Carolina, exemplifies the attitudes of the Resisters. While Rejecters completely repudiate the notion that the United States is a Christian nation, Resisters

Table 1.2. Religious Affiliations, Beliefs, and Behaviors of Ambassadors, Accommodators, Resisters, and Rejecters

	Rejecters (21.5%)	Resisters (26.6%)	Accommodators (32.1%)	Ambassadors (19.8%)	Whole Sample
Religious Tradition					
Evangelical Protestant	7.4 [a, b, c]	17.6 [b, c]	33.0 [c]	54.9	28.8
Mainline Protestant	10.4	13.4	12.5	11.3	12.4
Black Protestant	2.2 [a, b, c]	6.9	8.7	9.9	7.2
Catholic	14.2 [a, b]	30.8 [c]	31.9 [c]	18.6	25.1
Jewish	3.4 [a, b, c]	1.1	.8	.1	1.2
Other	11.1 [c]	7.6 [c]	7.5 [c]	3.2	7.3
No affiliation	51.1 [a, b, c]	21.9 [b, c]	6.2 [c]	2.3	18.1
Belief in God					
God exists, no doubts	12.6 [a, b, c]	43.9 [b, c]	77.5 [c]	94.4	59.5
God exists, some doubts	12.1 [a, c]	19.4 [b, c]	13.7 [c]	3.6	12.5
Higher power	25.4 [b, c]	19.9 [b, c]	6.6 [c]	1.4	13.1
Agnostic	13.3 [a, b, c]	8.0 [b, c]	.4	.4	4.8
Atheist	36.5 [a, b, c]	8.8 [b, c]	1.7 [c]	.2	10.2
Bible Views					
Biblical literalist	1.4 [a, b, c]	3.9 [b, c]	20.0 [c]	49.4	19.0
Bible inspired word of God	10.9 [a, b, c]	28.9 [b, c]	47.2 [c]	38.4	32.6
Bible contains human errors	7.7 [a, b]	17.9 [c]	13.4 [c]	6.9	11.9
Bible is book of legends	71.2 [a, b, c]	28.9 [b, c]	7.5	4.5	25.1
Don't know	8.8 [a, c]	20.4 [b, c]	11.9 [c]	.9	11.4
Religious Service Attendance					
Never	59.9 [a, b, c]	34.9 [b, c]	17.3 [c]	9.5	28.0
Several times a year	30.5 [a, c]	38.8 [b, c]	30.7 [c]	19.5	30.6
Several times a month	8.7 [a, b, c]	24.9 [b, c]	43.5	48.4	33.3
Weekly or more	.8 [b, c]	1.4 [b, c]	9.4 [c]	22.6	8.2

Table 1.2. Continued

	Rejecters (21.5%)	Resisters (26.6%)	Accommodators (32.1%)	Ambassadors (19.8%)	Whole Sample
Prayer Frequency					
Never	54.3 [a, b, c]	24.0 [b, c]	3.3 [c]	1.1	18.1
Rarely	23.2 [c]	26.7 [c]	21.0 [c]	7.1	20.5
Once a week	9.3 [a, b, c]	24.2 [c]	21.8	17.5	19.0
Once a day	8.5 [b, c]	12.9 [b, c]	25.4	25.7	18.8
Multiple times a day	4.7 [a, b, c]	12.2 [b, c]	28.5 [c]	48.6	23.7
Read Sacred Scriptures					
Never	69.6 [a, b, c]	48.9 [b, c]	26.6 [c]	9.8	37.2
Several times a year	24.9 [b]	30.1 [c]	31.5 [c]	22.8	28.3
Several times a month	1.4 [a, b, c]	8.1 [b]	12.4	8.5	8.0
Weekly or more	4.1 [a, b, c]	12.9 [b, c]	29.4 [c]	58.8	26.5

[a] Significant difference compared to Resisters.

[b] Significant difference compared to Accommodators.

[c] Significant difference compared to Ambassadors.

signal a bit more indecision. They may disagree that prayer should be instituted in public schools and believe that the government should not officially declare the United States a Christian nation, but they may be undecided about allowing the display of religious symbols in public places. In short, they lean toward opposing Christian nationalism.

Resisters share some clear demographic similarities with Rejecters: the average age, the gender distribution, or the size of place where Resisters live is not significantly different from Rejecters.[7] Whites make up 61 percent of Resisters, a much smaller proportion than Rejecters. The share of Resisters who are black (10 percent) or Hispanic (20 percent) is double the size for Rejecters. Forty-five percent of Resisters are married, which is significantly less among Rejecters.

The percent of Resisters in the various education or income categories is similar to Rejecters except in the proportion who are high school

Table 1.3. Political Ideology and Party of Ambassadors, Accommodators, Resisters, and Rejecters

	Rejecters (21.5%)	Resisters (26.6%)	Accommodators (32.1%)	Ambassadors (19.8%e)	Whole Sample
Political Ideology					
Conservative	7.4 [a, b, c]	20.4 [b, c]	43.8 [c]	68.8	35.3
Moderate	24.3 [a, b]	47.2 [c]	44.1 [c]	27.3	37.0
Liberal	68.4 [a, b, c]	32.4 [b, c]	12.0 [c]	3.9	27.7
Political Party					
Republican	5.9 [a, b, c]	16.9 [b, c]	40.3 [c]	55.7	29.5
Independent	40.0 [b, c]	42.1 [b, c]	29.2	23.9	33.7
Democrat	54.1 [a, b, c]	41.0 [b, c]	30.6 [c]	20.4	36.8

[a] Significant difference compared to Accommodators.

[b] Significant difference compared to Resisters.

[c] Significant difference compared to Rejecters.

graduates (25 percent) or who have completed postgraduate work (18 percent). Resisters, it appears, are slightly less well-educated than Rejecters. Compared to Rejecters, a larger share of Resisters are found at the lower end of the income distribution, while a smaller share occupy the highest end of the income distribution. Similar percentages of Resisters and Rejecters live in the various regions of the country, except in the Northeast, where significantly fewer Resisters live (18 percent).

The biggest difference between Resisters and Rejecters, however, is in their religious characteristics. Resisters are actually quite religious. More than two-thirds of Resisters identify with a Christian religious tradition, with over 30 percent of Resisters being Catholic and 18 percent affiliating with an evangelical Protestant denomination. The size of the unaffiliated group of Resisters (22 percent) is significantly smaller than that of the Rejecters (51 percent). Clearly, resisting Christian nationalism does not mean that one is completely disengaged from religion. This trend was visible in those we interviewed. Of the 12 Resisters we talked with, eight said religion was "very important" to them.

Resisters are also less likely than Rejecters to renounce common measures of religious belief. A clear majority of Resisters believe in a God or higher power (80 percent), much higher than Rejecters. Significantly fewer Resisters identify as agnostic or atheist than do Rejecters. One-third of Resisters say the Bible is either the literal or inspired word of God. A quarter attend religious services several times a month or more, or pray at least once a day, while over one-fifth read their sacred text at least several times a month.

Politically, Resisters of Christian nationalism are quite diverse. One-fifth (20 percent) identify as politically conservative, nearly a third (32 percent) as liberal, and almost half (47 percent) as moderate. Seventeen percent of Resisters claim they are Republican, while almost equal percentages identify as Independent (42 percent) or Democrat (41 percent).

Taken together, Resisters and Rejecters make up almost 48 percent of the US population.

Accommodators

> I think . . . maybe lessons taught through Christianity can be good foundational value points for the government as they're creating law and as they're enforcing law. I think Christian values are important in that I think the values that Christians cherish are important. And not so much because of the religious symbology itself, but just because of the general golden rule, "Let's be good to each other. Let's follow a value system."
>
> —Luke, *Accommodator*

Accommodators are in many ways a mirror image of Resisters. While Resisters are somewhat undecided but lean toward opposing Christian nationalism, Accommodators show comparable levels of indecision but lean toward accepting it. While perhaps agreeing that the federal government should advocate Christian values, Accommodators might be undecided about the federal government officially declaring the United States a Christian nation. The quote from Luke above is a perfect example. Luke and other Accommodators see much to admire about Christianity and believe it can be a positive influence on

American society. But it is the *values* of Christianity, which they agree can be found in other world religions, too, that are key. It isn't that these things are found in Christianity *alone*. So Accommodators might support the government allowing the display of religious symbols in public spaces but may (paradoxically) be less certain about whether the government should weaken the separation of church and state in order to do so. This group is generally comfortable with the idea of America's Christian foundations, and is amenable to the idea of a society where Christianity is conspicuous. They stop short, however, of fully and completely favoring Christianity alone in the public sphere. Their support is undeniable, but it is not unequivocal.

Accommodators are older than Resisters and Rejecters, with an average age of about 50. Accommodators also consist of many more women than men, which is a distinct difference from the previous two groups. Racially, Accommodators are quite similar to Resisters. While a greater proportion of Accommodators are black compared to Resisters and Rejecters, equal shares of Accommodators are white, Hispanic, or of another race. A significantly higher percentage of Accommodators are married compared to Resisters, but there is no significant difference between Accommodators and Rejecters regarding marriage rates.

Accommodators are almost identical to Resisters when it comes to income and are mostly similar to them on education. Similar shares of Accommodators and Resisters live in cities, suburbs, and towns, but many more Accommodators live in rural areas compared to Rejecters and Resisters, and larger numbers of Accommodators live in the Midwest and South, with fewer on the coasts.

A third of Accommodators affiliate with evangelical Protestantism, while another third identify as Catholic. Much higher percentages of Accommodators espouse belief in God and have a higher view of the Bible than Resisters and Rejecters. More Accommodators than Resisters and Rejecters report attending religious services several times a month or more, praying once a day or more, or reading scriptures several times a month or more.

Forty-four percent of Accommodators say they are politically conservative and only 12 percent say they are liberal. These are

significant departures from Resisters and Rejecters. An equal proportion of Accommodators and Resisters, though, say they are political moderates (44 and 47 percent). The Accommodators we interviewed mirrored these findings. The vast majority considered themselves either "moderate," "fairly," or "mostly" conservative politically. Regarding political party, more Accommodators than Rejecters or Resisters align with the Republican Party, while fewer say they are Independent or a part of the Democratic Party. However, 60 percent of Accommodators are either Independents (29 percent) or Democrats (30.6 percent).

Ambassadors

> I think that if we fail to acknowledge the Lord's work in the founding of our country . . . if we as believers fail to give credit where credit is due, the Lord may take his hand of blessing off our country. And I think that's exactly what it is. I think that we were founded on Christian principles, as one nation under God. And our country has steadily strayed from that.
>
> —Ashlyn, *Ambassador*

Those we call Ambassadors are wholly supportive of Christian nationalism. As one Ambassador we interviewed simply declared: "Our country was definitely founded on Christian principles . . . I believe the Constitution was following biblical principles, and that our laws should follow the same principles." In fact, when asked if the United States was a Christian nation, Ambassadors thought there was very little to discuss: We are a Christian nation. Todd, from Oklahoma, elaborated: "I do believe [America] was founded on Christian principles and influence. And I believe most of the founders had strong Christian belief. Most of the laws were founded off of Christian principles. Just about every law in every state, and most of the federal government's initial laws were founded off of Christian principles." In the minds of Ambassadors like Todd, the founding fathers were indeed establishing a Christian nation and merely refrained from choosing a specific denomination. The assumption, however, was always that Americans would be "Christian." One Ambassador living in the Midwest illustrates this well:

> While I don't have a problem with Muslims in the country practicing their religion, I don't want it forced on me or to be told I now live in a Muslim country, or a Buddhist country or anything. I believe our framers founded on Judeo-Christian principles, as I said before, and that is . . . their intention was not to define, "We're Baptists. We're Catholic. We're Protestant. We're Lutheran." It was just, "We're Christian."

Ambassadors also tie our prosperity as a nation to our heritage of obedience to God's commandments as laid out in the Christian Scriptures. An Ambassador from Oklahoma, Matthew, after some conversation about Christian nationalism, actually embraced the label, seeing it merely as a recognition of our country's historic dependence on the Bible.

> I would probably be identified from my beliefs as a Christian nationalist. But I don't see Christian nationalism as a bad thing . . . I'm by no means an expert, but I do consider myself decently well read in American history. And I think my Christian nationalism is more recognizing the profound impact the Bible has had on America from the 1500s and 1600s to the present. Has America ever been perfect? Absolutely not! Will America ever be perfect? No. [But] I think it is quite possible that the prosperity America has enjoyed is in large part due to America's embracing the Bible more so than any other country in history with the exception of Israel.

Ambassadors believe 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. When we asked Betsy, a 56-year-old Ambassador, how she felt about displaying the 10 Commandments in courthouses, even if not everyone participating in the legal system is Christian, she told us, "Absolutely, the Ten Commandments should be displayed in the courthouse. Again, when you're in a courthouse, if you're there charged with murder, what do the Ten Commandments say? You know? I guess there's not a whole lot [more] to say on that one. It's just a big, fat yes."

On the topic of church–state separation, Ambassadors we spoke with were largely unified in their opinion that the First Amendment was intended *solely* to keep the state out of the church's business, not to keep religion from influencing politics, as if that were possible.[8] Todd "strongly disagreed" that the government should enforce a strict separation of church and state, explaining, "Having most of your laws in the US founded on Christian principles, I find it very difficult to separate church and state. I believe that God's word has the final say in everything, how we live, the laws that we make, how we treat people." Similarly, Trina in Texas argued that the idea of separation of church and state was like "asking me to separate myself from who I see myself as."

Ambassadors are the oldest of the four categories by a wide margin, with an average age of 54 years. Women make up a greater share of Ambassadors. Ambassadors are also 70 percent white, 11 percent black, and 11 percent Hispanic. Compared to the three other groups, fewer Ambassadors have postgraduate educations or college degrees. A much smaller proportion of Ambassadors are high earners compared to each of the other groups.

Only 16 percent of Ambassadors reside in cities, which is significantly lower than any other groups. Almost two-thirds live in towns or rural areas. Almost half of all Ambassadors reside in the South, the highest proportion by far across each of the four groups.

Over half (55 percent) of Ambassadors identify as evangelical Protestant. Similar to Rejecters, fewer Ambassadors are Catholic (19 percent) compared to Accommodators or Resisters. Only six percent of Ambassadors are not affiliated with a Christian tradition. Large proportions of Ambassadors report holding traditional Christian beliefs. They overwhelmingly believe in God without any doubts at all and hold the Bible in high esteem. Ambassadors consistently report attending religious services more frequently, praying more frequently, and reading sacred scriptures more frequently than those in other groups. While Ambassadors can be found at the lowest levels of both public and private religious behavior, there is a clear linear trend toward more religious activity among those who fully support Christian nationalism.

Being an Ambassador of Christian nationalism is closely related to political views and political party. Two-thirds of Ambassadors (69 percent) identify as politically conservative, while four percent identify as politically liberal. On both accounts, Ambassadors are significantly different from each of the other groups. Interestingly, though, just over a quarter (27 percent) claim to be politically moderate, which is significantly less than Accommodators and Resisters but very similar to Rejecters. Finally, 56 percent of Ambassadors align with the Republican Party, with 24 percent saying they are Independents. Importantly, however, one out of five Ambassadors are Democrats. It is essential to note that despite the clear relationship between fully supporting Christian nationalism and one's politics, Ambassadors are found at both ends of the spectrum.

Distribution of Ambassadors, Accommodators, Resisters, and Rejecters Across Social Groups

Now that we have a clearer statistical socio-demographic portrait of Ambassadors, Accommodators, Resisters, and Rejecters, we need to consider how these four orientations are represented across various demographic, religious, and political groups. Here we're looking at the other side of the coin, with questions like, "What percent of evangelicals are Accommodators or Resisters?" or "What proportion of those living in the South are Ambassadors or Rejecters?" As it turns out, variation in support for Christian nationalism cuts across American civil society. No group is a monolith.

For instance, we see in Figure 1.2 that while over 65 percent of those Americans with a postgraduate education are either Resisters (27 percent) or Rejecters (40 percent), a significant minority are also Accommodators and Ambassadors. The same is true for college graduates. So, while at the highest level of education, Americans' support for Christian nationalism is quite low, more education does not seem to preclude someone from supporting Christian nationalism.

Or consider region (Figure 1.3). Ambassadors are found within every region of the United States but are not the majority anywhere. Rejecters are the largest group in the Northeast. Resisters are the largest group

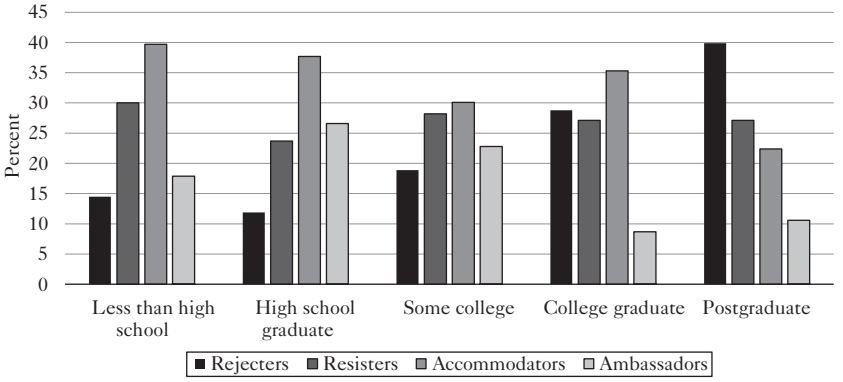

Figure 1.2.
Percent of Americans with Different Education Levels Who are Ambassadors, Accommodators, Resisters, or Rejecters
Source: 2017 Baylor Religion Survey.

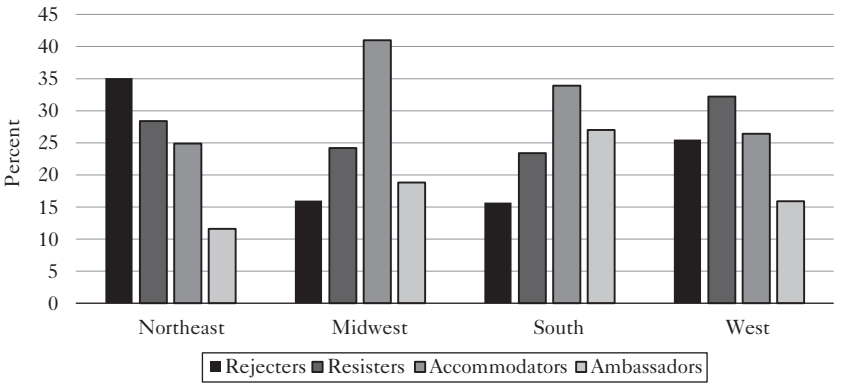

Figure 1.3.
Percent of Americans in Each Region of the U.S. Who are Ambassadors, Accommodators, Resisters, or Rejecters
Source: 2017 Baylor Religion Survey.

in the West. In the Midwest and South, Accommodators are most prevalent. The key, however, is that each response is found in every region. So, while a majority of residents from the South are Ambassadors or Accommodators, two out of five Southerners oppose Christian nationalism to some extent. In fact, Accommodators and Resisters are each

at least a quarter of the population *on their own* in every region of the United States. Variation in support for Christian nationalism thus clearly exists across geographic space.

Figure 1.4 provides us with another way to view regional variation in Christian nationalism. The 2017 BRS included information about each respondent's state of residence. Using this information, we imputed the average score on our Christian nationalism scale for each state in the union. Unfortunately, even with a survey sample of over 1,600, some states had very few respondents, so we grouped states together into the nine major divisions used by the US Census Bureau and then averaged their scores. Darker shading indicates higher average scores on the Christian nationalism scale. The regional distribution of stronger adherence to Christian nationalism is just as we might expect: concentrated primarily (though not exclusively) in the Bible Belt and Midwest. Americans on either coast, and particularly in the New England area, appear far less favorable toward this cultural framework.[9]

Throughout the history of the United States, Christian nationalism has shifted according to the cultural context that surrounds it. This has

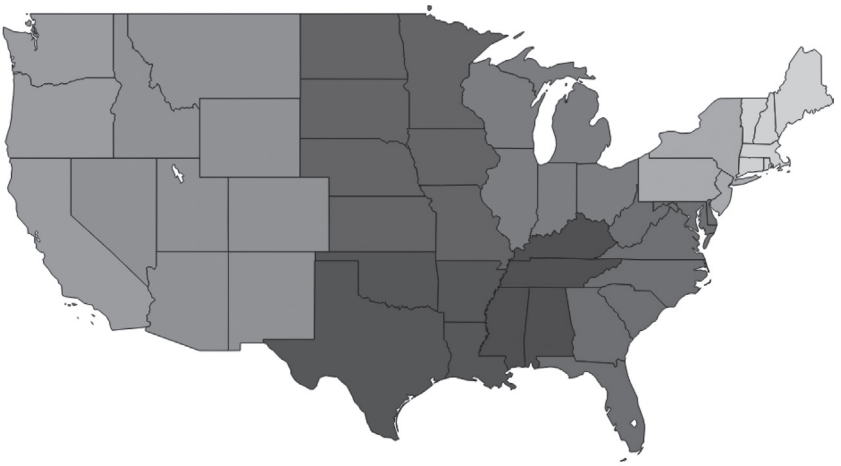

Figure 1.4.
Map of the United States Showing Average Christian Nationalism Score Across Nine Major Census Divisions
Source: 2017 Baylor Religion Survey.

been especially true regarding views toward race and how different racial groups respond to racial injustice. White Americans in different eras have drawn on Christian nationalism to both support and oppose slavery and Jim Crow laws. African Americans have also drawn on certain Christian nationalist ideals and narratives to oppose their unequal treatment in American society.[10] Understanding that Christian nationalism is perceived through the "prism" of racial identity, the flexible character of Christian nationalism suggests that we should see each of the different responses present across racial groups. In Figure 1.5, we find this to be true.

Among white Americans we find almost equal numbers of Ambassadors, Accommodators, Resisters, and Rejecters. For African Americans, however, a different relationship exists. While each of the four orientations is present, Accommodators are by far the largest group. Sixty-five percent of African Americans are supportive of Christian nationalism, which is the largest proportion of any racial group. Hispanic Americans are evenly split with similar percentages both supporting and opposing Christian nationalism. However, most Hispanic Americans are found in the more moderate groups, Accommodators and Resisters. Overall, we see that the four orientations toward Christian nationalism

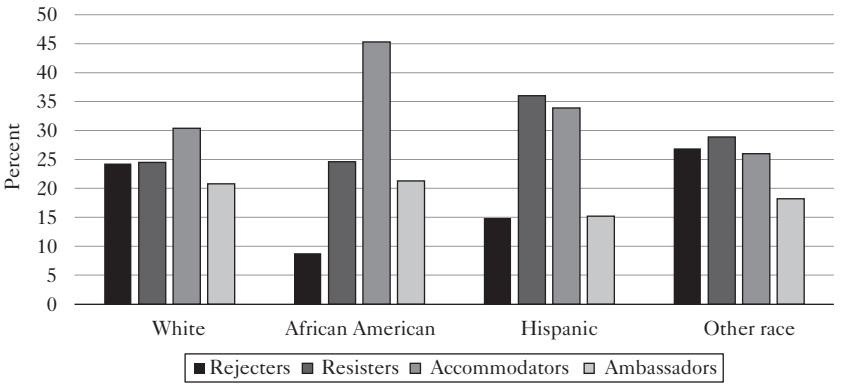

FIGURE 1.5.
Percent of Americans Across Racial Groups Who Are Ambassadors, Accommodators, Resisters, or Rejecters

Source: 2017 Baylor Religion Survey.

are represented across racial groups in the United States, with some interesting variation between the different racial groups.

The four orientations toward Christian nationalism are also found among Americans in different religious traditions. Figure 1.6 displays the percentage of various religious traditions who are Ambassadors, Accommodators, Resisters, and Rejecters. Most evangelical Protestants are Ambassadors (40 percent) or Accommodators (38 percent). This is unsurprising given the Christian nationalist rhetoric used by the Religious Right, whose leaders are largely located within evangelical Protestantism. Yet nearly a quarter (23 percent) of evangelicals are Resisters or Rejecters.[11] The current political climate and the high levels of support among evangelicals for the Trump administration has led to greater visibility among evangelicals who are opposed to Christian nationalism. For example, soon after exit polls showed 81 percent of white evangelicals voted for Donald Trump in 2016, a segment of evangelicals began labeling themselves "the 19 percent" to declare their opposition to the reactionary politics espoused by others in their faith tradition.[12] As these data affirm, not all evangelicals are Christian nationalists, and a substantial minority reject it.

Another important point is that Accommodators are the largest group within each of the Christian traditions except for

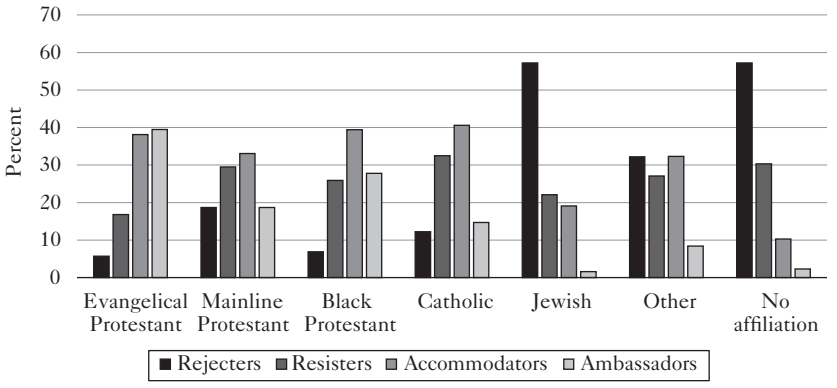

FIGURE 1.6.
Percent of Americans Across Religious Traditions Who Are Ambassadors, Accommodators, Resisters, or Rejecters

Source: 2017 Baylor Religion Survey.

evangelical Protestantism, where Ambassadors barely outnumber them. Accommodators even make up almost a third of the "Other" category, which includes all non-Judeo-Christian religions. Resisters are also well represented across each faith tradition, ranging from a low of 17 percent among evangelicals to a high of 33 percent among Catholics. Unsurprisingly, large proportions of Americans in non-Christian traditions are Rejecters of Christian nationalism. But Rejecters exist in significant numbers within Christian traditions. Clearly, Americans' orientations toward Christian nationalism are dependent on the religious tradition with which they affiliate. But only to a point.

Finally, let's examine whether any Democrats are Ambassadors or Republicans are Resisters, or if a person's politics completely accounts for their stance toward Christian nationalism. Figure 1.7 displays the percentages of each political party that are either Ambassadors, Accommodators, Resisters, or Rejecters. Republicans are clearly much more supportive of Christian nationalism, with four out of five being either Ambassadors or Accommodators. Much more variation exists among Independents and Democrats. Among Democrats, over one-third are either Ambassadors or Accommodators while 30 percent are Resisters and 32 percent are Rejecters. Among Independents, each orientation toward Christian nationalism can be found in

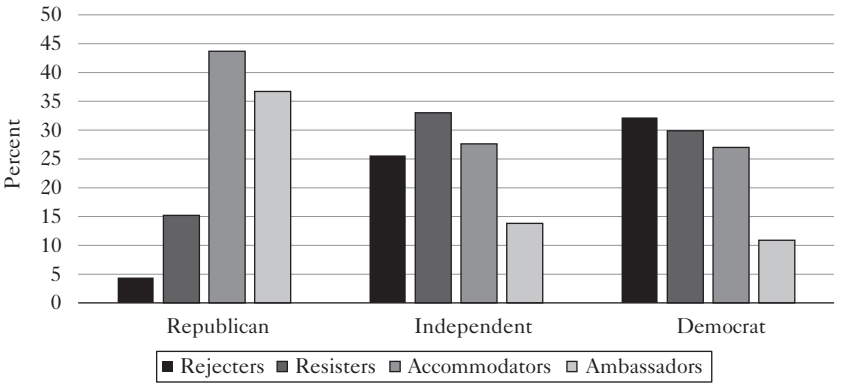

Figure 1.7.
Percent of Americans Across Political Party Who Are Ambassadors, Accommodators, Resisters, or Rejecters

Source: 2017 Baylor Religion Survey.

numbers similar to Democrats. It is clear that political party itself does not fully account for Americans' orientations toward Christian nationalism.

Overall, these data show that the four orientations toward Christian nationalism can be found across the socio-demographic, religious, and political make-up of the United States. This is crucial to grasp. It is inaccurate to assume, as many have done recently, that "white evangelical" is synonymous with Christian nationalism or that all Democrats want religion banished from the public sphere. Rather, each of the four orientations toward Christian nationalism are present within all of these various groups. In the 1980s, Princeton sociologist Robert Wuthnow proposed that American religion had experienced a "restructuring." One of the main axes upon which the shift took place concerned the public expression of religion, especially the intersection of Christianity and American identity and civic life.[13] Now Americans of different religious traditions and even political persuasions could be organized by how much they support ideologies like Christian nationalism. Simply put, knowing you are an Ambassador or Rejecter of Christian nationalism can now tell us far more about your social and political views than knowing what denomination you affiliate with, how often you attend church, and even whether you identify as Democrat or Republican.

Is Christian Nationalism Growing or Declining?

A significant and consistent trend in American religion is the growth of the religiously "unaffiliated" or religious "nones" (those who check "none" for religious affiliation on surveys). Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, this group ranged in size from five to almost eight percent of the population. However, in the mid-1990s this group began to grow quickly, reaching 14 percent by 2000 and 22 percent by 2017. The growth of the unaffiliated corresponds to the decline in the percentage of the population that identifies with a Christian tradition (Protestant or Catholic). Throughout the 1970s around 90 percent of the population identified as Christian. In the 1980s the average hovered around

89 percent. In the 1990s we see a slight dip to an average of 85 percent of the population identifying as Christian. This dropped further to an average of 74 percent from 2000 to 2016. In 2017, 71 percent of the population identified with a Christian tradition.

In *The End of White Christian America* (2016), Robert Jones thoroughly demonstrates not only this demographic decline and the reasons for it, but also the implications of such a decline for the broader culture. While Christians still wield considerable political power, they no longer dominate the cultural and social context like they used to. Therefore, it could be that the growth in the nonreligious and corresponding decline of the Christian population influences the proportion of the population that supports an ideology like Christian nationalism.

Let's first compare the sizes of the four orientations toward Christian nationalism over time. Because the questions comprising our Christian nationalism scale were asked in both the 2007 and 2017 BRS, we can determine if the relative sizes of the four orientations have changed in the last decade. For reference, in 2007, 16 percent of Americans identified as unaffiliated, while in 2017 this number increased to 22 percent. In 2007, 77 percent of Americans identified with a Christian religious tradition, which decreased to 71 percent by 2017. Clearly, from 2007 to 2017 there is an overall trend of Americans disaffiliating with Christianity. But is this decrease in affiliation matched by a similar decrease in Christian nationalism?

Figure 1.8 displays the percent of Americans who are Ambassadors, Accommodators, Resisters, or Rejecters of Christian nationalism in both 2007 and 2017. Beginning with Ambassadors, it is clear that fewer Americans are in this group now than a decade ago, a statistically significant difference. Accommodators also declined in size from 34.9 to 32.1. This difference, however, is not statistically significant. Accommodators are essentially the same size today as they were in 2007. Both Resisters and Rejecters have actually increased in size, and both reflect statistically significant changes. In 2007, Resisters made up 22 percent of the population but are now close to 27 percent of Americans. And in 2017 Rejecters are about 21.5 percent of the United States population, a three percent increase from 2007.

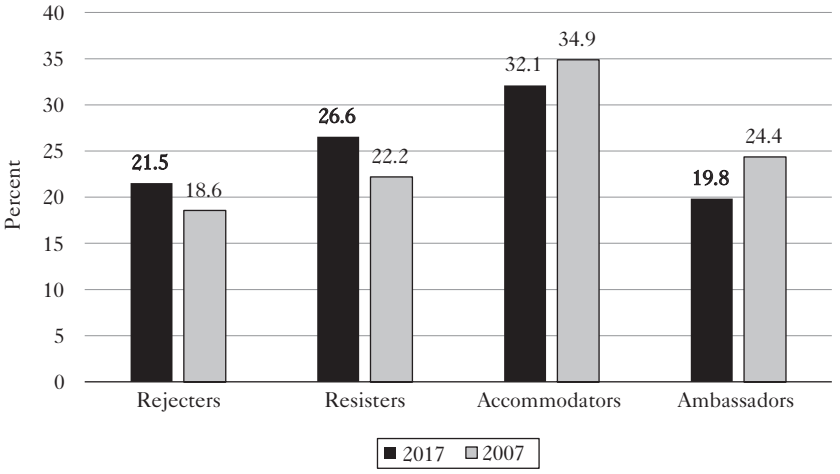

Figure 1.8.
Percent of Americans Who Are Ambassadors, Accommodators, Resisters, or Rejecters of Christian Nationalism, 2007–2017
Note: Bold indicates a significant difference between years.
Source: 2007 and 2017 Baylor Religion Surveys.

Combining the Resisters and Rejecters shows that over the last 10 years there has been an eight percent increase in the number of Americans who oppose Christian nationalism to some extent. And while Accommodators are about the same size, the number of Americans who are wholly supportive of Christian nationalism has decreased by almost five percent. It appears that as Americans have moved away from organized religion over the last 10 years, they have begun to make small shifts toward a more oppositional response to Christian nationalism as well.

Data sources that use a single-item measure of adults' views on America's Christian heritage also show a decline in viewing the United States as a Christian nation (see Figure 1.9). In 2012, a survey asked Americans to choose among four responses regarding whether they think the United States is a Christian nation. Two out of five Americans (40 percent) reported believing that "America has always been and is currently a Christian nation."[14] Only five years later, one out of four Americans (26 percent) chose this same response. In 2012, two out of

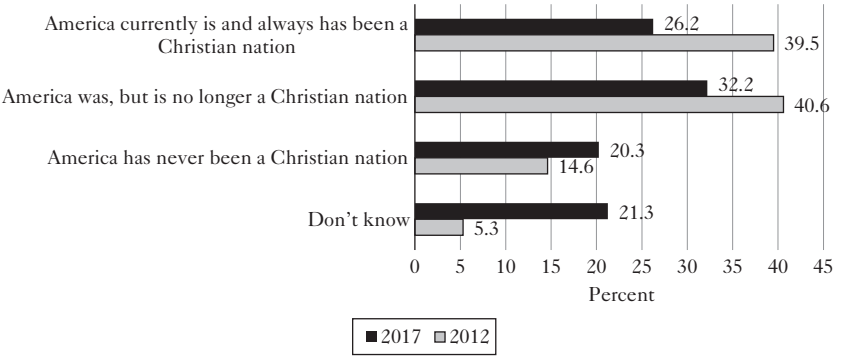

Figure 1.9.
Americans' Views Toward United States as a Christian Nation, 2012–2017

Sources: 2012 Religion, Class, and Culture Survey & 2017 Baylor Religion Survey.

five (40 percent) agreed that "America was a Christian nation in the past, but is not now." Half a decade later just 32 percent of Americans answered similarly. Back in 2012, 15 percent of Americans reportedly believed that "America has never been a Christian nation" and only five percent were undecided. By 2017, 20 percent of Americans claimed the United States has never been a Christian nation, and over 21 percent said they were undecided.

It is important to note that from 2012 to 2017 the percentage of Americans who did not affiliate with a religious tradition increased from 20 percent to 22 percent. However, during this same time period the percent of Americans who affiliated with a Christian religious tradition also increased a slight amount, from 69 percent to 71 percent.[15] These data, taken over a five-year span rather than 10 years, suggest a similar story with Christian nationalism. The proportion of Americans who believe the United States ever was or still is a Christian nation is declining. More Americans now believe that America has never been a Christian nation. And somewhat surprisingly, there has been a dramatic increase in the proportion of Americans who do not know what they believe about the Christian heritage of the United States.[16]

A final piece of evidence points to a long-term trend of slow but stable decline in the past 30 years regarding support for Christian

nationalism. Since 1974 the General Social Surveys (GSS) have asked respondents whether they "Disapprove" or "Approve" of the United States Supreme Court ruling that no state or local government may require the reading of the Lord's Prayer or Bible verses in public schools. This question is very similar to one of the measures included in our Christian nationalism scale, and the wording (essentially tapping into Americans' thoughts about the government restricting Christianity's influence in public institutions) makes it a useful measure for our purposes. Figure 1.10 displays the results from 1974 to 2018. While in the 1970s less than 32 percent of Americans approved of this ruling, roughly 48 percent of Americans feel that same way today. Likewise, nearly 70 percent disapproved 40 years ago while only 52 percent respond similarly today. Since the mid-1980s, however, there is little evidence of shifts in either group despite small variations across survey years. This long-term trend suggests two things. First, there is mostly stability with some evidence of growth in resistance to Christianity in public life. Second, though, a *majority* of Americans (52 percent) still

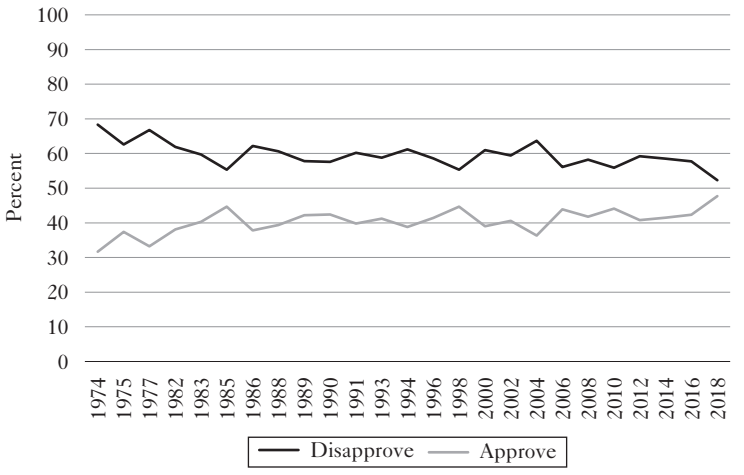

FIGURE 1.10.
Percent of Americans Who Disapprove or Approve of U.S. Supreme Court Ruling that No State or Local Government May Require the Reading of the Lord's Prayer or Bible Verses in Public Schools

Source: 1974–2018 General Social Surveys.

disapprove of this Supreme Court ruling, meaning most Americans are at the very least accommodating of a key Christian nationalist belief.

Will there continue to be a decline in support for Christian nationalism across the culture? Or, will recent events cause Americans to pine for a more intimate intertwining of Christianity and civic life? Two broader trends, one demographic and one religious, would lead us to predict that Ambassadors will continue to decline in size while Resisters and Rejecters will slowly grow their ranks.

First, as we discussed already, Americans continue to disaffiliate from the Christian tradition and Protestantism more specifically. Americans who are not connected to a Christian tradition will be much less likely to be exposed to Christian nationalism. Furthermore, their social networks will offer much lower levels of social support for those beliefs in the event that they hold them. The number of Christians in the United States will most likely continue to decline, and this could foreshadow changes in the levels of support for Christian nationalism. This decline does not mean, however, that Ambassadors will grow less fervent. Rather, this committed core of true believers will most likely maintain their intensity of support for Christian nationalism, especially as they continue to see themselves as a persecuted minority.

A second reason why decline is probable is that Americans who support Christian nationalism are getting older and older. Cohort replacement will lead to a continued decline in their numbers. Consider the following evidence. As Table 1.1 shows, the average age of Ambassadors (54 years) is significantly higher than each of the other three groups. The average age of Accommodators (50 years), while lower than the average age for Ambassadors, is significantly higher than Resisters (45 years) or Rejecters (43 years). However, looking at the average ages in 2017 alone could lead one to argue that these differences in age are merely due to the fact that as people age, they are more likely to become more supportive of Christian nationalism. This would lead us to predict that these groups might not shift in size over time.

However, the differences in average age across the four groups have changed significantly since 2007. Then, Ambassadors were actually

significantly younger than Accommodators (47 years versus 49 years) and not significantly older than Resisters (45 years) or Rejecters (45 years). If Americans were more likely to support Christian nationalism as they age, we would expect this same relationship to be apparent in both 2007 and 2017. Rather, a decade on, we see that Ambassadors are much older on average and are now significantly older than Accommodators.

Using the arbitrary generational divides common in popular discourse, we can see that Ambassadors are much less prevalent among Millennials and make up a much larger proportion of the Greatest Generation (see Figure 1.11). Among Millennials, more than 60 percent resist or reject Christian nationalism. Over half of those in Gen X support Christian nationalism to one extent or the other, but overall many more Gen Xers are opposed to Christian nationalism than Baby Boomers or the Greatest Generation. The reality of a much older set of Americans supporting Christian nationalism implies it may continue to decline across the population. It is also difficult to see any reason why strong support for Christian nationalism would reverse the aging trend of the last decade and somehow become even more prevalent.

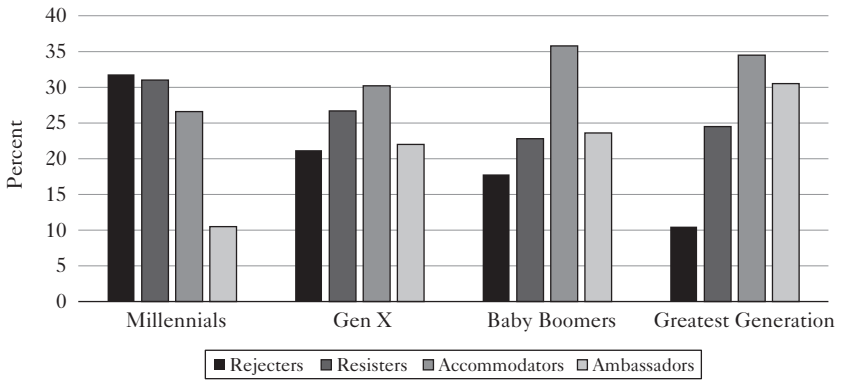

FIGURE 1.11.
Percent of Americans Across Generational Divides Who Are Ambassadors, Accommodators, Resisters, or Rejecters

Source: 2017 Baylor Religion Survey.

While it is difficult to predict future trends for Ambassadors, Accommodators, Resisters, and Rejecters given that we only have two data points spanning the last decade, this evidence would lead us to question anyone who believes a large-scale increase in support for Christian nationalism is imminent. Rather, these trends suggest that while ebbs and flows will occur, overall, high levels of support for Christian nationalism will slowly decrease, while the accommodation of it could continue indefinitely.

But there is an alternate possibility. Though the data points we've shared thus far suggest a steady decline in Christian nationalism over the last few decades, other data shows that Christian nationalism, by certain measures at least, may wax and wane in response to certain societal tensions. In 1996, 2004, and 2014, the GSS asked how important Americans believe being a Christian is for being "truly American." Though it is only a single-item measure, at the very least it indicates how much Americans conflate Christian identity with American civic belonging and corresponds quite well with our Christian nationalism measure in the BRS.

Figure 1.12 shows us two important trends. First, there was an obvious increase in the purported importance of being Christian to being truly American from 1996 to 2004. Second, this was followed by a similarly sized decline from 2004 to 2014.[17] In their 2010 study, sociologists Jeremy Straughn and Scott Feld sought to explain the jump from 1996 to 2004 by proposing a theory of "symbolic boundary alignment" where religious nationalism is used to designate who is "in" and who is "out." They contend that symbolic boundaries become more salient in times of social unrest. Given the events of 9/11 in 2001, by 2004 Americans were still looking for ways to clearly indicate who they were as a group by highlighting who they were not. For these reasons, there was an *increase* in the percentage of the population that believed being Christian is vital to being a true American *in spite of* a decrease in the proportion of the population that is Christian over that same time period.

Building on Straughn and Feld's work with the 2014 GSS data, a more recent study found that as 9/11 slipped further into the rearview

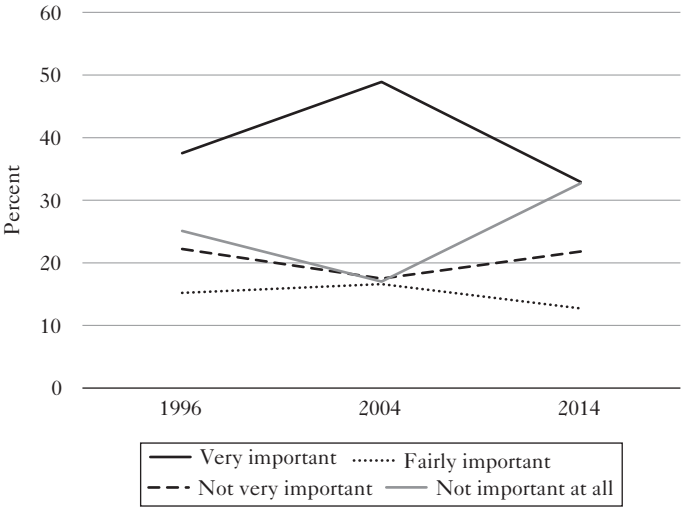

FIGURE 1.12.
Variation in Percent of Americans Who Believe It Is Important to Be a Christian to Be Truly American
Source: 1996, 2004, 2014 General Social Surveys.

mirror, Americans did not continue to view being Christian as "very important" for being a true American. In fact, in 2014 the percent that believed it to be very or fairly important dropped below the 1996 levels. Now, an equal number of Americans believe it is either not important at all or very important to be a Christian in order to be a true American. This suggests that historical events and shifts in the culture may alter the salience of the Christian religion as a symbolic boundary marker.[18]

Depending on the context, Christianity may not always be fundamental to the boundaries Americans draw around their national identity. Yet historians argue that Christianity can quite easily be made salient as a vital aspect of American identity by reactionary movements and leaders during periods of cultural, political, or economic unrest. This underscores the importance of the rhetoric used in the public sphere, especially from social and political leaders. It could very well be that since 2014, following the rise of Donald Trump to the presidency,

there has been another significant increase in the number of Americans who believe it is "very important" to be Christian in order to be "truly American."

***

So what does all this mean? What does one's support for Christian nationalism—or lack thereof—tell us about a person, their politics, their willingness to include outsiders, their beliefs about what makes a good society? We answer these questions in the next three chapters.