

Occupy Till He Comes

—

A Patriot Spirit

An Ethnographic Study of Christian Nationalism,
Culture War and the End Time Church



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Abstract

This thesis examines the intricate interplay between religious faith and the dynamics of Christian nationalism within the context of the Patriot Church, a prominent religious community in the United States. Through ethnographic data, I show how Patriot Church constructs itself as a church fighting a patriotic fight against the Devil and the powers of evil, longing to tear down America as we know it today.

Chapter one delves into the concept of Biblical Citizenship as understood by the congregation of Patriot Church. It scrutinizes the influential role of charismatic church leaders and their impact on American politics, highlighting the tension between religious freedom and religious dominionism. This chapter sets the stage for understanding how religious ideologies shape political landscapes and generate conflicts.

In the subsequent chapter, the focus shifts to the broader cultural war that is engulfing America, characterized by a profound clash between believers and non-believers. This conflict is not merely ideological but has tangible implications, such as the rise of phobias related to LGBTQ communities and the intensifying debate over abortion rights. The analysis underscores how these issues are emblematic of deeper societal divisions exacerbated by religious rhetoric and activism.

Furthermore, the thesis explores the spiritual dimensions of this cultural conflict, often framed as spiritual warfare. This concept involves a belief in demonic forces allegedly taking control of America, necessitating a militant response from the church. This chapter provides a nuanced understanding of how spiritual beliefs are mobilized to justify political and social actions, adding a metaphysical layer to the cultural wars.

The final chapter addresses the eschatological views held by the Patriot Church, focusing on their perception of America's trajectory towards the end times. It examines the notion of a potential national divorce or, in the worst-case scenario, a new civil war, as envisioned by the congregation. This exploration of apocalyptic beliefs provides critical insights into how religious narratives can influence perceptions of national identity and future possibilities.

Overall, this thesis seeks to offer an analysis of the intersections between religion, politics, and culture in contemporary America, emphasizing the profound impact of religious beliefs on national discourse and social conflicts.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The chaos of the Capitol insurrections January 6, 2021, was bewildering for a lot of reasons. Not only was it the violence, but also the immense use of symbolic images: wooden crosses and wooden gallows. Christian flags and Confederate flags. “Jesus Saves” and “Don’t Tread on Me” banners. Button-down shirts and bullet-proof vests. These confusing and even near contradictory symbols represents part of an increasingly familiar ideology: Christian Nationalism. The expression, which I had not heard before, aroused a curiosity in me. As someone who grew up in a Christian family in a quiet village in Norway, the thought of rebellion and violence, with Christian symbols in hand, was quite distant. It therefore sparked an interest in me to find out more about both the ideology of Christian Nationalism and those who cheers it on.

Sociologists Philip S. Gorski and Samuel L. Perry described the Capitol insurrection as a volcanic eruption (Gorski & Perry, 2022). Geologist study volcanic eruptions for four reasons; 1; to understand the shape of the landscape. 2; to uncover the forces that formed it. 3; to explain why they erupt and 4; to forecast eruptions and avoid catastrophes. This inspired me to conduct a fieldwork and map out the landscape of Christian Nationalism. Who were these people behind the posters, the slogans, and the angry posts on Facebook? And is it possible to study and understand the forces behind Christian Nationalism, and if possible, try and perceive where it’s going?

Anthropological research on the phenomenon of Christian nationalism in today's America is important due to the significant influence this ideology exerts on social, political, and cultural landscapes. Christian nationalism, which intertwines religious beliefs with national identity, has profound implications for understanding power dynamics, social cohesion, and policymaking in the United States (Djupe, Lewis, & Sokhey, 2023). This thesis will explore the reasons why anthropological research on this topic is critical, focusing on its impact on political processes, social integration, public policy, and the broader cultural discourse.

One of the most immediate reasons to study Christian nationalism is its profound impact on American politics. This ideology plays a crucial role in shaping the voting

behaviors and political affiliations of a significant portion of the American electorate (Simonnes, 2021). By understanding the motivations and beliefs of Christian nationalists, I can shed light on how religious ideologies influence electoral outcomes and party politics. This is essential for comprehending the rise of political movements and candidates who align with Christian nationalist values. Christian nationalism also has substantial implications for public policy. Policies related to education, reproductive rights, immigration, and religious freedom are often influenced by the values propagated by Christian nationalists.

Christian nationalism contributes to the construction of American identity and notions of belonging. By promoting a vision of America as a Christian nation, this ideology can both unify and divide. For some, it offers a sense of community and shared values; for others, it marginalizes and excludes those who do not conform to its religious and cultural norms. Understanding the motivations, strategies, and impacts of these movements can provide insights into broader social dynamics (Gorski & Perry, 2022). For example, the role of Christian nationalism in movements such as the Religious Right or counter-movements advocating for secularism and pluralism highlights the contentious nature of religion in public life.

In a religiously diverse society, Christian nationalism can strain interfaith relations and contribute to social tensions. I, as an anthropologist, can study how this ideology affects interactions between different religious communities, fostering either conflict or cooperation. This research could be essential for promoting mutual understanding and tolerance in a multicultural society. To fully understand the contemporary phenomenon of Christian nationalism, it is important to explore both its historical roots and where it might be headed. My fieldwork took me under the surface, through the various layers of Christian nationalism, down to the biblical bedrock on which it rests. This thesis is an empirical deep dive into a world of nationalism, bible studies and a glooming perspective on the future of the United States. It would take me to a barn outside of Knoxville, Tennessee, to a church fittingly called Patriot Church.

Patriot Church and gaining access

In the suburbs of Knoxville, Tennessee, right of the road, lies a small wooden barn. It would've been anonymous had it not been for the giant American flag which covers the entire roof, which leaves no doubt that this is Patriot Church, a church for patriotic men and women.

When planning my fieldwork, I did research on multiple churches and pastors who promoted Christian nationalist views. In the end one name stood out as the most interesting option: Pastor Ken Peters and his Patriot Church. In the recent years, especially following the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic and the 2021 insurrection at the Capitol, Ken Peters has become well known as a pastor. He has multiple times allowed broadcasters and journalists into his church for interviews and is very outspoken on his social media platforms. Pastor Ken and his wife started out in Washington state, where they started Covenant Church in 1998. For the next 21 years, Spokane was their home base until 2020, where Ken felt called by God to plant Patriot Church in Knoxville. His church has now grown and now has around 150-200 members. Patriot Church runs a school next door which is called Covenant Christian School, where most of the members' kids attend.

The church has been particularly vocal on issues such as drag performances, abortion, and other cultural topics. Patriot Church is distinctive among the many churches in Knoxville for its direct engagement in cultural and political issues. The church actively campaigns against drag shows and other events it views as morally objectionable, often organizing protests and encouraging its congregation to voice their opposition. This activism has sometimes brought the church into conflict with local communities and has drawn significant media attention. Peters openly expresses his desire to live in a conservative state, which influenced his decision to establish the church in Tennessee. Despite opposition and controversy, Peters and his congregation continue to advocate for their views, often invoking their constitutional rights to free speech and religious expression.

My choice of ethnographic field was born out of a long-standing curiosity on my part. Having grown up in a Christian family, with my father being a priest, it has always seemed distant to use religion as a means to subdue others. I've also had a long fascination for different ideologies and how people are drawn towards them. The fascination lies in trying to figure out why people choose to believe what they believe and what motivates them to not only follow certain beliefs, but ultimately breaking laws or committing violent acts. With the rise of Trump and his 2016 presidential campaign, Christian nationalism caught my attention. The men and women standing with huge posters, wanting to take America back for God, stirred the motivation in me to begin this project.

I reached out to Ken and the church in the fall of 2022. I presented my project and my intentions for my fieldwork at his church. This led to us having a phone call where I further explained the project and that I certainly wasn't coming over to make a "hit piece" on them,

but to gain insight in their beliefs, resulting in a master thesis. I felt it was important for me to underline this point to Ken, as I knew they had had a lot of journalists and media visiting, not all of whom wrote equally positive or neutral about them. I felt it was essential to emphasize the importance that I was there by virtue of being a student representing the University of Bergen and not there to make headlines. He seemed positive and was happy to let me join them for six months. He joked about being happy finally someone was coming to study “the crazy nationalists”. I can’t, of course, be sure whether this forthcoming attitude was orchestrated or pushed by Ken, to influence my data or my writing about them in a positive direction. During my stay and during my many conversations with Pastor Ken, his family, or the rest of the members I met on an almost daily basis, I never got the impression that there was a coordinated pre-planned approach to my presence. When I arrived the first time, it seemed like a surprise for the most of them. Certainly, they were eager to make a good impression of themselves and the church, but I felt genuinely that they believed full-heartily in their cause and beliefs and that I was indeed welcome.

When it comes to my own positioning, there are two different features that should be noted. Being a white man from a Scandinavian country, it is difficult to deny that it influenced my access to data during my fieldwork at Patriot Church (Bernard, 2011). Secondly, since being brought up in a Christian household myself, I knew how to dress, act, and talk in a Church setting. I recognized the norms and manners associated with being in a church setting, and this probably made it so that my informants accepted me more easily into their congregation. I also, when asked about my personal faith, didn’t deny being Christian. I didn’t hide it for two reasons; firstly, because I felt they became less suspicious towards me. I knew they were skeptical towards non-believers, so I felt being recognized as a Christian helped me being welcomed easier into the group. Although, this wasn’t without careful consideration from my side. I had worries about being confronted about my beliefs and/or tested based on my knowledge or commitment to the Christian belief. This, thankfully, never happened, but at the start of the fieldwork it was a real concern. The second reason for being open about my own personal faith was not only to build trust, but by doing it, I felt I was minimizing skepticism towards me as an outsider. As I will come back to in the chapters below, Patriot Church deals with a lot of push back. The members are therefore especially aware of outsiders like journalists and others who come to write about them or even protest at their church. I felt the need to remove any doubt of me being a critical journalist or worse, an informant for ANTIFA (Anti-Fascist). It still occurred that the members would ask me for my opinion, on

topics such as abortion, immigration or Trump, but I think succeeded in remaining as transparent and neutral as possibly.

Method

Ethnographic fieldwork is a key methodological approach in any anthropological research. By immersing myself in the community surrounding Patriot Church, where Christian nationalism is prevalent, I could gather rich, qualitative data on the lived experiences and beliefs of the informants I met. Participant observation and in-depth interviews can provide valuable insights into how my interlocutors values are expressed and maintained in everyday life. By immersing myself in the daily lives of the people I studied, I could gain a deeper and more nuanced understanding of their behaviors, beliefs, and social interactions. This method allowed me to see beyond what is explicitly stated in interviews or surveys, capturing the subtleties and complexities of cultural practices. Engaging directly with the church, helped me build trust between myself and my informants at Patriot Church. This relationship often leads to more honest and open communication, as participants are more likely to share sensitive or intimate aspects of their lives with someone, they trust (Bernard, 2011).

Participant observation provides contextual insight that other methods might miss. By living and participating in the community, I could observe how cultural practices are influenced by the context in which they happen, leading to a more comprehensive understanding of the culture of Patriot church. Participant observation naturally requires that you both master participating and observation while conduction fieldwork (Zahle, 2012). For the most part, most of my fieldwork took place in the barn of Patriot Church on their Sunday services. There, I both observed the meetings and took notes while I sat in the crowd. As I sat there it would almost seem weird if I hadn't simultaneously participated in the church service. I therefore chose to take part in the service as if I was a natural part of the group. I think this further helped me to integrate myself into the congregation. The participation didn't end with the walls of their church building. I would after almost every Sunday service be invited to lunch by either Ken and his family or other members of the church. Furthermore, I attended courses and seminars arranged by Patriot Church, which I will return to in the following chapters of this thesis. I also was lucky enough to be able to join Ken and church members to different trips, both to other cities and out of state trips.

In contrast to anthropological convention, I did not live together with my informants. I had the offer from Ken to stay at a rental cabin on the lot next to Patriot Church.

Living that close would without a doubt had made it easier for me, but disappointingly, I could not afford it. In hindsight, I have realized that it possibly was for the best. Not living with informants allowed me a kind of sanctuary where I could retreat home after events and church meetings and collect my thoughts.

While no method can completely eliminate observer bias, participant observation helps reduce it by allowing me to experience the culture firsthand rather than relying solely on secondhand reports. This firsthand experience could lead to more accurate and reliable data. Participant observation is a flexible method that allows me another in the field to adapt to new situations and follow leads that might emerge during the research process. This adaptability is crucial in understanding dynamic and evolving cultural practices. This method also enables me to observe the interconnectedness of various aspects of life within Patriot Church. By participating in different activities and events, I can observe how economic, social, religious, and political factors interplay in the daily lives of people. Overall, participant observation is a fundamental method in anthropology because it allows researchers to gather rich, qualitative data and develop a profound understanding of the cultures they study.

[Anonymisation and informed consent](#)

I early on decided on not changing the name of Patriot Church or the names of Pastor Ken and Pastor Shahram. This was both because they both gave me permission to use their name and secondly, because they are already well-known men in the realm of Christian nationalism. Both have a large following on social media and are actively seeking attention towards their church and their religious as well as their political views. Bearing in mind that Patriot Church, even though being a relatively small church, has already welcomed the media and journalists on several occasions. I therefore considered it unnecessary to anonymise the church's name. By not anonymizing the name of the church I would argue that, naming it, better yield a valuable insight into the topic of Christian nationalism for others to explore. All other members, interlocutors, and people I've talked to during my fieldwork has been given a new name. This also goes for people outside the church that gave me valuable insight. As usual within established research ethics, I did my best to attain informed consent from those I met during the project. I didn't obtain written agreements from my informants, since Pastor Ken actually opened the first meeting I was attending by introducing me to the whole church. He joked about that I had traveled all the way from Norway to come to Tennessee to observe "the crazy nationalists". This would prove to be an effective way to introduce me to the

congregation. I would still, of course, remind those I were talking with that I was taking notes and that would be used in the thesis, but I didn't pick up on anyone holding back information or avoiding speaking with me.

Fieldwork among people I don't necessarily agree with

A topic of conversation the supervisor and I discussed a lot before and during my project was carrying out fieldwork among people I didn't necessarily like, and/or who had opinions and views on things I couldn't agree with. I knew different sensitive topics such as religion, abortion, immigration and what some would categorize as conspiracy theories. I therefore needed to be prepared to be confronted with opinions where possibly my personal point of view would come under their spotlight. As Bangstad asks (Bangstad, 2018), how do you conduct anthropological research of "people we don't necessarily like"? and as to make it even more complicated; I didn't dislike any of the people I met at Patriot church. I actually enjoyed their company, but at the same time I didn't support or agree to their political ideas of Christian nationalism. To remain as objectively as possible, I had to apply "*empathy, not sympathy*" (Bernard 2011, 295). In other words, I had connected with my informants as people and suspending my own judgement. Like Gingrich and Banks wrote it; "*empathy is indispensable for any seriously methodological focus on actors' experiences and perspectives*" (Gingrich & Banks 2006, 11). But as I didn't sympathise with their political or religious views, I couldn't be truly value neutral. But as Gingrich and Banks further write; "*Sympathy is impossible because the basic orientation of neo-nationalism... is towards cultural exclusion and assimilation, an orientation that contradicts anthropology's basic premise of sociocultural diversity*" (2006, 11). My main goal has therefore been to refrain from valorising my informants and avoid judging them as bad or good people, but rather understanding why they think and act like they do on their own terms.

But of course, no fieldwork is completed without there being some difficulties. At one point in my fieldwork, I had become better acquainted with a married couple in the church who had begun to be responsible for Patriot Church's weekly podcast. One day I was asked to be on an episode. She said it would be a better opportunity for me to present my project for a wider crowd, and she could even send me the questions up front, so I knew what I was walking into. I said yes to what would be a nice, but maybe awkward interview. This then led me to being asked to join another member's podcast. His podcast hadn't any affiliation with Patriot Church, it was simply his own "podcast for patriots". Again, I agreed to join him for an

interview, both because I was eager to talk about my project, but also because I felt I could “repay” my informants kindness, by meeting them on their own half. The interview didn’t go well. I didn’t know what he was going to ask me and was caught off guard when he pushed me on topics of abortion and how we could solve the crisis of families falling apart in America. Afterwards I felt uneasy. This was firstly because I felt bad for actively participating in making material which content, I personally felt was out of my comfort zone. Secondly, I felt the interview had put me in a bad light and that I was somehow un-masked as someone who didn’t belong there. Doing fieldwork with people you don't like is obviously complicated. I don't wish Patriot Church and its members any harm, but I also don't want their ideology to spread significantly. How can this be solved? I would argue that the main argument should be that by taking my informants seriously and attempt to understand their cause and worldviews on their own terms, I uphold some sort of methodological relativism. I could from there provide tools for counter measurements by making my ethnographic knowledge legible to others who maybe don’t understand Christian nationalism.

Thesis Buildup

The first chapter investigates how members of Patriot Church articulate and defend their faith amidst the turbulence of contemporary American politics and society. The chapter explores the theological and ideological underpinnings that fortify their beliefs, particularly in the context of perceived threats to their religious freedom and moral values. The role of Donald Trump as a political and spiritual figurehead, and the mobilization of Christian nationalism in American politics are also examined.

In the second chapter, I focus on the culture war, a battleground where issues such as abortion and LGBTQ+ rights have sharply polarized the nation. This chapter delves into how these contentious topics are framed within the discourse of Patriot Church members and how they contribute to the broader narrative of Christian nationalism. The analysis highlights the strategies and rhetoric used to mobilize resistance against perceived cultural encroachments, demonstrating how these issues serve to rally the community and solidify their oppositional stance.

Building on the culture war theme, the third chapter transitions to an exploration of spiritual warfare as perceived by evangelical and Christian nationalist groups. Here, the focus shifts to the belief in a cosmic struggle between good and evil, with particular attention to the

role of demons and spiritual adversaries. This chapter examines how these beliefs are enacted in daily practices, sermons, and community activities, revealing the depth of conviction and the sense of existential urgency that underpins the notion of spiritual warfare.

The final chapter addresses the eschatological dimension of Christian nationalism, investigating how the community prepares for what they perceive as the imminent end of the world and the rise of the Antichrist. This chapter explores the apocalyptic narratives prevalent among Patriot Church members, their interpretations of current events as signs of the times, and their preparations for the prophesied final battle between good and evil. The analysis includes a look at the theological justifications for these beliefs, as well as the practical steps taken by the community to ready themselves for the anticipated culmination of history.

By systematically exploring these interconnected themes, I aim to give a nuanced understanding of how Christian nationalism shapes the beliefs of its adherents in contemporary America. Through the lens of Patriot Church, this study highlights the ways in which faith, culture, and eschatology intersect to form a potent socio-political force.

Chapter 2

Biblical Citizenship in Modern America

*No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son,
Who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father,
Has made him known*

-

John 1:1



Outside of Plymouth, Massachusetts stands a 25m tall statue in solid granite. The statue, named The National Monument to the Forefathers and was finished in 1889, but its history and the values it represents has roots going far deeper into Americas history and legacy. This

first chapter of my thesis will be fixed upon the mobilization of charismatic Christianity and Christian nationalism in American politics, and how it affects not only the lives of the members in Patriot Church, but also thoughts surrounding religious freedom and the American idea of freedom. I will look upon how Patriot Church uses faith and charismatic Christianity to establish a deep and personal relationship with Jesus and how that relationship is utilized to give reason behind their actions and beliefs. One could ask why this is relevant? There have already been done a lot of research on the topic of charismatic Christian groups and how they operate. What I will do is to give this a new light through my own empirical fieldwork from inside of Patriot Church. During their services, meetings, bible groups and demonstrations I got to experience their beliefs and personal faith. That insight gave me a better understanding of how they not only view America today, but also how they envision Americas future and their place in it.

The role of Charismatic and Evangelical Christianity on American Politics is not a new concept. Evangelical churches and Pastors have affected American politics since its foundation (Simonnes, 2021). But its influence has maybe never been more dividing and what we see now is in many ways the aftermath of the Jan 6 insurrection (Denker, 2022). This chapter will outline how the members of Patriot Church are preparing their biblical weapons and are putting on the armor of God to better prepare themselves against the Deep State and the war between the holy and the demonic (Gorski & Perry, 2022). I therefore ask the question; how can we better understand the American idea of freedom, freedom of faith and how are these values are protected?

Biblical Citizenship

Early on in my stay with Patriot Church I heard talks about a course that many of the church members were attending. The course was named *Biblical Citizenship in Modern America*, and it immediately caught my attention. Biblical Citizenship in Modern America is a course held by the organization The Patriot Academy. Founded by former Texas State Representative and lawyer Rick Green, Patriot Academy has an outspoken goal to; *equip and educate a generation of citizens and leaders to champion the cause of freedom and truth in every sector of society, as we help restore our Constitutional Republic and the Biblical principles that cause our Nation to thrive*. Patriot Academy looks at America today and sees a nation that's fallen away from its biblical foundation which made it into the superpower that it is today. In their opinion, America has tried over and over to turn away from its dark path but have thrown

away the manual to true liberty from tyranny. At the course they point to The Monument to the Forefathers as this manual, that was left behind to the American people, so that if they ever lost their belief in freedom or the value of liberty, they could look to the Monument for guidance.

Religious freedom has long been considered a cornerstone of American democracy, rooted in the First Amendment of the United States Constitution, which guarantees the free exercise of religion (Simonnes, 2021). However, in the complex landscape of religious ideologies, another concept has emerged – religious dominionism. This belief system asserts that Christians should dominate not only the personal sphere but also society and its institutions (Gorski & Perry, 2022). This ideology intersects with the phenomenon of Christian Nationalism, creating a nuanced and often contentious relationship within the broader context of religious freedom, meaning that religious freedom doesn't only mean freedom from being persecuted, but the privilege to persecute to protect your own (Gorski & Perry, 2022). The concept of religious freedom is deeply ingrained in the principles that Patriot Church claims shaped the American nation. The Founding Fathers, recognizing the diverse religious landscape among the early settlers, sought to ensure that individuals had the right to practice their faith without fear of persecution or interference from the government. The First Amendment of the Constitution reflects this commitment, stating, "*Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.*" Religious freedom, as enshrined in the First Amendment, embodies the idea that individuals have the right to worship as they please, free from government imposition. It is a fundamental aspect of the pluralistic society that America aspires to be, fostering tolerance and coexistence among people of different faiths and beliefs.

In contrast, religious dominionism extends beyond personal belief and seeks to influence and shape society according to a specific interpretation of Christian doctrine (Denker, 2022). Adherents of dominionism believe that Christians should hold dominion over all aspects of society, including government, education, and culture. This belief system often manifests in a desire to implement biblical law in the public sphere (Gorski & Perry, 2022). Within the dominionistic framework, there are variations, ranging from soft dominionism, which seeks cultural influence, to hard dominionism, advocating for a more direct takeover of political and social institutions. It is important to note that not all Christians adhere to dominionism, and it is crucial to recognize that this ideology represents a particular subset of the broader Christian community.

Religious freedom and dominionism becomes particularly pronounced in the context of Christian Nationalism. Christian Nationalism often intertwines with dominionistic ideas, as some proponents of Christian Nationalism seek to establish a society where their interpretation of Christianity is not only tolerated, but actively promoted and integrated into the legal and cultural fabric of the nation (Denker, 2022). Both at church services and small groups, members of Patriot Church argued for the infusion of religious values into public policy, education, and the legal system. They saw religious freedom not only as the right to practice one's faith but also as the freedom to shape societal norms in alignment with their religious worldview. This could lead to tensions with the broader understanding of religious freedom, as the desire to establish a Christian nation may infringe upon the rights of individuals with different religious beliefs or no religious affiliation.

[The American Evangelical Relationship with God](#)

Every Sunday morning, Patriot Church invites its congregation to church. Their church is well lit, inviting and has a social atmosphere. The stage isn't large and gives as much space for seating as possible. It gives a sense of intimacy, compared to larger churches where the pastor is preaching from a large stage far away from the audience. By the time I arrive at the church at its first of two meetings, the seats are starting to fill up. The room is bustling with small talk until the worship team starts playing. The worship-leader, who's also the youth pastor of the church, invites the audience together to lift up and praise the name of Jesus. Patriot Church, like many other Pentecostals, puts a lot of focus on the worship. The music and the lyrics are carefully selected in advance, for example to substantiate what the Pastor is planning to preach about. The worship praises an almighty Lord who was and is and is to come, but at the same time a person whom one can have a personal and intimate relationship with. From my seat I observe how a Sunday service is simultaneously both holy and casual. As others in the room are having a deep spiritual dialog with God, other latecomers emerge from the side doors greeting acquaintances and getting themselves a cup of coffee and a donut. For everyone present in the room the invitation is clear; to experience God as if he was real in the flesh, standing by your side.

Psychologist and anthropologist, Tanya Luhrmann (2012) wonders on how a congregation could have such a deep personal relationship with Jesus, when they had never seen him. How could sensible people be able to believe that an invisible being with demonstrable effect on their lives? While attending services and small group meetings at The

Vineyard, an evangelical church with 600 branches across the country, she noticed that several members of the congregation said God had repeatedly spoken to them and that they had heard what God wanted them to do. To talk to God and recognize when he is present and when he responds to your prayers, is an important skill to master in the Vineyard Church and equally in Patriot Church (Luhmann, 2012). After accepting Jesus 'invitation and establishing a relationship with God, the first thing to master is to recognize that thoughts in their heads are not their own thoughts, but in fact God reaching out. One must overcome the fundamental awareness that our minds and thoughts are private. The important thing is to listen to your inner thoughts as God-generated and not our own. Prayer becomes the act of talking with God and a skill that requires practice (Luhmann, 2012).

At the core of the anthropology of faith lies the investigation into the nature of religious belief. Patriot Church is after all a church and the members attend the services first and foremost as believers, not as nationalists. Religious beliefs are not mere intellectual propositions; they encompass a profound dimension of human experience, intertwining with emotions, identity, and purpose (Luhmann, 2012). Therefore, better understanding the human dimension of faith gave me a better foundation to understand the inner workings of Patriot Church and the Christian Nationalistic movement. Evangelical Christians can be characterized by a fervent commitment to spreading the Christian gospel, emphasizes a personal and transformative relationship with Jesus Christ. Believers are encouraged to experience a "bornagain" moment, a deeply personal encounter that shapes their identity and understanding of the divine (Harding, 2000). To be "born-again" refers to the phenomenon of gaining a new spirit when a person accepts Jesus as his/her Lord and Savior and regenerates the Holy Spirit. At this point you leave behind the "old you" and continue onwards as a new person with a newfound purpose. The nature of religious belief, therefore, becomes a deeply intimate experience, transcending rational analysis and influencing the very core of one's being. This belief, at Patriot Church, is not just confined to doctrinal adherence or ritualistic practices; instead, it permeates the believer's daily life, influencing decisions, relationships, and perspectives. As a follower of Jesus, they want to believe that Jesus is as real and present today, as he was 2000 years ago (Luhmann, 2012). The personal dimension of faith is often marked by a sense of conviction, a profound belief that transcends doubt and uncertainty. The members of Patriot Church often described their faith as a source of comfort, guidance, and purpose. The personal relationship with Jesus is framed as a dynamic and transformative

journey, wherein individuals find peace in times of distress, guidance in moments of confusion, and a profound sense of purpose that shapes their aspirations and actions.

While faith in Patriot Church is deeply personal, it is also intricately interwoven with cultural contexts. It is important to acknowledge that religious beliefs are not isolated phenomena but are shaped by and, in turn, shape the cultural landscapes they inhabit (Harding, 2000). In Patriot Church, with its emphasis on evangelism, community, and moral values, their faith becomes a cultural phenomenon that leaves an indelible mark on the local society around them. In the congregation, shared beliefs and practices create a sense of belonging and identity. The cultural expression of faith may include worship styles, rituals, and communal activities that reinforce a collective identity. Something that would be very clear was that evangelical Christianity often intersects with political and social issues, influencing the cultural narrative and trying to shape the values of communities (Coleman, 2000). Faith, whether personal or cultural, significantly influences the worldviews and actions of individuals. This worldview is characterized by a moral framework grounded in biblical principles, influencing ethical decisions, social interactions, and political engagements (Luhmann, 2012). Patriot Church's members, driven by their faith, were very active participants in social and political movements. Issues such as abortion, LGBTQ+ rights, became focal points of engagement, with members seeking to shape societal norms and policies in accordance with their religious convictions. The influence of faith extended beyond individual actions, permeating the collective consciousness of communities and societies.

The role of Charismatic Christianity in Political America

Charismatic and Evangelical Christianity, a vibrant and emotive religious movement within Christianity, has played significant roles in shaping American politics (Djupe, Lewis, & Sokhey, 2023). Characterized by energetic worship, belief in spiritual gifts, and a personal relationship with God, charismatic Christianity has been a powerful force in mobilizing voters and influencing political decisions. The roots of charismatic Christianity can be traced back to the early 20th century with the emergence of the Pentecostal movement. Pentecostalism emphasized the experience of the Holy Spirit, including speaking in tongues and other spiritual gifts. Over time, charismatic Christianity expanded beyond Pentecostalism to encompass a broader range of denominations, including charismatic Catholics and mainstream Protestant churches. The Charismatic Movement gained momentum in the 1960s

and 1970s, coinciding with the broader countercultural movements of that era (Luhmann, 2012). As a reaction to the perceived spiritual stagnation in mainstream Christianity, charismatic leaders and believers sought a more dynamic and experiential form of faith. This movement's emphasis on direct encounters with the divine and the belief in miracles, healing, and prophecy laid the foundation for a potent religious force that would soon become intertwined with American politics. Charismatic Christian leaders have played pivotal roles in American politics, utilizing their religious influence to mobilize voters and impact policy decisions. Figures such as Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson, and Billy Graham became influential voices, leveraging their charismatic appeal to connect with a wide audience (Harding, 2000). Their ability to inspire and rally supporters around shared religious values marked a shift in the relationship between faith and politics. Jerry Falwell, the founder of the Moral Majority in the late 1970s, was a key figure in the fusion of charismatic Christianity with conservative politics. The Moral Majority, comprised largely of evangelical and charismatic Christians, sought to promote a conservative, religiously grounded agenda (Harding, 2000). Falwell and his followers advocated for issues such as pro-life stances, opposition to LGBTQ+ rights, and the promotion of traditional family values. Pat Robertson, a televangelist and founder of the Christian Broadcasting Network, also played a prominent role in the political landscape. His 1988 presidential campaign demonstrated the potential of charismatic Christian leaders to mobilize voters. While he did not secure the Republican nomination, Robertson's candidacy showcased the political influence of the charismatic movement (Harding, 2000).

Charismatic leaders effectively tap into the emotional and spiritual aspects of faith, framing political issues within a religious context. This approach resonates with a significant portion of the American electorate, particularly among evangelical and charismatic Christians who feel a deep connection between their faith and their civic duty. These leaders often use mass media, including television and radio, to disseminate their message and reach a broad audience (Djupe, Lewis, & Sokhey, 2023). Both Pastor Ken and co-pastor Shahram uses Facebook and other social networks actively to reach out to their members and followers. The charismatic style of communication, marked by passionate sermons and appeals to emotion, has proved to be a powerful tool in energizing the church. The congregation and members of Patriot Church are often encouraged to actively participate in political processes in Tennessee, reinforcing the idea that political engagement is a manifestation of their religious convictions, because if they didn't do anything, evil would prevail without resistance. It was also normal for Pastor Ken, after the worship was over, to give the church an update on the recent

developments of the different political cases he and other followers was invested in. This could be the fight against abortion at the State Capitol in Nashville or challenging dragqueens who wanted to read for children in libraries. Ken would also put the name of politicians and lawmakers who voted against their interests up on the screen with names and phone numbers so that the congregation could try and influence the outcome of the votes.

Charismatic Christianity has also played a role in shaping policy decisions through its impact on electoral outcomes. Politicians seeking support from the charismatic Christian demographic are often compelled to align their policy positions with the moral and social values advocated by charismatic leaders. Issues such as abortion, LGBTQ+ rights, and education have become focal points for the intersection of charismatic Christianity and politics. The emphasis on conservative social values within the charismatic movement has influenced the Republican Party platform, as seen in the alignment of religiously motivated voters with conservative candidates (Denker, 2022). This alignment has led to the prioritization of certain policy issues and the nomination of candidates who are in sync with the values espoused by charismatic leaders. Critics argue that the infusion of charismatic Christianity into politics can be divisive, contributing to a polarization of issues and reinforcing social conservatism (Djupe, Lewis, & Sokhey, 2023). On the other hand, supporters contend that it provides a vital voice for those whose religious beliefs guide their worldview and moral convictions. Charismatic Christianity's role in American politics has been transformative, influencing both the mobilization of voters and the shaping of policy decisions. Charismatic leaders have harnessed the emotional and spiritual aspects of faith to build political movements, leveraging their influence to impact elections and policy outcomes. As the United States continues to navigate the complex relationship between religion and politics, the charismatic movement is likely to remain a powerful force shaping the nation's political landscape. Understanding this dynamic is essential for comprehending the broader intersections of faith, culture, and governance in American society. It also arises a conflict between religious freedom and religious dominionism.

Trump, God, and Red State Christians

To understand the relationship between Donald Trump and conservative evangelical Christians, it's essential to first appreciate the historical context. Evangelical Christians have been a significant political force in the United States for decades. Their influence became particularly pronounced in the late 20th century with the rise of the Moral Majority, a political

organization founded by Jerry Falwell in 1979 (Harding, 2000). The Moral Majority mobilized conservative Christians to support political candidates who aligned with their views on issues such as abortion, same-sex marriage, and religious freedom. The alignment of evangelical Christians with the Republican Party solidified during the Reagan era. Ronald Reagan, though not deeply religious, was able to garner substantial support from evangelicals by endorsing their key issues and framing his policies within a moral and religious context. This set a precedent for future Republican candidates, who increasingly sought the evangelical vote as a cornerstone of their electoral strategies (Simonnes, 2021).

When Donald Trump announced his candidacy for president in 2015, many political analysts were skeptical about his ability to win over the evangelical vote (Denker, 2022). Trump, a thrice-married businessman with a history of liberal positions on social issues, seemed an unlikely champion for a demographic that prized personal morality and religious conviction. However, several factors contributed to his surprising appeal to evangelical Christians (Simonnes, 2021). Firstly, Trump's straightforward, often blunt rhetoric resonated with many evangelicals who felt that political correctness had gone too far and that their values were under siege. His promise to "Make America Great Again" struck a chord with those who longed for a return to what they perceived as a more moral and orderly society. Additionally, his commitment to appointing conservative judges to the Supreme Court, particularly those who might overturn *Roe v. Wade*, was a significant draw (Djupe, Lewis, & Sokhey, 2023).

Secondly, key evangelical leaders quickly threw their support behind Trump. Figures like Jerry Falwell Jr., Franklin Graham, and Robert Jeffress became vocal proponents of his candidacy. These leaders argued that despite his personal flaws, Trump was the best candidate to advance the evangelical agenda (Simonnes, 2021). They highlighted his promises to protect religious freedom, oppose abortion, and support Israel as crucial reasons for their endorsement. Prominent church leaders played a critical role in shaping evangelical support for Trump. Jerry Falwell Jr., then president of Liberty University, was one of the first major evangelical figures to endorse Trump. Falwell's endorsement provided Trump with a significant boost, signaling to evangelical voters that supporting Trump was compatible with their values. Falwell emphasized Trump's commitment to religious liberty and his promise to appoint conservative justices to the Supreme Court. Franklin Graham, son of the famed evangelist Billy Graham, also became a staunch supporter of Trump. Graham often framed the election as a spiritual battle, urging Christians to vote for Trump to protect religious freedoms

and uphold Christian values in the public sphere (Simonnes, 2021). His influence, stemming from his leadership of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association and his high-profile crusades, was pivotal in mobilizing evangelical voters. Robert Jeffress, pastor of the First Baptist Church in Dallas, was another influential voice. Jeffress frequently appeared in the media defending Trump and articulating why evangelicals should support him. He argued that Trump was a modern-day Cyrus, a biblical figure who, despite not being a believer, was used by God to achieve His purposes. This narrative helped many evangelicals reconcile their support for a candidate whose personal life did not align with their moral expectations.

The 2016 election saw unprecedented levels of evangelical mobilization in support of Trump. According to exit polls, approximately 81% of white evangelical Christians voted for Trump, a higher percentage than voted for George W. Bush, John McCain, or Mitt Romney in previous elections (Djupe, Lewis, & Sokhey, 2023). This overwhelming support was crucial in securing Trump's victory, particularly in key swing states like Florida, Pennsylvania, and Ohio. Several factors contributed to this high level of support. Firstly, Trump's campaign effectively communicated his stance on issues that were of paramount importance to evangelicals. His commitment to appointing pro-life justices, defending religious liberty, and opposing same-sex marriage resonated deeply with this demographic (Denker, 2022). Additionally, the Republican National Convention featured numerous evangelical speakers, further solidifying his connection to the community. Secondly, the role of evangelical media cannot be underestimated. Christian television networks, radio stations, and online platforms played a significant role in shaping evangelical opinion (Simonnes, 2021). Programs hosted by figures like Pat Robertson and James Dobson provided a steady stream of pro-Trump commentary, framing his candidacy in a positive light and reinforcing the narrative that voting for Trump was a moral imperative.

Once in office, Trump delivered on many of his promises to evangelicals, further solidifying their support. His administration made significant strides in appointing conservative judges, with three Supreme Court justices—Neil Gorsuch, Brett Kavanaugh, and Amy Coney Barrett—being confirmed during his tenure. These appointments were hailed as major victories by evangelical leaders, who saw them as essential to advancing their goals of overturning *Roe v. Wade* and protecting religious freedoms (Simonnes, 2021). Trump's policies on religious liberty also endeared him to evangelicals. He issued executive orders aimed at expanding religious freedom, including measures that allowed religious organizations to receive federal funding and protections for healthcare workers who objected

to providing services like abortion on religious grounds. His administration also rolled back Obama-era policies that were seen as infringing on religious liberties, such as mandates requiring employers to provide contraception coverage. Furthermore, Trump's unwavering support for Israel, including the controversial decision to move the U.S. Embassy to Jerusalem, resonated with many evangelicals who view the support of Israel as a biblical mandate. This policy move was celebrated by evangelical leaders and their congregations, who often see the modern state of Israel as playing a central role in biblical prophecy. Despite broad support, Trump's relationship with evangelicals was not without its critics and internal divisions. Some evangelicals, particularly younger and more diverse members of the community, expressed discomfort with Trump's rhetoric and policies, especially those related to immigration and race. These critics argued that aligning too closely with Trump risked compromising the moral integrity of the evangelical witness and alienating potential converts. Prominent evangelical figures like Russell Moore, president of the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention, were vocal in their criticism of Trump. Moore and others argued that Trump's behavior and policies were inconsistent with Christian values and that evangelicals should be wary of aligning themselves too closely with a political figure. These dissenting voices highlighted the diversity of opinion within the evangelical community and the tension between political pragmatism and moral conviction.

As the 2020 election approached, the relationship between Trump and evangelical Christians remained strong, though with some notable shifts. The COVID-19 pandemic and the social unrest following the killing of George Floyd brought new challenges and opportunities for evangelical engagement in politics. Trump continued to court the evangelical vote, emphasizing his administration's achievements in appointing conservative judges, protecting religious liberties, and supporting Israel. However, the pandemic also exposed some of the fault lines within the evangelical community. While many evangelical leaders continued to support Trump, some expressed frustration with his handling of the crisis, particularly his inconsistent messaging and perceived lack of empathy. The racial unrest also prompted a reexamination of the evangelical community's stance on issues of race and justice, with some leaders calling for a more robust engagement with social justice issues. In the 2020 election, Trump once again received strong support from evangelical voters, though slightly less than in 2016. According to exit polls, about 76% of white evangelicals voted for Trump, down from 81% in 2016. This decline, while not substantial, indicated a shift within the

community, with some evangelicals choosing to either abstain from voting or support a thirdparty candidate (Djupe, Lewis, & Sokhey, 2023).

The United States is unique among Western democracies in the extent to which religion influences its politics (Denker, 2022). This influence is reflected in the prominence of religious rhetoric in political discourse, the mobilization of religious voters, and the active involvement of religious leaders in electoral politics. Religious rhetoric has long been a staple of American political campaigns. Candidates frequently invoke religious language and imagery to appeal to voters' moral and spiritual sensibilities. This practice is particularly pronounced among Republican candidates, who often frame their policies in terms of religious values and moral imperatives. However, Democratic candidates also engage with religious themes, though typically in a more inclusive and less doctrinaire manner.

The mobilization of religious voters is another key aspect of religion's role in American elections. Religious organizations, particularly evangelical churches, play a crucial role in voter registration drives, get-out-the-vote efforts, and political education. These activities are often coordinated through networks of churches and religious organizations, leveraging their significant social capital to influence electoral outcomes. Religious leaders, like Pastor Ken, also plays a direct role in electoral politics, both as endorsers of candidates and as candidates themselves. Endorsements from prominent religious leaders can provide a significant boost to a candidate's campaign, signaling to religious voters that the candidate aligns with their values. Additionally, some religious leaders have run for office themselves, bringing their moral authority and networks of supporters to the political arena.

The future of evangelical influence in American politics is likely to be shaped by several factors, including demographic changes, cultural shifts, and the evolving political landscape (Djupe, Lewis, & Sokhey, 2023). Demographic changes, particularly the growth of the Hispanic population and the increasing religious diversity of the United States, may alter the composition of the evangelical community and its political priorities. Cultural shifts, such as the increasing acceptance of same-sex marriage and the growing emphasis on social justice issues, may also influence evangelical political engagement. While older evangelicals tend to prioritize issues like abortion and religious liberty, younger evangelicals are more likely to emphasize issues like racial justice, climate change, and immigration. This generational shift could lead to a realignment of evangelical political priorities and alliances.

The evolving political landscape, particularly the increasing polarization and fragmentation of American politics, may also impact evangelical influence. The rise of

populism and nationalism, as exemplified by Trump's presidency, has reshaped the Republican Party and its relationship with evangelical voters. As the party continues to evolve, so too will its strategies for engaging with the evangelical community.

The relationship between Donald Trump and conservative evangelical Christians is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that reflects broader trends in American politics and society. Trump's appeal to evangelicals was rooted in a combination of shared values, strategic endorsements from prominent religious leaders, and effective mobilization efforts. Despite internal divisions and criticisms, the Patriot Church community and others like them played a crucial role in Trump's electoral success, demonstrating the significant influence of religion in American politics.

Religious Freedom vs. Religious Dominionism

The tension between religious freedom and religious dominionism is central to the discourse on Christian nationalism. Religious freedom, as enshrined in the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, guarantees individuals the right to practice their faith without government interference. It is a cornerstone of American democracy, ensuring a pluralistic society where diverse beliefs can coexist.

Religious dominionism, on the other hand, is the belief that Christians are mandated by God to govern all aspects of society, including political, legal, and cultural institutions (Gorski & Perry, 2022). This ideology seeks to transform society to reflect Christian doctrines, often advocating for laws and policies that prioritize Christian beliefs over others. Dominionism is not monolithic; it ranges from advocating for Christian values in public policy to more extreme forms that call for a theocratic government.

In contemporary American politics, Christian nationalism manifests in various forms, influencing policy debates, electoral strategies, and social movements. The political mobilization of evangelical Christians, who often support Christian nationalist ideals, has been a significant force in shaping the Republican Party's platform. Issues such as abortion, same-sex marriage, and religious exemptions from anti-discrimination laws are battlegrounds where the conflict between religious freedom and dominionism plays out. Conversely, proponents of religious freedom argue that denying same-sex couples the right to marry violates their civil rights and the principle of equality before the law. They contend that a truly pluralistic society must accommodate diverse beliefs and lifestyles, ensuring that no single religious doctrine dominates public policy.

The controversy over religious exemptions in anti-discrimination laws further illustrates this conflict. Ken and Patriot Church advocate for exemptions that allow individuals and businesses to refuse services based on religious beliefs, arguing that such protections are necessary to uphold their freedom of conscience. During my time with the church, it often happened that a new company was added to the ever growing list of companies on the no-go lists. This could be companies such as Target, when they started up with a Pride clothing collection. When critics, argued that these exemptions enabled discrimination against marginalized groups, undermining the principles of equality and nondiscrimination, Patriot Church advocated for freedom of speech and their religious freedom.

The influence of Christian nationalism on American politics has had significant implications for democratic institutions and social cohesion (Gorski & Perry, 2022). By privileging one religious' perspective, policies inspired by Christian nationalism can erode the separation of church and state, a principle that has historically safeguarded religious pluralism and prevented the dominance of any single faith tradition. Ken preached many times over that this separation needed to go, that it hindered America from being closer to God. As mentioned earlier, they believe in the deep history of the Christian faith in the American society, and doesn't see any need for a separation between church and state. As far as they are concerned, the church should be the state. Furthermore, the politicization of religion deepens social divisions, fostering an "us vs. them" mentality (Zimmerman, 2022). This polarization is evident in the increasing animosity between religious and secular groups, as well as among different religious communities. The perception that American identity is intrinsically linked to Christianity marginalizes non-Christian citizens, contributing to social fragmentation and a sense of exclusion.

The rise of Christian nationalism may also pose challenges to the integrity of democratic processes (Onishi, 2023). When political candidates and leaders invoke religious rhetoric to garner support, it can blur the line between religious conviction and political expediency (Luhmann, 2012). This fusion of faith and politics can lead to the manipulation of religious sentiments for electoral gain, undermining the authenticity of both religious and democratic values. Addressing the conflict between religious freedom and religious dominionism requires a multifaceted approach, with education and dialogue playing crucial roles. Promoting a nuanced understanding of the First Amendment and the principles of religious freedom can help mitigate the influence of Christian nationalism. Educational

initiatives emphasize the importance of separating personal beliefs from public policy, fostering respect for diverse perspectives. Dialogue between religious and secular communities is essential for bridging divides and fostering mutual understanding. Interfaith and intercultural initiatives can create spaces for constructive conversations, where individuals can explore common values and work towards shared goals. By focusing on areas of agreement, such as the importance of justice, compassion, and community, it is possible to build coalitions that transcend religious and ideological differences. Understanding Christian nationalism provides valuable insights into the ongoing conflict between religious freedom and religious dominionism in American politics. This ideology continues to shape contemporary political discourse and policy debates. The tension between advocating for a society governed by Christian principles and upholding the constitutional guarantee of religious freedom highlights the complexities of navigating a pluralistic democracy. Addressing this conflict requires a commitment to the principles of religious freedom, respect for diversity, and the separation of church and state. Through education and dialogue, it is possible to foster a more inclusive and cohesive society, where individuals of all faiths and beliefs can coexist and contribute to the common good. As America continues to grapple with the implications of Christian nationalism, it must reaffirm its commitment to the foundational values of liberty, equality, and justice for all.

Chapter 3

The Culture War



Imagine for a second, that you one day discover everything you thought you knew about the world around you – were not true. That the society you live in is controlled by people who doesn't have your interests at heart. The things you see on TV or read about in the news is controlled and censored, directly aimed towards giving you a false impression of the true events taking place. This is the Culture War that many of the members of Patriot Church believe America finds itself in. The ongoing Culture War in America is a multifaceted clash of values, ideologies, and identities that permeates nearly every aspect of society, from politics to media to everyday interactions (Zimmerman, 2022). At its core, it represents a struggle for power and influence over the dominant narratives and norms that shape the collective consciousness of the nation. This cultural battleground is marked by intense debates and polarization on issues ranging from abortion rights to the trans movement to the rise of Christian nationalism, each of which reflects deeper fissures within American society

(Sánchez-Prieto, 2023). Abortion remains one of the most contentious and deeply divisive issues in the Culture War. At the heart of this debate lie fundamentally different beliefs about personhood, bodily autonomy, and the role of government in regulating reproductive rights. On one side are those who advocate for women's right to choose, arguing that access to safe and legal abortion is essential for women's health, autonomy, and equality. They view restrictions on abortion as an infringement on individual rights and a threat to women's agency over their own bodies. On the other side are anti-abortion activists who often frame the issue in moral and religious terms, asserting the sanctity of life from conception and advocating for legal protections for the unborn. For them, the Culture War over abortion is a battle to protect the rights of the unborn and uphold traditional values rooted in Judeo-Christian ethics. The trans movement has emerged as another flashpoint in the Culture War, challenging traditional understandings of gender and identity. Transgender individuals, who identify with a gender different from the one assigned to them at birth, have increasingly demanded recognition, rights, and acceptance in society. This has sparked heated debates over issues such as bathroom access, gender-neutral language, and healthcare coverage for genderaffirming treatments.

Supporters of the trans movement argue for greater inclusivity, equality, and respect for transgender individuals, emphasizing the importance of self-identification and affirming gender identity. They advocate for policies and cultural shifts that recognize and accommodate diverse gender identities, challenging rigid gender norms and discrimination based on gender identity or expression. Patriot Church and its members on the other hand, view this as a clear strategy to break down the American society. They view it as a threat to traditional notions of gender, family, and societal norms. They raise concerns about the erasure of biological distinctions between male and female, the potential impact on children and adolescents exploring gender identity, and the perceived infringement on religious freedom and parental rights. For them, the Culture War over the trans movement is a struggle to uphold traditional understandings of gender and preserve what they see as the natural order.

Christian nationalism has also become a significant force in the Culture War, fueled by a fusion of religious identity with political ideology (Bjork-James, 2019). Proponents of Christian nationalism, like Patriot Church, advocate for policies and practices that reflect their religious beliefs, including efforts to promote prayer in schools, display religious symbols in public spaces, and enact laws aligned with conservative Christian morality. They see the Culture War as a battle to reclaim America's Christian heritage and resist what they perceive

as secularization and moral decline. Critics of Christian nationalism, however, raise concerns about the erosion of the separation of church and state, the marginalization of religious minorities, and the potential for discrimination and intolerance in the name of religious freedom. They argue for a pluralistic society that respects religious diversity and ensures equal rights and protections for all, regardless of religious affiliation. At its core, it is a struggle for power, identity, and the “soul of the nation”, with what could be far-reaching implications for the future of American society and democracy.

I will therefore in this chapter explore the culture war by examining three different cases. Firstly, I will present what the supposed culture war is and the role it has procured in American society. Furthermore, I will examine the members of Patriot Church’s views on how the culture war affects their life, by exploring their opinions on the effects and their solutions to the cultural conflict.

Secondly, I will present how the church and its members, led by Pastor Ken, decide to fight against the “woke left”, the liberal politicians and the Republican “Rinos”, as they fight against liberalization of abortion rights in Tennessee. I look at how Ken mobilizes his members to join his trips back and forth to the Capitol in Nashville, where they lobby to uphold the abortion laws unchanged. In their efforts to make the womb safe again, and to keep Tennessee free from abortion and other abominations, they uphold the sensation of America as a Christian nation. I will also explore their views on the US/Mexico border, where they see a new potential threat rising, the illegal mass immigration which will end in the replacement of white American Culture.

Lastly, I will look at the Nashville school shooting of 27th, and put it into context to how Patriot Church and their members look at the shooting and see it as clear evidence to the culture war escalating. The Nashville shooting, a school shooting that was carried out by the transgender perpetrator Aiden Hale, killed six people, and caused a lot of distress in the community of Patriot Church, leading to them rising money for armed security outside their own school.

“Willingly Overlooking Known Evil”

One day I sat down with David and his wife Caroline. I had met them early on in my fieldwork and we had started to become more known with each other. As we sat down David said he thought Trump was coming back for a huge comeback in 2024. As he saw it, nothing could stop Trump. They had a small victory January 6, but didn’t succeed in nothing more

than to prove for the whole world that Biden stole the election. I asked him what he meant by the democrats winning on January 6, the now infamous insurrection at the Capitol in Washington DC. He looked at Caroline, smiled and then said that the media lied about the whole thing. The people outside the Capitol were Patriots who were infiltrated by ANTIFA and FBI, who persuaded them to enter the Capitol. I only had to look at how many patriots who were in prison now because of the FBI tricking them. Caroline then said they had watched Jessie Walters on Fox News, talking about how the new coup is already being planned by the Deep State, to win again in the 2024 election. Trump was now fighting through lawsuit after lawsuit pinned on him by corrupt politicians who hate America. I sat there thinking I had to ask them who and what this Deep State is. David didn't hesitate and said the Deep State are New York Times, Washington Post, CIA and all the other branches of the US's government who have worked day and night against the American people for the last 8 years. "Just look at him", David said, pointing to picture of a politician I didn't recognize. "This stupid idiot is part of the Lincoln Project. They got millions of dollars before the 2020 election just to spread hate about Trump. Do you think that's fair"? I had to admit, thinking I needed to save the lunch, that it sounded suspicious. Caroline had even heard that the leader of the project had used the money on boys and was scandalized. Other members like George Conway were convicted as a liar. This was the people that the Mainstream Media used against Trump because the media and the Democrats are desperate in their efforts to hide the evidence, because they see 2024 as another opportunity for Trump to again gain power. The media is desperate, because they can't figure out why Trump still is so popular, and they refuse to understand it. *"They only try to push him and his voters down in a pit, but after 8 years, it's like throwing water on the gose. It just bounces off"*. The Media therefore only digs itself deeper and deeper down in their self-made hole.

David said I only needed to look towards American higher education as it is, as he put it, sinking deeper and deeper into the woke sinking hole. David reflected upon how the intellectuals has forsaken its role as the critical voice of society. David felt it was uncomfortable that the American Universities like Harvard and Yale was becoming more and more radical. *"They have had years of critical race theory and anti-racism against white people. A political program that programs them into not liking opinions they don't like"*. David had heard a lecture on YouTube on the topic. A professor he said was named Ferguson had held a lecture where he talked about how mythical activists had crossed the line from science and knowledge to politics. That was, according to David, the fatal moment.

Furthermore, he told me how this could even be traced back to the German universities of Hitler's Nazi-Germany. As they were writing the treason of the intellectuals, German professors were already well on the way to providing justifications for the antisemitism that would be the foundation of Hitler's Third Reich. In our time, American professors have become apologists for the anti-Semitism and terrorism of Hamas, and he meant it very seriously when he said the fate of the great German universities of the 1930s and 1940s is a terrible warning to the elite universities of the United States. He then asked;

“How bad you may say, are our established Universities? Let me tell you, according to the foundation for individual rights and expression, the number of campus de-platforming attempts soared to a record high last year. There were 137 up from 81 in 2022. Let's look at the latest Heterodox Academy report in 2022 which is the most recent data we have, 59% of students reported being reluctant to discuss at least one of five controversial topics they were asked about. 62% of students said that was because quote; “other students would make critical comments with each other after class”. 63% of students! This is in universities across the country who have agreed that the climate on their campus prevented people from saying things they believe because the because others might find these views offensive”.

Later in the week at the church I asked Simon, another member of Patriot Church what he thought about David's opinions on American Colleges. Simon could indeed confirm David's beliefs and claimed many more of the people in the church had similar stories of their own or had family members who had dropped out of college for this reason. Ken also talked about this in one of his services. He tried to find the essence that explained how America, the official America, had swung so sharply towards the Left. He said one must look at both the teachers and the students because they are an essential part of the explanation. They are ideologized while at the University and then they go out into institutions and big companies and begin to influence those around them. One could ask why, he said, and it is because of the reason being Leftists feel they have a completely obvious right to change society the way they want, because they are convinced that they want the best for everyone, he said. Conservatives are either harming or belong to the scrapheap of history. The Liberal Party had already started long before Trump appeared, they simply went completely crazy because Trump is the phenomenon that should never have happened. He is against normality, and they use absolutely all the tools they have, including the judiciary, and even that is proving to be very

difficult because their cases are bad and with now evidence. There is nothing to take Trump down with and if it had been, it would have been on the table a long time ago.

Caroline sighed and looked at me. *“Even these who engage in perversions or have deviated from the norm, when ordinary Americans hear that if Trump said something bad, he has said something bad, but the Clintons flew with Jeffrey Epstein's plane, Lolita express, twenty-six times”*. And she reminded me of the triangle between Monica Lewinsky, Clinton, and Hillary. These are the same ones who then used some statements on tape that were 8 years old against Trump to discredit him. She was frustrated, but relieved over how Americans had somehow been schooled through all these years to see what they are up to against, and they don't like it. She said it's not just critical race theory, which is a form of reverse racism, it's also the use of LGBTQ and the trans movement being used in an ideological way. You must believe it first, to observe the design behind the brainwashing that the Americans have become a victim of. Caroline was especially concerned about the children. She was tired of the government and media listening to a marginal group that's only about 0.6% of the population. Not only were the LGBTQI listened to, but they were also lifted as the new norm. Caroline sees it as not a coincidence, but a calculated plan by the Left and the globalists to destroy the nuclear Christian family and the parents' authority. They feel provoked and lied to because they claim that the movement is given millions of dollars and experts go on TV claiming that no one under 18 are targeted. But both David and Caroline have heard about 14-year old's who have removed their breasts, put on chemical cures and are destroyed for life. And now they are seeing more and more people rising against it, and the lawsuits a piling up. *“When your 14 you don't know what you're doing. Even many 20-yearold don't know the effects of what they do now to their bodies. And that's a fact the transphenomenon knows about and have taken advantage of. Just look at those who have gone through with it. They have done irreparable harm to themselves and must live on painkillers for the rest of their lives. And this is the movement who has the motto “no one is free until everyone is”*.

Others in Patriot Church had called it a mass psychosis which have spread to almost every corner of the population. And the Left and the government supposedly loves it. They want it in the schools and universities, but both David and Caroline see it as a violation of the kids. Pastor Shahram has drawn lines between the Pride-movement and the impact of demons among us. And the teachers at the schools too have a role to play. They have made an environment in the classroom where no one dares to go against it. They show me a study that concludes that 3 out of 4 liberals wants to control the opinions that comes forth at the schools.

If teachers say no to Pride, according to the study, 3 out of 4 students say they want to get the teacher fired. *“So many teachers have been fired, you wouldn’t believe it, but no American or European media wants to write about it!”* That would hurt the Democrats and Obama. When I heard the name Obama, I had to ask a follow up question; *“Don’t you mean Biden?”* *“No, no, the real power in the White House isn’t Biden. He is demented and don’t even know which state he’s in. It has always been Obama pulling strings.”*

“Pray to Keep Tennessee Abortion Free!”

One Sunday in March 2023, Ken had a new update for the church’s congregation. A new house bill was presented for the house committee. The house bill would open the opportunity for mothers to abort the fetus in case of severe sickness in either her or the child. The small liberalization of the abortion law was met with swift condemnation from Ken and the rest of the church. The Pastor said he was going back for Nashville to fight these forces of evil yet again and give the unborn a voice.

I therefore found myself the next day riding along in Kens car with 3 other members of the church, headed for the Capitol in Nashville. The plan was clear, after parking the car, all the members would meet outside of the Capitol building, and together march up to the front of the building. On the top of the stairs, our group was met by familiar faces from Patriot Church. The atmosphere in the group, which now numbered approximately 20 people, was light, but I felt at the same time there was a hint of seriousness in the air. Ken asked if we could gather in a circle for a short prayer before they entered the building. As group circled in Pastor Ken started praying – he prayed for all guardian angels to come down and confuse the minds of the legislator in the building behind them. The angels had to confuse them, so that no action could be made in which His babies were going to get killed. Ken finishes of the prayer and ask the group if they are ready. The response is clear – they were ready to fight.

After entering through the security and walking the seemingly endless corridors of the Nashville Capitol Building, it became obvious that Ken was on a mission. By mission I mean that he was looking for legislative representatives he knew was on the “right side” and talk to them on how they could win the vote surrounding the abortion-bill. Everywhere in the corridors, there were doctors and nurses in their white coats who were all out on the same errand, how to influence the vote. They gave us all hard looks as they passed us and I felt like an anthropologist caught between two sides in a locked conflict.

Abortion is another topic which people in the Patriot Church have strong opinions about, and a topic often discussed during my fieldwork. And as I've just shown, it is a topic worth driving 6 hours back and forth to Nashville to protect. The tensions between Christian nationalists and abortion stem from deeply held religious beliefs and moral convictions regarding the sanctity of life and the role of government in protecting it (Harding, 2000). From this perspective, abortion is seen as a grave moral wrong, tantamount to the taking of innocent life, and therefore incompatible with Christian teachings and American values. Christian nationalists advocate for legal restrictions on abortion, viewing it as a moral imperative to protect the rights of the unborn and uphold the sanctity of human life from conception. For Christian nationalists, the Culture War over abortion is not only a battle to protect the unborn but also a broader struggle to preserve traditional moral values and religious freedom in the face of what they perceive as secularization and moral decay (Burdick, 2024). They see efforts to expand access to abortion services or uphold reproductive rights as a direct assault on their religious beliefs and the fabric of American society. Conversely, critics of Christian nationalism argue that efforts to impose religiously motivated restrictions on abortion infringe on individual rights and threaten the separation of church and state. They advocate for a secular approach to public policy that respects diverse religious beliefs and ensures reproductive freedom for all individuals, regardless of religious affiliation. Ultimately, the tensions between Christian nationalists and abortion reflect deeper divisions within American society over issues of morality, religion, and the proper role of government in regulating personal behavior.

Pastor Ken has become a veteran in this Culture War. During his tenure as Pastor, he has many years behind him demonstrating against abortion, the trans movement and illegal immigration. And I didn't have to wait long to experience this for myself. Both Ken and Shahram would often update the church on how the abortion fight was going in America and Tennessee especially. One of the reasons to why Ken and his family left his home state Washington, was the liberation of abortion laws in the state. Abortion had therefore become a central topic for the church. On many occasions, Ken, during the opening of the Sunday service, would take to the stage and update the congregation on the state of the unborn in Tennessee. One week, the Capitol in Nashville issued out a new house bill that would liberalize the abortion laws in the state of Tennessee. Tennessee has already one of the strictest laws regarding abortion, and the house bill wouldn't ease it up too much. This was still viewed as an attack on not only their religious faith, but on life itself. Ken would therefore on

stage show pictures of the different representatives that were going to vote on the notion. As he showed the pictures, he said the church could not serve both God and the world. At one point they had to choose, and the choice would always be to follow the word of God. *“This is the reason we fight the culture war. It is necessary to lay the groundworks for Gods kingdom on this earth.”* The culture war is used to show the congregation who the enemy is. The two sides of the conflict are carefully split into the categories of the ones who serve the good, God, and the side who serves the powers of evil. When Ken talks about the nurses and the doctors present at the committee-meetings, they are not talked about as professional caretakers or highly educated in their field of expertise. They are Kens version of Woke; Willingly Overlooking Known Evil.

“Keep America Christian”

One of the key strategies of Christian nationalism is to frame societal changes and external influences as threats to this perceived Christian identity (Al-Kire, 2021). This is where the narrative of threat becomes pivotal. Research shows that Christian nationalists often depict Islam as an antithetical force that endangers the cultural and religious fabric of the nation (Baker, 2020). This framing leverages historical narratives of conflict between Christianity and Islam, such as the Crusades, and contemporary geopolitical conflicts involving predominantly Muslim countries.

The portrayal of Islam as a threat serves as a foundation for broader anti-Islam and anti-immigration rhetoric (Shortle & Gaddie, 2015). This rhetoric often paints Muslim immigrants as potential terrorists, extremists, or adherents of a religion incompatible with Western values. For instance, in the United States, political figures and media personalities who subscribe to Christian nationalist views frequently argue that allowing Muslim immigrants into the country increases the risk of terrorism and undermines the nation's Christian heritage. Pastor Shahram would even go as far as to claim anti-Christ could possibly come from the Islamic faith. This surprised me, knowing Shaharam had grown up in a Muslim country. This rhetoric is not limited to the United States. In Europe, similar sentiments are expressed by far-right political parties and movements, which argue that Muslim immigrants are a threat to national security, cultural identity, and social cohesion. The fear of cultural dilution and the perceived failure of multiculturalism are often cited as reasons for opposing Muslim immigration. This discourse is not only about security but also about maintaining a homogenous national identity that is seen as inherently Christian (Baker, 2020).

The argument for safer borders is a central theme in the narrative of Christian nationalism. This argument posits that stringent border controls and immigration policies are necessary to protect the nation from external threats (Al-Kire, Pasek, Tsang, Leman, & Rowatt, 2022). This narrative often includes the notion that Muslim immigrants pose a unique threat due to their religion. For example, the travel bans, and stringent vetting processes proposed by political leaders often explicitly target predominantly Muslim countries, justified under the guise of national security (Al-Kire, Pasek, Tsang, Leman, & Rowatt, 2022). In this context, "safer borders" become a euphemism for excluding individuals based on their religion and ethnicity (Whitehead & Perry, 2020). The rhetoric suggests that by keeping Muslims out, the nation can preserve its Christian identity and protect itself from terrorism and cultural erosion. This viewpoint ignores the diverse and peaceful nature of the majority of Muslim immigrants and reduces complex social issues into "us vs them".

The Great Replacement theory is viewed by most as a conspiracy theory that fits neatly into this narrative of threat (Ekman, 2022) (Djupe, Lewis, & Sokhey, 2023). This theory posits that there is a deliberate effort, often orchestrated by global elites or specific ethnic groups, to replace the native population of a country with immigrants. This theory is particularly popular among white supremacist and far-right groups and has been used to stoke fears of demographic change and cultural displacement. In the context of Christian nationalism, the Great Replacement theory amplifies fears of a Muslim takeover (Djupe, Lewis, & Sokhey, 2023). It suggests that the influx of Muslim immigrants is part of a broader plan to Islamize the West, thereby replacing the Christian population and eradicating its cultural and religious identity (Ekman, 2022). This theory has been cited in various terrorist manifestos and has influenced numerous violent attacks against Muslims and other minority groups. The Great Replacement theory leverages demographic statistics and immigration trends to create a sense of urgency and existential threat. It often uses inflammatory rhetoric and pseudoscientific claims to argue that Western nations are on the brink of losing their cultural identity. This theory has been debunked by numerous scholars and experts who point out that demographic changes are natural, and that diversity strengthens rather than weakens societies. However, its emotional appeal and simplicity make it a powerful tool for those seeking to mobilize support for anti-Islam and anti-immigration policies (Al-Kire, Pasek, Tsang, Leman, & Rowatt, 2022). They may emphasize crimes committed by Muslims, ignore, or downplay positive contributions of Muslim communities, and use dehumanizing language to describe Muslim immigrants. Political leaders who adopt Christian nationalist rhetoric

could also play a significant role in mainstreaming these ideas (Armaly, Buckley , & Enders, 2022). They may propose policies that explicitly or implicitly target Muslim communities, use inflammatory language to describe Islam, and promote the idea that the nation's Christian identity is under siege. This creates a feedback loop where media coverage and political discourse reinforce each other, making Islamophobia and xenophobia more socially acceptable.

LGBTQIA and the school shooting in Nashville

On the morning of March 27th, Aiden Hale, a 28-year-old Nashville resident, broke into the Covenant School in Nashville. Heavily armed, he gained access to the building by shooting through a glass door and then proceeded to shot and kill 3 students aged 9 and 3 employees. The Covenant School shooting was unique in two different ways. Firstly, the Covenant School was a private Christian elementary school, affiliated with the conservative Covenant Presbyterian Church. Only 6% percent of School shootings happens at private schools (Ball & Suleyman, 2023). Secondly, and maybe most importantly, the shooter identified as a transperson. And coincidence would have it that Patriot Church's school has the same name as the school that was attacked in Nashville. This led to panic among many members, before they realized that it was another Covenant Christian School.

The reaction from Ken and other prominent members was not long in coming and was, if possible, not difficult to predict. The first meeting after the attack was used to emphasize a kind of "I told you so" to those who had doubted that the Trans movement was, and is looking to attack, not only Christians, but their children.

The attack on Covenant Christian School in Nashville even further pushed Pastor Ken and Shahram's narrative of threat against their church. Therefore, in the coming week after, Patriot Church invited all of the congregation for a social evening of fun, quiz and silent auction. And what did the money go to, you may ask, armed security outside their won school. As Ken later would say from the pulpit; *"When the enemy comes with their weapons, the only thing to do is to bring larger weapons"*.

The tensions between Christian nationalists and the trans movement arise from contrasting beliefs about gender, sexuality, and the moral order of society (O'Donnell J. S., 2020). Christian nationalists often adhere to traditional interpretations of religious texts that emphasize binary understandings of gender and the importance of biological sex in defining one's identity (Bjork-James, 2019). From this perspective, the trans movement, which

challenges these traditional norms by affirming diverse gender identities and advocating for transgender rights, is seen as a threat to religious values and social stability (Ball & Suleyman, 2023). The members of Patriot Church view gender as a divine and immutable characteristic assigned by God at birth, and they see efforts to affirm transgender identities or promote gender fluidity as contrary to their religious teachings. They argue that gender dysphoria, the distress experienced by some individuals whose gender identity differs from their assigned sex at birth, should be addressed through spiritual guidance and adherence to traditional gender roles rather than through gender-affirming treatments or policies. Furthermore, Christian nationalists' express concerns about the perceived erosion of moral standards and family values that they believe the trans movement represents. They often view gender transition, especially among children and adolescents, as a form of societal collapse and moral decay, and they advocate for policies and practices that reinforce traditional gender roles and preserve what they see as the natural order established by God. In response, critics of Christian nationalism argue that efforts to impose religiously motivated restrictions on transgender rights infringe on individual autonomy and perpetuate discrimination and marginalization against transgender individuals (Bjork-James, 2019). They advocate for greater inclusivity, acceptance, and legal protections for transgender people, emphasizing the importance of affirming diverse gender identities and ensuring equal rights and opportunities for all individuals, regardless of gender identity or expression.

The use of conspiracy theories to legitimize resistance against the LGBTQ community has taken on an intensified and troubling dimension following the tragic school shooting in Nashville in 2023. First, I think it is important to note that neither Ken nor Shahram, would see this as a conspiracy theory. For them this isn't only real, its deadly serious. The event had not only added fuel to the already fierce culture war raging in Tennessee and America but had also exposed the ways in which deeply entrenched ideological beliefs are mobilized to target marginalized communities (Bialecki, 2017). To understand this phenomenon, it is crucial to examine the historical and contemporary contexts in which Christian nationalism and conspiracy theories intersect, and how they are employed to justify hostility and resistance against the LGBTQ community. The Nashville school shooting in 2023, where the perpetrator identified as a transgender individual, became a flashpoint in the culture war (Ball & Suleyman, 2023). In the aftermath, prominent figures within the Christian nationalist movement and their allies leveraged the tragedy to further their narrative against the LGBTQ community. They framed the incident not merely as an isolated act of violence but as evidence

of a broader societal problem purportedly caused by the acceptance and normalization of LGBTQ identities (Bjork-James, 2019). They appeal to emotions and fears, offering a sense of certainty and control in an uncertain world. In the context of the Nashville shooting, conspiracy theories quickly emerged, suggesting that the shooter's transgender identity was a direct cause of the violence. These theories often ignore evidence and context, instead opting for narratives that confirm pre-existing biases.

One prominent conspiracy theory posited that the LGBTQ community, and transgender individuals in particular, were inherently violent and mentally unstable (Ball & Suleyman, 2023). This theory was bolstered by selectively citing instances of violence involving LGBTQ individuals while ignoring broader statistics that show no correlation between gender identity and propensity for violence. By amplifying such narratives, proponents of Christian nationalism sought to create a climate of fear and suspicion around the LGBTQ community, portraying them as a threat to societal order and safety. Through platforms such as social media, conservative news channels, and religious broadcasts, these narratives were broadcast to a wide audience, often without critical examination. The repeated exposure to these ideas helped to normalize them, embedding them in the collective consciousness of communities already predisposed to view the LGBTQ community with suspicion.

The rhetoric used by Christian nationalists in the wake of the Nashville shooting also drew heavily on the notion of moral panic (Ball & Suleyman, 2023). This concept, developed by sociologist Stanley Cohen (Cohen, 2006), describes a situation where a person, group, or event is perceived as a threat to societal values and interests, leading to widespread fear and hostility. In this case, the LGBTQ community was positioned as the "folk devil" responsible for societal decline. The school shooting was portrayed not as a tragic anomaly but as a symptom of a larger moral and cultural crisis brought about by the acceptance of LGBTQ rights.

Politicians and religious leaders aligned with Christian nationalist ideologies were quick to capitalize on this moral panic. They called for stricter regulations on LGBTQ rights, advocating for policies that would roll back protections and limit the visibility and acceptance of LGBTQ individuals in public life. These calls were often framed in the language of protecting children and preserving traditional family values, tapping into deeply held beliefs and fears among their constituents.

In this charged atmosphere, the line between legitimate policy debate and outright discrimination became increasingly blurred. Measures that sought to restrict the rights of

LGBTQ individuals were justified not on the basis of evidence or rational argument, but through appeals to emotion and fear-driven narratives (Ball & Suleyman, 2023) (Bjork-James, 2019). This approach not only undermined the principles of equality and justice but also contributed to an environment where hostility and violence against LGBTQ individuals were more likely to be condoned or ignored. The use of conspiracy theories to legitimize resistance against the LGBTQ community also had significant implications for public discourse and democratic processes.

When political and religious leaders endorse or fail to challenge these theories, it could erode trust in institutions and fosters a polarized and adversarial political climate. This just fuels the cultural war of Ken Peters and his members. Constructive dialogue becomes difficult, if not impossible, when one side views the other not as a legitimate political opponent but as an existential threat. Moreover, the impact of these conspiracy theories extends beyond the immediate political and social context. For the LGBTQ community, the perpetuation of harmful stereotypes and unfounded accusations contributes to a climate of fear and marginalization (Ball & Suleyman, 2023).

The Nashville school shooting thus serves as a stark illustration of how Christian nationalism and what we view as conspiracy theories, could intersect to exacerbate social divisions and legitimize resistance against marginalized communities. It highlights the need for a critical examination of the ways in which ideological beliefs and misinformation can be weaponized in the service of political agendas. The tragic events in Nashville in 2023 underscored the dangers of allowing ideological beliefs to shape responses to complex social issues. The interplay between Christian nationalism and conspiracy theories in legitimizing resistance against the LGBTQ community reflects broader trends in American society, where cultural and political conflicts are increasingly framed in terms of existential battles between good and evil.

Chapter 4

Spiritual Warfare

Until now I've looked at how the cultural war is fought, but like all conflicts, it has several layers and different theaters of war. I will therefore now focus on the spiritual aspect of this conflict by exploring spiritual warfare. Spiritual warfare in America, particularly within evangelical circles, is often framed as a cosmic battle between good and evil, with profound implications for both individual lives and societal structures (O'Donnell, 2020). A significant aspect of this belief involves the perception that demons actively seek to influence politics and undermine the church (Nie, 2024). Evangelicals who hold to this worldview see the political realm not just as a battleground for policies and governance, but as a stage where spiritual forces are at play (O'Donnell, 2020). They believe that demons, as agents of Satan, are intent on corrupting political leaders and policies to steer the nation away from Christian values. This perspective is often rooted in a literal interpretation of biblical passages that describe spiritual warfare, such as Ephesians 6:12, which speaks of struggling "not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms."

From this standpoint, political decisions and trends that appear to deviate from traditional Christian teachings are seen, not merely as ideological differences, but as manifestations of demonic influence. Issues such as the legalization of abortion, the push for LGBTQ+ rights, and the removal of religious symbols from public spaces are often cited as evidence of this spiritual conflict. These are viewed as strategies by demonic forces to erode the moral fabric of society and weaken the church's influence.

Furthermore, this belief in demonic influence extends to fears about direct attacks on the church itself. Evangelicals may interpret declining church attendance, the rise of secularism, and increasing legal pressures on religious institutions as part of a broader, malevolent scheme to silence Christian voices and dismantle religious freedoms (Snow, 2016). Leaders and laypeople alike often engage in prayer and other spiritual disciplines, believing that these practices can counteract the demonic forces they perceive to be at work.

This perspective on spiritual warfare has significant implications for evangelical engagement in politics. It often drives a sense of urgency and a call to action, mobilizing believers to support political candidates and policies that align with their religious convictions (Nie, 2024) (Whitehead & Perry, 2020). This engagement is framed not just as civic duty but as spiritual duty, a stand against the forces of darkness.

For many evangelicals, the belief in spiritual warfare remains a powerful motivator, shaping their approach to both faith and politics. In sum, the evangelical belief in demons influencing politics and targeting the church underscores a profound sense of spiritual urgency. It shapes how believers interpret contemporary events and their role within them, reinforcing a worldview where the struggle for the nation's soul is seen as an extension of a cosmic battle between good and evil.

When Two Worlds Meet

The lives of charismatic evangelicals in the United States present a fascinating intersection of belief and experience where the boundaries between the immaterial mind-self and the material world are both rigid and porous (Brahinsky, 2020). This dual perception, what philosopher Charles Taylor might refer to as ‘boundedness,’ reflects a complex interaction between a secular sense of a well-defined boundary and a religious conviction in the permeability of this boundary under certain conditions (Brahinsky, 2020). For charismatics, the supernatural is not a distant or abstract concept but an imminent reality that can be experienced directly (Harding, 2000). I will in this chapter explore how charismatic evangelicals navigate this dual perception, focusing on their strategies for crossing the mind-world buffer, the evidence they cite for the supernatural’s reality, and the ontological anxiety that arises from the tension between their beliefs and secular skepticism.

Charismatic evangelicals inhabit a worldview where the mind and the world are usually perceived as distinct and separate, a perspective rooted in secular modernity. However, their commitment to supernatural experiences requires them to also view this boundary as porous. This porosity is not constant but is activated through specific practices and conditions that allow the natural and the supernatural to intersect. These practices include spoken prayer, intense emotional experiences, playful modes of pretend, and moments of bodily rupture or ‘breaking in.’ Each of these strategies serves as a mechanism for crossing the boundary, providing tangible evidence of the supernatural’s presence and power.

Spoken prayer is a fundamental practice among charismatic evangelicals that serves as a direct line of communication with the divine. Through prayer, practitioners believe they can influence and be influenced by supernatural forces. This practice underscores the porosity of the mind-world boundary, as it allows for a dialogue that transcends the material limitations of the self. Emotions play a critical role in charismatic worship and experiences. Intense

emotional states, such as ecstasy, joy, or spiritual rapture, are seen as indicators of divine presence. These emotions are not just internal feelings but are often expressed through physical manifestations such as crying, shaking, or speaking in tongues. These expressions serve as evidence that the boundary between the natural and the supernatural has been crossed.

Charismatics often engage in playful modes of pretend, such as prophetic enactments or spiritual warfare dramatizations. These activities, while appearing imaginative or theatrical, are deeply serious to practitioners. They create a liminal space where the supernatural can be encountered and experienced. This playfulness helps to bridge the gap between belief and tangible experience. Physical experiences of rapture, such as being ‘slain in the Spirit’ or experiencing miraculous healings, are powerful demonstrations of the supernatural breaking into the natural world. These bodily experiences provide undeniable evidence for practitioners that the immaterial mind-self can interact directly with the material world.

For charismatic evangelicals, the reality of the supernatural is supported by various forms of evidence derived from their experiences. These include personal testimonies, communal affirmations, and observable phenomena that are interpreted as divine interventions. The cultivation of intense bodily sensations during worship, such as feeling heat, tingling, or other physical manifestations, serves to confirm the presence of the divine. These sensations are taken as direct evidence that God is real and actively involved in the lives of believers.

Despite their strategies and evidence, charismatic evangelicals often experience what can be termed ‘ontological anxiety (Brahinsky, 2020). It is anxiety which arises from the tensions between their supernatural experiences and the broader secular skepticism that questions the validity of these experiences. This anxiety manifests in three primary ways. Charismatics go to great lengths to cultivate and highlight intense bodily sensations as proof of God’s reality. These sensations are meant to bridge the gap between the immaterial and the material, but they also highlight the fragility of the boundary they are attempting to cross. The need to constantly reaffirm these sensations underscores an underlying anxiety about their reality. Charismatic evangelicals often describe their supernatural experiences using a ‘common-sense realism.’ (Noll, 1985) They present their experiences as self-evident truths that should be apparent to any reasonable observer. This approach seeks to normalize their experiences and counteract skepticism, but it also reveals a tension between the need to validate their beliefs in secular terms and their intrinsic faith-based nature. There is a

persistent incoherence between the evangelical impulse to embrace supernatural experiences and the secular impulse to rationalize or explain them away. This incoherence is disturbing for many charismatics, as it forces them to confront the limits of their own belief system in the face of external doubt. This internal conflict often leads to a heightened state of vigilance and defensiveness about their faith.

The life of the members of Patriot Church are marked by a dynamic interplay between the immaterial mind-self and the material world. Through various strategies such as spoken prayer, powerful emotions, playful pretend, and bodily rupture, they navigate the boundary that separates the natural from the supernatural (Brahinsky, 2020). These strategies provide them with evidence of the supernatural's reality, yet they also face significant ontological anxiety. This anxiety manifests in their efforts to cultivate intense bodily sensations, describing their experiences with common-sense, and reconciling the incoherence between their evangelical and secular impulses. In understanding these dynamics, I will further seek to gain a deeper insight into the lived reality Patriot Church members and the complex ways in which they engage with the supernatural in a secular world. Which leads over to the topics of demons and demonology.

Demonology

Demonology, the study of demons and beliefs about demonic influence, is a rich and complex field that intersects with various aspects of anthropology. By examining how different cultures understand and interact with demons, anthropologists have gained insight into the underlying social, psychological, and cosmological structures that shape human societies (Routledge, 2017) (Snow & College, 2016). This exploration reveals the universal and diverse ways in which humans conceptualize and engage with the supernatural. Demonology encompasses the beliefs, practices, and narratives surrounding demons—supernatural beings often associated with malevolence and harm. These entities can be found in the mythologies, religions, and folklore of numerous cultures, each with unique attributes and roles. Demons may be seen as independent spirits, fallen angels, malevolent gods, or the souls of the wicked deceased, depending on cultural context.

Anthropologically, demons serve several functions in human societies. They often embody the fears and anxieties of a culture, acting as personifications of disease, death, chaos, and moral transgression (Scott & Geertz, 1990) By externalizing these fears into supernatural entities, societies can create a framework for understanding and managing misfortune and

disorder. In many cultures, demons are used as instruments of social control, reinforcing moral norms and behaviors (Scott & Geertz, 1990). The fear of demonic possession or attack can discourage individuals from engaging in activities deemed harmful or taboo. For example, in Christian theology, demons are often associated with sins and immoral behaviors, serving as a deterrent against straying from religious teachings (Scott & Geertz, 1990). Similarly, in various African and Asian cultures, belief in malevolent spirits reinforces community values and cohesion, as individuals strive to avoid actions that might invite demonic retribution. (Stevens , 1992) Demons are frequently invoked to explain otherwise inexplicable misfortunes and illnesses. Shamanic traditions, for example, involve rituals where shamans enter trance states to combat the demons believed to cause illness (Stevens , 1992) (Snow & College, 2016). This practice not only offers a method for healing but also reinforces the social role of the shaman as a mediator between the natural and supernatural worlds. Demons often play central roles in cultural narratives and mythologies, reflecting deeper cosmological and existential concerns. In Hinduism, for example, demons (asuras) frequently appear in myths that explore themes of good versus evil, the cyclical nature of time, and the moral order of the universe. These narratives provide a framework for understanding the world and one's place within it, offering moral and ethical lessons. While the specifics of demonology vary widely across cultures, some common themes and patterns emerge.

In Christian demonology, demons are typically seen as fallen angels who rebelled against God and were cast out of heaven. They are led by Satan, the ultimate adversary, and work to tempt and corrupt humans (Stevens , 1992). This is also the narrative that Ken teaches at Patriot Church, that one of the fallen angels one day will rise up and show himself as the anti-Christ. The belief in demons can also be understood through psychological and sociocultural lenses. Psychologically, demons can be seen as projections of the human psyche, embodying repressed fears, desires, and conflicts (Crooks, 2018). The authority to identify and combat demons often resides with religious or spiritual leaders, consolidating their power and influence. This dynamic is evident in the role of exorcists in Christianity or shamans in indigenous cultures, where the ability to mediate with the supernatural confers significant social status (Stevens , 1992). In the modern world, traditional beliefs in demons continue to adapt and persist, even in highly secularized societies. Popular culture, including films, books, and video games, frequently draws on demonological themes, reflecting enduring fascination and fear (Stevens , 1992) (Crooks, 2018).

The anthropology of demonology reveals the profound and multifaceted ways in which humans understand and engage with the supernatural (Stevens , 1992). By focusing on demonology, I wish to put the rest of the chapter in the context of a congregation believing in demons around them and that they are not only “under the bed”, they manifests as your enemies who are trying to destroy you.

“Bring your Weapons to Fight the Devil”

In March, I got an exciting offer that I couldn't refuse. Ken and a small group of Patriot Church members were going to Spokane, Washington to continue their Spiritual Warfare against Planned Parenthood. Spiritual Warfare and the fight against abortion was a natural continuation of the themes I had witnessed since I arrived at Patriot Church earlier in January. America's declining morale and the need for strong men and women to stand up for the weak had long been a central topic, especially at the men's group Ken led every Thursday. The men's group is designed to be a space for the men of the congregation to discuss the Bible, but also current political and societal events that needed addressing. While promoting the group during the Sunday service, Ken would often use war rhetoric or expressions such as "bring your weapons this Thursday to fight the Devil". By weapons he meant the Bible, but it underpins the rhetoric and their self-image as soldiers in God's army. By February, I was invited to join the group. I didn't know it then, but the men's groups would end up being one of the highlights of my fieldwork. The group gave me an opportunity to come under the skin of these rugged men who came across as quiet and unapproachable outside of the church. There I would meet men like Shaun, Jim, and Ben. Shaun played in the worship band and Jim and Ben were in the prayer group. They were all highly respected in the congregation and would become, not only important informants, but friends during my time with Patriot Church.

At the time when I joined the group, the men were busy reading *Letters to the American Church*. The book deals with the German church during the days of Nazi Germany and how the church did not stand up to Hitler's regime of terror. In the book by Eric Metaxas, takes on Dietrich Bonhoeffer and his opposition to the Nazis. Ken was a big fan of the book and stated that it revealed the haunting similarities between today's American church and the German church of the 1930s. Other men in the group pointed out that the book visualized the church and its irreplaceable role in the culture of the nation, and that it was their duty to fight the powers of darkness, especially on behalf of the weak and vulnerable. For these men, silence was no option. God had called them all to defend the unborn, to confront the lies of

cultural Marxism, and battle the globalist tyranny that crushes human freedom. Ken would draw parallels between Biden and Hitler and suggested that they both used the same tactics when comes to manipulating the public. As he saw it, was the Reichstag-fire used in the same way as Covid was used by Biden to subdue Americans. There was no doubt in the group that America is in the middle of the biggest moral battle of its lifetime. Shaun, when asked what they thought about the state of morality in today's America he answered, *"I believe that morality in America is in great decay. I believe that we have allowed morality to become whatever feels right or makes us happy. That is no morality at all. Morality in America is definitely threatened, from within"*. Jim agreed and went further in his description; *"Morality is at an all-time low: child sacrifice by abortion, sex outside the sanctity of marriage, satanic worship, pedophilia, transgenderism, practiced homosexuality, all sorts of idolatry, greed, deception, pornography and anything not supported by God's holy Word in the Bible"*. This Thursday was only a week after Sam Smith's performance of the song Unholy at the Grammy Awards. Smith had been dressed as a devil, with background dancers also dressed in red. This was yet another clear sign of the times for the members of the group, that demonic forces are actively attacking America's morals and soul.

Ken and his family moved to Tennessee when they felt the state of Washington was becoming too liberal on the issue of abortion. In Tennessee, he not only founded the Patriot Church, but also an organization called TCAPP (the church at Planned Parenthood). He started the organization to be on the frontlines against abortion and fight it with worship and what he calls non-confrontational Spiritual Warfare. On their homepage, they describe themselves as not only a protest, but a worship service. *"The Church at Planned Parenthood is NOT a protest. It's a worship service at the gates of Hell. The Church at Planned Parenthood is a gathering of Christians for the worship of God and the corporate prayer for repentance for this nation, repentance for the apathetic church and repentance of our blood guiltiness in this abortion holocaust"*.

TCAPP is the embodiment of what Ken Peters views as one of the church's main tasks; to stand up against evil and tyranny. And suddenly I got the call up to join this Holy War against the Holocaust of Abortion. And there was no coincidence with the background of this campaign against Planned Parenthood in Spokane. TCAPP had on several occasions held meetings right outside Planned Parenthood buildings, with loud music and speeches. Planned Parenthood had therefore sued TCAPP in 2022 for harassment and for preventing people from getting health care. TCAPP was found guilty and fined nearly \$100,000. But this was not

enough to stop Ken and TCAPP. The final ruling prevented TCAPP from organizing meetings outside the premises but could not stop them from setting up worship and speeches across the street. I was therefore now on my way to participate in what was to be the first meeting outside PP since they were sentenced. In the group leaving Tennessee was Pastor Ken, his daughter and husband Nolan, the youth-pastor at the church. Traveling together with us was also members of the church, Jim and Ben. Since Nolan and his wife and Ken had their own rental cars, Jim, Ben and I was left with the last car. As experienced during my time “in the field”, most of my conversations happened in cars, so this was a yet a good opportunity to talk about their feelings surrounding abortion and morals in America. I was curious to know what they thought about the question of non-Christians and their morals and what they thought was the biggest moral battle facing America today. Jim was the first to answer;

“Non-Christians can have good morals, but still fall prey to sin as we all do. But only Christians can gain forgiveness, salvation and eternal life through faith and repentance. I do not believe there can be a (completely) free and just society absent of biblical Christian values. “Free and just” suggests the presence of fairness and justice in all matters, and the absence of greed and idolatry manifesting negative behaviors and ambitions. These characteristics underlying our human condition resulting from the fall of man and are present in Christians and non-Christians alike.

The biggest moral battle today, or one of them is the misapplication of “separation of church and state” and the belief that Christians shouldn’t get involved in politics. This has resulted in a once Christian nation evolving into a secular nation with all forms of evil and anti-biblical, anti-God laws at the city, state, and national levels”.

This was nothing new to me, but it was still interesting to hear it said so directly. It reflected many of the worries other members of Patriot church had in their hearts. It was intriguing to watch and hear how they distinguished Christians and non-Christians, and how secular thinking is viewed as the enemy.

As I sat there in the car listening to the two men talk, I couldn’t help but think about what Bjork-James (2023) wrote about Christian Nationalists and how they find themselves as both an entitled majority and as an embattled minority. In one moment, they are the strong silent majority, who will bring justice and righteousness back into Washington DC. But the Woke Left, MSM (Mainstream Media) and globalist politicians are, not only working against them, but actively seeking them out and persecute them. The conversation now turned over to the topic of January 6. I still remember watching live on TV. The angry mob, all the poster

with political and Christian slogans and the calls to “stop the steal”. But apparently, I was completely wrong about the whole thing. It was never an insurrection. The MAGA-movement and the people outside the Capitol had been infiltrated by ANTIFA and FBI who had manipulated people to enter the building. According to them, it was a false flag operation to undermine the MAGA-movement yet again and to further push America towards a secular Godless police state.

“At the Gates of Hell”

The day of the worship service had arrived. The atmosphere was calm, but there was still a feeling of anticipation in the air when we arrived outside the clinic. Despite being 20 minutes until the scheduled start, 20-30 participants had already arrived. At 7 p.m., Nolan and another local Pastor started singing worship. The 80 or so people in attendance joined in, raising their hands, closing their eyes, and singing. Children waved signs that read, “Strong family, strong country” and, “It’s okay to like babies being born”. TCAPP also had a small stall where they sold TCAPP t-shirts, stickers, and other types of merchandise. The theme for the evening’s worship/protest, was “not backing down”. As the worship music started with all its familiar songs, I thought to myself that this had to be the strangest place I’ve ever heard worship. And I also was faced with my first real dilemma during my fieldwork, where to put myself. I felt as though I couldn’t stand in the middle of the group, since I would lose track of the saturation but at the same time, I felt that standing too far from the group would maybe send the message of me being embarrassed or distanced myself from the group. I therefore landed on some kind of middle ground, where I first went up on a staircase, took some pictures and then rejoined the group. I looked at the people around me, as they stood there with their hands in the air singing and worshipping. On the other side of the street, it was calm. The counterprotest I thought was coming, never arrived, but there was one silent man sitting in a chair holding a sign reading “Ken Peters is a loser”. After almost 20 minutes of opening worship Ken Peters took to the stage. He began by dismissing the court ruling and called it a leftist attack and that it was “crazy, rigged-up, satanic stronghold corruption”. The crowd cheered and many shouted “yes” and “amen”. The message was as clear as it was simple, they were not backing down and no court could stop them from serving their God. They had maybe lost a temporary battle, but they were going to win the war. Satan may have gotten a temporary victory, but tonight they’re staring a rematch and when the Lord brings a rematch the Lord wins.

Ken then introduced the evenings speaker, non-other than co-Pastor of Patriot Church, Shahram Haydian. Shahram, a well-spoken and articulate speaker, began by saying that it wasn't only a pleasure coming to Spokane, but a duty put on him by the Lord. Tonight, he said, they're not here to battle flesh and blood, but there to battle the principalities of demons. *"We're not messing around. We understand that we are up against demonic forces. This is not just a human battle; it is a spiritual battle"*. Further he called out the Pastors not present because they have forsaken the One true God, the God of the righteous people of America. Shahram reminded the crowd why they had to be there standing up to the demon of Molech. Molech is believed to be a fallen angel, the demon of child sacrifice. Molech was also the idol whom the Israelites worshiped when they lost faith in God and Moses in the desert after being freed from Egypt. *"This is the most important central issue to the condition of the nation and to the condition of the state. Because if we do not address the abomination, what God has called an abomination, what we ought to now see as Molech worship the satanists are setting up abortion clinics around this nation because they are letting you and I know what this is about, this is not about choice this is not about reproductive rights this is about human sacrifice"*. I didn't really know what to feel or do at this moment. This was no debate were one side wanted reproductive right and the other wanted to protect babies. This was a war against demons and the dark powers of Satan himself and anyone who dared to stand up against them was indeed on the side of evil and corruption. Shahram was nearing the end of his speech and led the group in prayer. He prayed America no longer would be a nation under the influence of idols and demons, but under God. A nation who kills babies for money and were no one speaks out for the voiceless unborn, is no true nation. And as the meeting drew to a close and the group scattered, I found myself wondering if the group of people around me felt as an entitled majority or an embattled minority (Bjork-James, 2023).

Fighting Demons at Pinnacle Movie theater

In charismatic Christian circles, the concept of spiritual warfare plays a central role in interpreting political and social phenomena. Charismatic demonology posits that demonic forces actively seek to influence and corrupt individuals, institutions, and even nations. This belief system provides a supernatural dimension to the deep state narrative, where the alleged conspirators are not merely political adversaries but agents of demonic influence. Charismatic leaders and televangelists often speak of spiritual battles and deliverance from demonic oppression, linking these concepts to contemporary political issues. For instance, figures like

Paula White, a prominent advisor to Donald Trump, have framed political struggles in terms of spiritual warfare, calling for prayer and spiritual intervention to combat what they perceive as demonic forces at work within the government (Cole, 2020).

Another figure of the charismatic Christian circles is Pastor Greg Locke. Pastor Locke is an American evangelical pastor, author, and social media personality known for his controversial and outspoken views on various social and political issues. He is the founder and lead pastor of Global Vision Bible Church, located in Mount Juliet, Tennessee. The church has grown significantly under his leadership. The church is known for its strong evangelical and conservative stance on biblical teachings. Locke has also a significant presence on social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, where he shares his sermons, political opinions, and responses to current events. He is well known for his controversial and often inflammatory statements. He has been outspoken on issues such as LGBTQ+ rights, COVID-19 restrictions and vaccines, and the 2020 U.S. presidential election. He has frequently propagated conspiracy theories, including those related to the "deep state" and election fraud. Political Alignment: Locke is a staunch supporter of former President Donald Trump and has been vocal about his opposition to the Democratic Party and liberal policies. He often frames his political views within a religious context, portraying them as part of a spiritual battle between good and evil. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Locke gained notoriety for his opposition to lockdowns, mask mandates, and vaccines. He held inperson church services despite restrictions and spread misinformation about the virus and vaccines, leading to widespread criticism.

One Sunday morning during the meeting, Pastor Ken, with excitement in his voice, could inform the rest of the church that he had booked the Pinnacle Movie Theater for the premiere of Greg Locke's new movie; "Come Out in Jesus Name". The documentary film released in 2023 with the focus on deliverance ministry and spiritual warfare within the Christian faith aims to shed light on the practice of exorcism and deliverance ministry, highlighting the belief in spiritual warfare and the power of Jesus to expel demons. It presents testimonies, live exorcisms, and interviews with individuals who claim to have experienced or witnessed demonic oppression and subsequent deliverance. In the movie, Pastor Locke shares his journey into deliverance ministry and presents his experiences and beliefs regarding demonic activity and the authority of Jesus to cast out demons (Smietana, 2022). The film features a mix of personal testimonies, live deliverance sessions, and theological discussions.

It explores themes of faith, spiritual warfare, and the power of prayer, aiming to demonstrate the reality of demonic influence and the effectiveness of deliverance through Jesus Christ. Pastor Locke had even stated demons told him names of witches in his church (Smietana, Tennessee preacher Greg Locke says demons told him names of witches in his church, 2022).

Two weeks later, I therefore found myself at the Regal Pinnacle Movie Theater with almost the entire congregation getting ready for “Come Out in Jesus Name”. Pastor Ken had told me that hundreds of other movie theaters would also show the movie that same evening, making this a possible huge opportunity for revival across the country. Ken and his family had the week before attended the premiere of the movie alongside Greg Locke himself and other lucky invited. He had promised me that the movie would be a must watch.” As I sat there, side by side with the church members, I didn’t really know what would hit me. The movie begins and the eager crowd gets quiet, as Greg Locke comes on the screen, talking on how it all began. Locke explains how Christians must come out of their fantasy of there not being demons in their life. They not only exist, but they are also everywhere around us, trying to harm their lives, their relationships, and their church. And he had thought the same, until it all had changed one time in the church, when he was preparing to baptize a mum and her daughter. After the mum was finished in the water, the daughter who was up next, started to scream her lungs out. She was clearly a demon. This first meeting lead Greg Locke down the path of fighting against demons and evil spirits in America. It has led him to cast out demons at his sermons in Nashville, leading exorcisms and arranging burning of secular literature including Harry Potter and The Lord of the Rings.

The real surprise was the ending of the movie. As the movie drew to a close and I was full of impressions, after 2 hours of exorcism and harrowing stories about lives destroyed by demons, I was ready for a quick walk out of the theatre. But when the ending came, there was no end titles. Instead, the camera clipped over to the stage of Greg Locke’s church, Global Vision Bible Church. Pastor Locke stood there with a microphone in his hand and started to thank all of us for attending his movie. He said he was grateful so many people showed up for this important time for the church in America, which is under attack right at this moment. He was talking to us, as we were present at one of his revival meetings in the church tent outside of Nashville. The voice was getting higher and more intense and suddenly the woman right in front of me screamed so loud that I wished to run out of the theater. The woman fell to her knees and started to sob intensely. Myself, frozen in my seat, found myself not knowing what to do. Another member of Patriot Church came closer and started to pray for the woman, now

sobbing on the floor. Greg Locke was now on the higher scale of the prayer closing in on the climax. All around the room there was yelling for God's forgiveness as Pastor Locke reached the climax of the prayer. 30 minutes later we all walked outside. Jim from the church said, with enthusiasm in his voice, that there had broken out revivals all over the country where the movie was shown. This in his mind was the start of the turn of the tide. The demons had nowhere to hide now.

Chapter 5

Your Kingdom Come

The belief that America and the Church are living in the "last days" before the end of the world and the rise of the Antichrist is a prominent theme within certain segments of evangelical and Christian nationalist thought. This eschatological view influences their political, social, and religious outlooks, shaping a worldview that sees contemporary events as fulfillment of biblical prophecy. This essay explores how these beliefs manifest themselves, their theological foundations, and their implications for American society. Eschatology, the study of the end times, is a central component of Christian theology, particularly within evangelicalism (Bialecki, 2017). The belief in the imminent return of Jesus Christ, the rise of the Antichrist, and the final judgment is rooted in various biblical texts, most notably the books of Daniel, Ezekiel, and Revelation. These scriptures depict a series of apocalyptic events leading to the ultimate triumph of good over evil, including the emergence of a deceptive and tyrannical world leader known as the Antichrist. Many evangelicals interpret current global and national events through an eschatological lens, seeing signs of the end times in political turmoil, natural disasters, and moral decline. This perspective is often reinforced by popular evangelical authors and preachers, who link contemporary issues to biblical prophecy (Bjork-James, 2023).

The End Time Church

One of my first meetings at Patriot Church was on the topic of the church in the end times. It was a bit surprising since I didn't know they had so much focus on the end times and on how America has forsaken the church, the word of God and thus leading the nation and the world against the apocalypse and the second coming of Jesus. Pastor Shahram Haidian had one night a seminar on the topic of End Time Bible Prophecies, and how they are all happening in front of our eyes. The seminar was set in Patriot Church's barn. The lighting was dimmed, and it was a calm feeling in the room. Shahram got on stage and started to introduce the series and where one can find all his shows on Rumble and on his own website. He told us about his lack of trust in Facebook, about the algorithms that block content without users knowing, also called "shadow banning". This deep mistrust in the social media platforms is shared by many others in the church. This is part of what they see as the deep state's effort at silencing the voices of the opposition without them knowing about it.

The first topic Shahram wanted to talk about was Israel. Both Shahram and Pastor Ken view Israel as a "prophetic timeclock". This implies that they see the country works as Gods

time peace. They look at Israel and better understand where we are according to Gods timing and His preparation for the End Times. To comprehend this, one needs a better understanding of the different views of the end times. Shahram had earlier explained that there are 3 different views: all-millennial, post-millennial and pre-millennial. All-millennial believe they have no defined terms for the coming millennial reign, the thousand-year reign of Jesus. They simply don't believe that it's a distinct time for when he returns. Postmillennial means that they believe we are in the end-times right now, that we are in the thousand-year reign. But Shahram has a problem with this – where is Jesus? If we are truly in the thousand-year reign, where is Jesus, the one who will rule on the Earth as he does in Heaven.

Premillennial means that we are coming up to it, that the end times are near, and that we are in the last days before the 7-day tribulation. According to the Bible, “The Tribulation” will occur before the second coming of Jesus and it will be a period lasting seven prophetic Hebrew years. The majority of Pastors in the US today, according to Shahram, are “these woke Pastors” that are coming out of seminaries that are teaching either an amillennial or postmillennial theology. This implies that there is no prophecy to be found in the Bible, about Israel. The “woke Pastors” see no outstanding prophecies so therefore they ask: why are the Jews there? Then they have these theories that are becoming dominant globally, according to Shahram, which entail that there is a global Zionist ploy which enables the Jews to control the whole world. The conspiracy theory of a Zionist ploy to rule the world is a deeply anti-Semitic belief that suggests Jewish people, or Zionists, are secretly plotting to dominate global political, economic, and social systems. This theory often posits that Jews use their influence in finance, media, and politics to control governments and institutions worldwide. It alleges that there is a clandestine agenda to establish a New World Order under Jewish control. This conspiracy theory has roots in various anti-Semitic texts and propaganda, such as the infamous "Protocols of the Elders of Zion," a fabricated document that falsely purports to reveal a Jewish plan for global domination. Despite being thoroughly debunked, this theory has persisted and resurfaced in various forms, often used by extremist groups to justify hatred and violence against Jews.

Shahram then pointed out how the church today, as he sees it, have a truth-problem. When the church has problems dealing with the truth of the Bibles prophesies, it becomes immune against the word of God. The solution to this immunity problem is Gods truth and that they become resilient enough to fight for it. If the church doesn't rise against those lies, the deception and delusion will take over. Shahram describes with great enthusiasm how one of the biggest problems facing America and the world today, is that most Christians are not recognizing that the globalist agenda is not good. *“They think it's great and that we're a global*

community. All the things that the globalists are implementing are going to be so cool all the technology and the digital stuff they think it's good rather than understanding it as the beast system as the enemy system". According to Shahram, prophecy matters, that's why we're here, that's why they as Christians got to keep teaching because we got to have a right understanding of prophecy and a right understanding of eschatology.

Shahram said he's doing this because it matters if you get Israel wrong, because if you get Israel wrong, nothing makes sense. After a brief pause, he further elaborated on the topic of Israel. As he has explained earlier, if you study the Old Testament and the Psalms one can establish that there is a "clock" counting down the time to when the end times begin. Depending on where you view the birth of the current nation of Israel, that clock has started. Some would argue the clock started in 1948 when the state of Israel was established, but Shahram proclaims he views it as 1967. That is because of the recapturing of Zion during the six-days war. The Sixday War, being the armed conflict between Israel and a coalition of Arab states (Laron, 2017). Their attack on Israel constituted the first real attack from the anti-Christ against Israel and the jews, as Shahram sees as Gods chosen people. The war ended in defeat for the Arab coalition and Israel captured the Golan Heights, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip. As far as Shahram thinks, Israel was no complete. He says Zion is not modern-day Israel, meaning the current geography according to the Bible. *"Zion is Jerusalem that's how God viewed Zion, so in my opinion that would be the beginning of time: God's clock"*. He describes Israel as a miracle, how God brought the scattered Jews from around the nation back, but more importantly, He rebirthed the land, which was desolate, but now blossoming. That's all part of the End Times apparently. The clock has started, and we are in the last days. Now it's a matter of interpretation as far as how much time do we have before we go into the tribulation. He again reminds the congregation of his earlier talks on the topic of the excitement and pressure of rebuilding the Third Temple. The Temple, as it seems, is very important regarding the compromises that the Jews are willing to make in Israel with their neighbors. The Arab nations are in control of the Temple mount and doesn't let the jews have their religious freedom. He is referring to the book of Thessalonians, where it is referring to the coming of the Antichrist. There are certain conditions that have been met and then it says very early on in chapter 2 verse 4; *"so he who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God and is worshipped so that he sits as God in the temple of God showing himself that he is God"*. Shahram reminds the listeners what he said earlier that morning at the church service, that the revelation of Baal worship and that he was a oppressor. Baal is a god who was worshipped in many ancient Middle Eastern communities and is seen as a false God by many Christian churches today. According to

Shahram's signs of the End Times, he will come back and again try to supplant God as a counterfeit of the true God and the true spirit. It is then explained how the Third Temple must be built in order to fulfill the Biblical prophecy. Today one can observe how they do the libations, the water ceremonies and now they're talking about putting water in the pool of Salomon. Supposedly, it hasn't been water in there for 2000 years, which shows there's events that are happening in Israel and preparation for the sacrifices that going to come our way. And it's happening each month! This is not long term this is not a 10-year plan, but more like one- or two-year plan.

I realized now how quiet was in the room. Usually, there's was some sort of active listening, where the congregants gave the speaker comments like "yes", "that's good", but not now. It was almost as if the serious topic of Shahram's seminar gave them too much to think about. The realization that their world was not only coming to an end, but it was not talk about some distant future. As Shahram said, things are happening very quickly, and the situation was ever changing. And adding to the time-pressure, it was also the tensions on the Temple mount between the Jews and the Arabs. The Jews still want to worship and sacrifice on the Temple Mount. *"The Jews right now are talking about starting on the Mount of Olives. They have the priest ready, they have the showbread ready, and they have the heffers ready. They have everything ready, but they're going to start on the Mount of Olives, but their goal is to get to the Temple Mount which is a problem because who controls the Temple Mount religiously – the Muslims do. The Arabs do"*. I could tell by the response from the crowd that this hit a nerve. The thought of the Muslims having control, as if they had taken it by force from them personally. Shahram continued and we had to remember, there is no such thing as Palestinians, and it never was. He had read in an interesting article about all these nations being provoked because a member of the Israeli Knesset went up to the Temple Mount and simply walked. He hadn't prayed, just simply walked. The United Nations had had a hissy fit and called a Security Council meeting. All this because a Jewish member of the Knesset dared to step forward. According to the article, the last time something similar had happened was six years ago. *"It was not unprecedented, but all of a sudden, the Muslims and Hamas were all crying foul, so the United Nations said we got to have an emergency security meeting and schooled Israel once again. "How dare you"*.

The mood of the room had changed now. Gone was the fear of the apocalypse and the frequency of eager responses now increased. I thought to myself that Shahram, as an experienced preacher could feel this, and must have felt as though he had the room in the palm of his hand. After a small "dramatic pause", he continued talking about the European nations

and how they suddenly came out and said no, we want the status quo. The status quo implies Jews are not supposed to be allowed on the temple mount. Christians can go there, but they say that the Jews can't openly pray and only the Muslims can go on the temple mount and do whatever they want – that's how it works. But why is it so? He claimed that if you look at the British ambassador, a Muslim who's affirming that the Jordanian Islamic authority gets to control the temple, but what's interesting is if one look at this article. The article states that the Muslim authority has reinstated a policy that the Christians who go up to the temple mount must wear identifying garbs with a yellow marking. This, according to Shahram, must be understood as a sign that this all a part of the so-called inter-faith and multi-faith deception. What he means by those terms is describing what he believes is happening in Israel right now. Shahram believes in the theory of the Deep State wanting to break down religion. How can they do this, you ask – by merging all of the Abrahamic religions into one, in his words Wnew Woke religion suitable for the modern world.

Israel and the One World Religion

As if Shahram was finished with the warmup, he now proceeded the seminar with greater vigor. He turned from the topic of Islam to the topic of the One World Religion. Shahram said it was almost amazing how even Islam and of course the Vatican and evangelicals now are embracing climate worship, rather than worshipping the Creator. “Climate alarmism” is now becoming part of the New One World Religion. He had covered that too in a brand-new presentation on the coming One World Religion. By One World Religion, Shahram means the plot made by, what he calls, the globalist organization of WEF (World Economic Forum). The organization is led the businessman and professor Klaus Schwab. A lot of people in the Christian Nationalists sphere has a deep mistrust against both WEF and Schwab, since they see them as the embodiment of the new enemy against America and the free Christian world. With their Agenda 2030, and close cooperation with the World Health Organization, who they blame the Covidpandemic on, WEF wants to get rid of all religion and make it into Shahram calls the One World Religion. WEF and OWR held a conference that they had in Egypt. At the conference they had over 70 religious interfaith leaders, who were saying that climate protection must be a foundation of any faith. When climate change is mentioned, I hear some smirks and sighs in the room. It is clearly yet another topic that is not very popular with the members of the church.

“There are some folks out there that think that we're already in the tribulation but I'm not so sure about that. I think we're getting close, but remember I said that what the text says”?

Shahram asked the listeners. He then asked them when they thought the seven-year tribulation would start. He said he, like many of them, also believed earlier that it would begin when the anti-Christ signs a covenant with Israel. This would mean the end of the Israeli state and Jerusalem would fall again to the forces of evil. But that's not what it says, in the Bible, according to Shahram. He mentions again how he covered it last month.” *Let’s look at what it says. “And He will confirm a covenant with many for one week, but in the middle of the week he will put it into sacrifice and offering, so that he, that’s the Antichrist we know, will confirm a covenant with the many, not just with Israel”.* What does this mean? That the Anti-Christ is coming to set up his reign in Israel. And it's no allegory as some people say, according to Shahram. It is an actual event. In the middle of a seven year-period he is going to break the covenant and he's going to end the sacrificing. Now since the Jews have reinstated sacrifice, according to Second Thessalonians, the anti-Christ will set himself up as God in the temple and begin the abomination that causes desolation. Shahram further explains the Hebrew word “gabar”. The word means strong and refers to the strong covenant the anti-Christ is going to set up on Earth between him and the many. In other words, the anti-Christ will come for the many. Meaning only a small portion of the people now will belong to the One true God.

The Apocalyptic Narrative in Politics

Apocalyptic narratives within this context refer to interpretations of biblical prophecy that predict an imminent, cataclysmic end to the world, often involving a final battle between good and evil (Furse, 2022). These narratives are particularly potent in mobilizing political action among Christian nationalists. They provide a sense of urgency and moral clarity, framing political struggles as cosmic battles with existential stakes, again, the importance of growing a sensation of threat, both from outside and within (Djupe, Lewis, & Sokhey, 2023). By positioning contemporary events within this framework, leaders can rally support for policies that align with their ideological goals. The strategic social construction model posits that political actors deliberately use socially constructed narratives to achieve specific strategic objectives (Whitehead & Perry, 2020). In the case of Christian nationalists and Patriot Church, apocalyptic narratives are talked about as a natural next step – we will suffer now, but soon will Jesus’ return.

The sense of impending doom inherent in apocalyptic narratives galvanizes especially members of Patriot Church by creating a heightened sense of urgency. This mobilization can be particularly effective in driving voter turnout, securing donations, and fostering activism

(Simonnes, 2021). Apocalyptic narratives can legitimize controversial policies by framing them as necessary steps to prevent an impending catastrophe. For instance, aggressive foreign policies can be justified as preemptive measures to protect against evil forces that threaten the nation's survival (Gorski & Perry, 2022). By casting domestic liberalism and other opposing ideologies as part of the apocalyptic threat, Christian nationalists can delegitimize their political adversaries. This strategy paints liberals not just as political opponents but as moral and existential threats to the nation's divine mission (Djupe, Lewis, & Sokhey, 2023).

I often got the feeling that their view on the decline of the United States in the global order, was as a sign of moral and spiritual decay. Apocalyptic narratives suggest that this decline is part of a larger, divine plan that can only be averted through righteous action, or that it is already too late (Bjork-James, 2023). By framing international issues in these terms, the pastors advocated for aggressive strategies to reassert American dominance and counter perceived threats from rival powers (Onishi, 2023) (Simonnes, 2021). For instance, the rise of China and the resurgence of Russia are often depicted as part of an apocalyptic struggle against godless regimes by Ken. Similarly, conflicts in the Middle East are frequently interpreted through an apocalyptic lens, with nations like Iran viewed as embodiments of evil that must be confronted to fulfill divine prophecy.

Apocalyptic narratives also serve to critique domestic liberalism by linking it to the nation's decline (Bjork-James, 2023). Policies and cultural changes promoted by liberal movements are portrayed as moral failings that contribute to the apocalyptic scenario. This perspective positions liberalism not merely as a political alternative but as an active force in bringing about the end times (Snow & College, 2016). Such critiques often focus on issues like abortion, LGBTQ+ rights, and secularism, suggesting that these liberal policies undermine the nation's moral fabric and hasten divine judgment. By linking domestic policies to apocalyptic outcomes, Christian nationalists can argue for a return to traditional values as a means of averting national disaster.

The use of apocalyptic narratives naturally dovetails with conspiratorial thinking. The idea of a hidden, malevolent force orchestrating global events is a common theme in both apocalyptic literature and conspiracy theories. This overlap allows Christian nationalists to incorporate a wide range of conspiratorial views into their ideology. For example, theories about a "deep state" undermining President Trump or globalist cabals seeking to destroy national sovereignty fit neatly into an apocalyptic framework. These conspiracies are seen as manifestations of the larger spiritual battle described in apocalyptic prophecies. By integrating

these views, Christian nationalists can appeal to a broader audience that is already predisposed to conspiratorial thinking.

Despite their extreme views, Christian nationalists have maintained significant ties to mainstream politics. This is partly due to their strategic use of apocalyptic narratives, which resonate with a substantial portion of the American electorate (Whitehead & Perry, 2020). Several factors contribute to this phenomenon. Christian nationalists represent a crucial voting bloc within the Republican Party. Their ability to mobilize voters around apocalyptic themes ensures that their views are taken seriously by mainstream politicians. Candidates seeking to secure the evangelical vote often adopt or at least acknowledge these narratives, further embedding them in the political mainstream. Christian nationalist leaders have successfully placed their allies in key positions within the government, particularly during the Trump administration (Simonnes, 2021). These appointments allowed them to influence policy directly, promoting agendas that align with their apocalyptic worldview.

The Great Reset

Another theory Shahram brought forth, was the theory of “the Great reset”. This is another theory many people at Patriot Church adhere to. The theory can be explained by the belief that when the globalists and the anti-Christ has pushed the world to its brink, the world needs a reset to start over and re-shape a new world in their image (Schwab, 2020). When members I talked to at Patriot church talked about vaccines, AI-technology, or state-banks they all mentioned the Great Reset as an underlying motivation as to why they are pushed on the American people. Shahram sees this yet another part of the anti-Christ plan for the end times. The Antichrist is going to affirm or confirm the great reset as part of the agreement with the many. As Shahram views it, the Israeli government is all in for the great reset. Israel is also all in for the World Economic Forum and all in for the World Health Organization too. Israel is even all in for the vaccines. The government, which is very secular, not very religious, is part of a growing religious sect, according to Shahram. As he views it, has the ultra-orthodox given Netanyahu the power that he has right now, but the government overall, including Netanyahu, is all in for the globalist agenda. *“And who would’ve thought that they would have a very specific title to their world agreement. They don’t call it Agenda 2030, which is really what it is. Really all their documents and their agreements are Agenda 2030. Remember it was started as an Agenda 2021 which they wrote in 1991, then they adapted it and they updated in 2015 and they put the date*

agenda 2030 on it. They changed their time frame. That's really what this is: The New World Order. It's really agenda 2030, but they don't call it that, they call it now the Great Reset”.

He viewed it as almost amazing because the Great Reset went global and at least 185 nations on the planet are implementing the Great Reset. Most of the countries on earth, including the United States and all the Western European nations are implementing the Great Reset and it has fundamentally changed the world. It was especially implemented through COVID-19, where they implemented the great narrative, the great reset, and their new world order, which Shahram, pointing to the Bible, also call the “Beast System,” highlighting Revelation 13. That is why they praise God and are in desperate need of the “Great Pushback”. The Great Pushback is a topic Shahram covers in many other of his sermons. What it means is that the rise of the anti-Christ and the New World Order, needs a strong counter movement. The church needs to stay together, joined by the Holy Spirit to be light in the darkness. Shahram calls for this because they need to wake up believers, especially to prepare the end time church to counter the Great reset and not fall for it. He also thinks that this ultimately could be the implementation of all the parameters of the Great Reset. He has observed, in America, the fact that they are already setting up the foundation for the beast-system. Everything about the great reset is the foundation for the beast-system, including the fact that they must remove sovereignty which they're going to do. They're pushing again for the global health pandemic treaty where the nations signing it is agreeing to give up sovereignty. In America, this is especially led by the President, which he calls criminal-Biden. *“It's a sovereignty move. We're going to take your sovereignty and seed it to World Health Organization, seed it to the United Nations, World Economic Forum, and the globalist elite. Then the other pieces of the puzzle, digital currency, global digital currency, digital ID, and health passports. Those pieces and the economic collapse are going to usher in whatever their version of the great reset is, which appears like they're pretty serious about.”* “You will own nothing and be happy”. This quote has almost been made famous by the far-right movement and others who oppose the WEF. The quote refers to a speech made by Klaus Schwab where he, at one of the annual meetings in Davos, talked about the need to make a more green and sustainable future. Shahram sees it more through the lens of the anti-Christ, where he will take everything dear to you. Shahram says that they are serious about it too and points out a headline he used the same morning at the service. The headline speaks about how they do not want you to use gas stoves. They don't want you in any way shape or form to be self-sufficient. The globalists don't want you to have a wood burning stove, because then you won't be a slave of the of the government. They don't want you to have a gas burning stove because they want everyone to switch over to electric, so they can just easily shut

it off. They also push for everyone to drive electric cars. California implemented that they wanted outlaw gas burning cars by 2030. That's in seven years, he said loudly and frustrated. He said that it almost felt like the states of California and Washington were competing to make the lives of their population the most miserable. He also assumed they're already telling people in California that they can't use their cars the whole time. *"They're already telling people to use smart meters. You can't have your air conditioning on, your heat on. We got a cycle they did it hear when we had the cold weather, right, remember? Lenoir city, we're going to have to have rolling power-outs every 15 minutes, sorry. 45 minutes on 15 minutes off, on off on off."*

Everything about the new world order, the great reset is about control, according to Shahram and Ken. And that's what Shahram tells them every chance he gets. That they got to be aware of the state of the world they're living in. According to him, that's why Bible prophecy matters, because all these young Christians and all these woke Christians that think this is so wonderful, that they're going to have this global community and this technology is getting them closer together. That at one point it was "I can swipe my phone". Then "swipe the wallet", then "swipe my hand". Pretty soon, Shahram thinks, they will not even have to swipe anything. You just walk in the room, and it'll be able to scan you, because of the stuff in you. We are moving again towards transhumanism. When he said the word transhumanism, a lot of the members in the crowd shook their heads. A lady even said loud and clearly; demonic. Transhumanism for Shahram and Patriot Church represents how America is headed towards a future where humans lose their holiness and pride in God's creation. All these things are pieces of the puzzle, and you must understand that you must resist. He tells them that they cannot stop it from being implemented, they will be implemented, but the people of the church must not be a part of the implementation and resist them. This is why he talks about alternative systems – why the talk about having their own food supply, having their own farmers, and having their own chickens, meat, milk and commerce and bartering. Shahram says that all these things that he had been talking about, he thinks they're going to see. That they are in the place of that dichotomy. He thinks globally, God will be creating what he believes will be self-sustaining communities, especially of believers all over the world for these end times. There's going to be these communities that are alert and awake and the remnant. then the majority are falling for this great deception but it's interesting what they're planning, and their time frame so just pray about that pray about this great because whether it is or not the fact is.

International organizations, global treaties, and movements towards a more interconnected world are often viewed with suspicion. These trends are interpreted as steps

toward a one-world government that the Antichrist will eventually control. For believers, the sense of living in the last days fosters a strong sense of community and identity. Churches and religious organizations become places of refuge and preparation, where believers gather to reinforce their faith and readiness for the end times. This communal aspect provides a source of strength and solidarity, helping individuals navigate the uncertainties of modern life.

The belief that America and the Church are living in the last days before the end of the world and the rise of the Antichrist is a powerful and influential component of evangelical and Christian nationalist thought. Rooted in theological traditions of pre-millennialism and dispensationalism, these beliefs shape how many views contemporary events and engage with society. While providing a sense of purpose and community, they also contribute to political polarization and influence public policy in significant ways. As America continues to grapple with its diverse religious landscape, understanding the motivations and implications of these eschatological beliefs is crucial. Whether one views them as a source of hope or a cause for concern, they undeniably play a pivotal role in the lives of many Americans, shaping the nation's cultural and political fabric in profound ways.

Towards National Divorce?

The notion of America heading towards a national divorce or even civil war is not merely a dramatic speculation but a reflection of deepening divisions within the country. This concept has been explored by various scholars and commentators, including Bradley Onishi (Onishi, 2023), who refers to this phenomenon as the creation of a "redoubt" - a term historically used to describe a defensive fortification. This contemporary redoubt, however, is metaphorically representing areas where conservative and Republican populations are concentrating, essentially forming a politically and culturally homogeneous region within the United States. The idea has been further propelled by figures such as Representative Marjorie Taylor Greene, who has publicly suggested the division of the nation into red (conservative) and blue (liberal) states, often underpinned by Christian nationalistic motives (Weaver, 23).

In recent years, there has been a noticeable trend of conservatives and Republicans relocating from traditionally liberal states to those with more conservative governance (Anderson, 2024). This migration is often driven by a combination of economic, political, and cultural factors. States like Texas, Florida, and Tennessee have become popular destinations for those seeking lower taxes, fewer regulations, and policies that align more closely with conservative values. This shift is not just anecdotal but is supported by demographic data

showing significant population increases in these states, often at the expense of more liberal states such as California and New York.

The motivations for this migration are multifaceted. Economically, states with lower tax burdens and less stringent business regulations are attractive to both individuals and businesses (Anderson, 2024). Politically, the increasingly polarized national climate has made living in states governed by opposing ideologies less tenable for many. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, both Pastor Ken Peters and Pastor Shahram moved from their home state Washington State, down south to Tennessee. There they could go to church, didn't need to take vaccines and could live in an abortion free state. Culturally, the migration reflects a desire to reside in communities with shared values and lifestyles. Conservative-leaning individuals often feel alienated in liberal-dominated states where policies and societal norms may clash with their beliefs (Anderson, 2024). This sense of alienation can be particularly strong in areas where progressive policies on issues such as gun control, abortion, and LGBTQ+ rights are prominent. Moving to a state where the local government and community support their views can provide a sense of belonging and security.

The idea of a national divorce is not entirely new in American history. The most significant precedent is, of course, the Civil War, where deep-seated differences over slavery and states' rights led to a bloody conflict. While the current situation differs significantly, the underlying tensions of governance, cultural identity, and regionalism echo past conflicts. The concept of secession or separation has periodically resurfaced in American discourse, often during times of heightened political and social unrest.

During my many talks with Ken and Shahram, the topic of civil war or national divorce, was often on the table. They both agreed that, although impossible, the perfect solution would be national divorce without bloodshed. Shahram pointed out that in a perfect world, the liberals would leave us alone, like we do them, but it doesn't work like that in the real world. Both would often preach about making so called sanctuary cities and states where conservatives and Christians could live their lives without the interference of Pride, abortion, or other unethical practices. Many proponents, as they see it, of the national divorce concept view their ideology through a religious lens, believing that the United States have gone too far down the road of sin. This perspective often includes opposition to what they perceive as moral decay in liberal and spiritual decay, and secularism in public life. The intertwining of religious identity with political ideology adds a layer of complexity to the polarization, making compromise and unity more challenging to achieve.

The increasing polarization and the migration of conservatives to specific states have significant implications for governance and policymaking.

The notion of a national divorce raises critical questions about social cohesion and national identity. The United States has long prided itself on being a melting pot of cultures and ideas, with a collective identity that transcends regional differences. However, the growing polarization challenges this ideal, as communities become more insular and less tolerant of differing viewpoints (Djupe, Lewis, & Sokhey, 2023). The social fabric of the nation is strained when large segments of the population feel disconnected from or hostile towards other parts of the country.

While the idea of a national divorce suggests a peaceful separation, the reality is likely far more fraught with the very likely potential for conflict. Moreover, the deep emotional and ideological investments on both sides mean that any attempt at separation could provoke significant unrest and possibly violence. The specter of civil war, while still unlikely, cannot be entirely dismissed if the polarization continues unchecked.

The idea of America heading towards a national divorce or civil war reflects the profound polarization and division currently characterizing the nation. The migration of conservatives to create a "redoubt," as described by Bradley Onishi (Onishi, 2023)

Summary of Findings

In my thesis, I delve into the multifaceted relationship between religious faith, politics, and social conflict in the United States, with a particular focus on the congregation of Patriot Church. The first chapter centers on the concept of being a Biblical Citizen within this congregation. Here, I analyze how members interpret and enact their faith in the public sphere, emphasizing their belief in aligning civic duties with Biblical principles. This exploration reveals the significant influence of charismatic church leaders, who often shape the political attitudes and actions of their followers. These leaders play a crucial role in blurring the lines between religious freedom and religious dominionism, advocating for a society governed by Christian values, which leads to tensions within a pluralistic society that values religious freedom.

The second chapter addresses the ongoing culture war in America, highlighting the stark division between believers and non-believers. This chapter outlines how these cultural conflicts manifest in contentious debates over LGBTQ rights and abortion, exacerbating phobias and further entrenching societal divisions. The rhetoric used by religious groups, particularly those with charismatic leaders, often frames these issues in moral and spiritual terms, positioning them as battles between good and evil. This framing not only intensifies the conflicts but also polarizes public opinion, contributing to a climate of fear and mistrust.

In examining the spiritual dimension of this cultural conflict, I delve into the concept of spiritual warfare as understood by the Patriot Church congregation. This belief posits that America is under siege by demonic forces, and it is the duty of the faithful to engage in a spiritual battle to reclaim the nation. This perspective infuses political and social issues with a heightened sense of urgency and existential threat, further mobilizing believers to act in both the religious and political arenas. The idea of spiritual warfare underscores the depth of conviction and the intensity of the rhetoric employed by these groups, which can have profound implications for social cohesion and political discourse.

The final chapter explores eschatological beliefs, focusing on the notion that America is in the end times—a belief strongly held by the Patriot Church. This apocalyptic worldview suggests that the country is headed towards a dramatic and possibly violent transformation. I examine the implications of this belief, particularly the potential for a "national divorce" or even a new civil war. This chapter highlights how such apocalyptic narratives can shape the political and social strategies of religious groups, fostering a sense of impending doom that justifies extreme measures in the pursuit of their vision for the nation.

Overall, my thesis provides a comprehensive analysis of how religious beliefs and practices intersect with political ideologies and social conflicts in contemporary America. By focusing on the Patriot Church, I illustrate how faith communities navigate and influence the broader cultural and political landscape, often in ways that challenge the boundaries between religious and secular life. This study contributes to a deeper understanding of the dynamics at play in the American culture war and the role of religion in shaping public life and policy.

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