The New Antebellum: A Sociological Interpretation of Christian Nationalism and its Danger to Both Christianity and American Democracy

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Sociology 100: Thinking Sociologically

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December 11, 2024

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Introduction

Hate and fear have become the new American identity, plaguing social media platforms and legislation as it drips from the mouths of the citizenry. The nation has been torn apart by polarization in a continuation of the division and extremist ideology that has tormented generations of Americans since its founding. Today, Christian nationalism is at the forefront of division and extremism in its idea of a new America, defined by traditionalism, biblical law, and an end to our taken-for-granted democratic processes. Its proponents insist that America's survival depends on Christian laws and national observance, a claim that hides the truth of its political subtext. When the ideology's surface is peeled back, its threat to democracy and mainstream Christianity is clear in its perversion of Christian principles for political gain. This is where its ethical considerations reside, in its desire to upheave our current conceptions of equality, justice, and democracy. In the face of the issue's pressing dangers, its solution lies with the people, who must unite to wrest Christian nationalism's oppressive grip off America. The blueprint for achieving this has already been noted by sociologists, in the valuably impartial analyses they provide about our society and its political culture. Thus, Christian nationalism can be properly defined as centuries' worth of accumulated hate, evident in its desire to erect a country that helps a select few rather than all people. This is a dire threat to both American democracy and Christianity as it grows in power — being what may either usher America into a new era of Jim Crow or be the catalyst of a civil war and eventual collapse if not stopped.

Characteristics of Christian Nationalism

To understand the harm Christian nationalism poses, the roots of the movement and who its members are must be acknowledged. Christian nationalism is an ideology that advocates for the government to make laws that align with Christian teachings, promote it publicly, or even enforce its beliefs by law (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). Many apologists desire a return to a time

when America's populace was predominantly Christian, and its societal influences were clear. Other supporters wish for America to become a theocracy, where its people are not only Christian by choice or birth but by law. With few, if any, similarities to Christianity itself, the movement seeks to establish white, native-born Protestants as the most privileged group in the United States, a claim corroborated by many sociologists (Americans United for Separation of Church and State 2023; Gorski et al. 2022; Perry & Whitehead 2020).

Two of the greatest contributors to this thought are sociologists Samuel Perry and Andrew Whitehead (2020). They explain how Christian nationalism does not at all reflect Christianity. Rather, it seeks to uphold "nativism, white supremacy, patriarchy, and heteronormativity, along with divine sanction for authoritarian control and militarism" (p. 10). Christianity is merely the label haphazardly glued to the movement's title, with its morality less preoccupied with embodying Jesus Christ's ethical and sinless life than it is in creating a nation where difference is no longer encouraged, and where white Protestants are the only ones welcomed. The authors quote sociologist Philip Gorski in his summation of the movement, that it is solely "...political idolatry dressed up as religious orthodoxy" (p. 21), a way to revitalize the country's hatred and fear to form a society that only benefits a select few.

Historical Background.

Despite its modern danger, Christian nationalism, in essence, is nothing new to America — present since its original colonies as reflected by Whitehead's exploration of the "Doctrine of Discovery" (as cited in Americans United for Separation of Church and State, 2023) and Gorski et al. (2022) mention of the "... Spirit of 1690" (p. 47). Both insights express how the movement began not with angry rioters brandishing Confederate flags and Bibles, but with Europeans first settling in the Americas, claiming what was their "rightful land," and perceiving the natives to be barbarians who must be spiritually saved. This sentiment was only further strengthened as the

Puritans built their home in New England. They created a social hierarchy based on race and religion that defined who belonged, who was excluded, and even who became property.

Whitehead's "Doctrine of Discovery" and the "Spirit of 1690" express how white Protestants became the ideal citizens, a standard that was maintained via rigid hierarchies. Demonizing those who did not fit in was further given a Christian flavor by people like clergyman Cotton Mather (1663-1728). According to Gorski et al. (2022), Mather believed that white Puritans were a special people chosen by God and that salvation itself was biological, meaning that heaven was unattainable for those not among God's chosen ones (p. 53). Outsiders became so dehumanized that Native American and later African enslavement was readily accepted by the American colonists, since these groups were either "'heathens' or 'captives of war'" (p. 54). However, some white Christians of this time did oppose slavery, such as Judge Samuel Sewall (1652-1730), who used the Bible to refute slavery and insist that all people were equal (p. 55). Many Christians would also become abolitionists and civil rights activists in the future, like Harriet Beecher Stowe and Martin Luther King Jr., who utilized true biblical teachings to show that all people are equal human beings. But the current of ideology did not flow in the way of equality, with activists like Judge Sewall being in the minority for centuries.

After the French and Indian Wars (1688-1763), social belonging specifically meant Protestantism out of an opposition to the French Catholics, with the Revolutionary War (1775-1783) and the War of 1812 (1812-1815) giving this aspect of belonging a distinctly American form of nationalism (p. 57). By the twentieth century, this ideal status of being white, American, and Protestant had justified racial segregation, white supremacy, and violence to all who were not the ideal heterosexual white Christian that America was meant for. Christian nationalism would come to take the political stage after the Supreme Court's unanimous ruling for racial integration in *Brown v. Board of Education*, when leaders like Paul Weyrich and Richard

Viguerie orchestrated a movement known as the "Religious Right" (p. 69). They advocated for traditional moral and social practices, ones that would keep white Christians at the top of the social hierarchy — a roadblock against the progressively diverse direction that America was taking.

The people of Christian Nationalism.

How people interact with Christian nationalism is also essential to explain alongside its historical context. This is a uniquely sociological contribution to the movement that helps us understand who is involved in the movement and why. Perry and Whitehead (2020) illustrate four categories of people regarding the movement. Rejecters, the first group, favor a complete separation of church and state and believe that Christianity should have no federal favoritism, with America not being a unique nation chosen by God. These people are often younger white males who are highly educated and have better salaries than many. While they generally hold religious beliefs, many are not devout and live in the West and Northeast (p. 26-29). Resisters, the next category, also oppose Christian nationalism yet are not as vehemently against it as Rejecters. They are more willing for some religion to be implemented in the public sphere, such as with allowing Christian symbols to be presented in public places. They are about the same demographically as rejecters but with more racial and political diversity and are more religiously devout (p. 29-33). Accommodators are those that lean in favor towards Christian nationalism yet still show some indecision. They want federal advocacy for "Christian values" yet still support a church-state separation and oppose America being declared a specifically Christian nation. They closely match Resisters in demographics, but Accommodators are more likely to be women and are generally older than both them and Rejecters (p. 33-35). Ambassadors, the strongest supporters of Christian nationalism alongside Accommodators are the oldest out of all groups, with an average age of 54. Many are women and half of this group lives in the American South.

They are usually white, conservative, and evangelical Protestant, with 55% of this group identifying under the latter term and studiously engaging with their religion via Scripture readings, praying, etc. (p. 35-38). It is important to understand how people interact with Christian nationalism to comprehend why some reject the movement while others embrace it. The trend is that white, evangelical Protestants are most likely to favor Christian nationalist rhetoric. This illustrates how the movement's origins as colonization in the "Spirit of 1690" evolved to the modern day. It is also notable that many devout Christians oppose the movement, supporting the argument that Christian nationalism's underlying structure is not religious in nature but rather sociopolitical.

The Threat to the Christian Faith

With its early history and modern political goals in mind, Christian nationalism is extremely dangerous to the stability of Christianity and to American democracy, a worry that many scholars share (Perry and Whitehead 2020; Juergensmeyer 1996; Fuchs 2018; Gorski et al. 2022; Grubbs et al. 2022, Americans United for Separation of Church and State 2023). Regarding the former, Christian nationalism has injected its poison into mainstream Christianity, pressuring its members to engage in it and causing outsiders to turn away in revulsion, thinking that this is what the religion is meant to be. And with talk of what it means to be a real believer, cries for the implementation of Christian theocratic laws, and calls for the country to embody proper "Christian values," who can blame either of them? The movement's damage is first apparent in the churches, where evangelical leaders do not mention Jesus' ethical teachings or loving one's neighbor. Instead, they pluck the strings of peoples' fears of outsiders — primarily non-white Christian individuals — and the fact that Christianity is losing its national dominance. They articulate how left-wing advocates and atheists seek to take away their freedoms as Christians, wishing to transform America into a secular country that despises religion.

Perry and Whitehead (2020) exhibit Christian nationalist leader and pastor Dr. Robert Jeffress as an example, one who is known for his "Freedom Sunday" events at his megachurch in Texas. There, he stands at a pulpit meant to preach God's Word to instead cite founding documents and court rulings to emphasize America's Christian beginnings, and how secularists wish to destroy that heritage (p. 55-57). During one of these "Freedom Sunday" services in recent years, Jeffress delivered a sermon titled, "America is a Christian Nation," where he stated that "... we've allowed the secularists, the humanists, the atheists, the infidels to pervert our Constitution into something our founding fathers never intended.... We're not going to allow this in our Christian country anymore!" (p. 57). This complements fellow Christian nationalist leader and former president of Virginia's Liberty University, Jerry Falwell Jr., who remarked in an interview that "I don't look to the teachings of Jesus for what my political beliefs should be" (p. 86). Both leaders highlight their goal to transform Christianity from a faith built on salvation through Jesus and good works into a political doctrine, one that has already been set in motion.

This doctrine has and will continue to change Christians from wanting to follow Christ's teachings to instead advocating for America to officially be a Christian nation, with laws and principles that maintain an unmovable social hierarchy with white Christians at the top. Many believers have become convinced that America is meant to be a Christian country, one that must be saved from the secularists and atheists. The movement unites those within the group against all others, dehumanizing dissidents and contributing to why so many nationalists are fearful of outsiders and why they feel the desperate need to protect their country. This is no different from the white Protestants of both early and recent America who have justified centuries of slavery and persecution by viewing Asians, Africans, Hispanics, and Native Americans as inferior savages, or even the writings of Puritan Cotton Mather, who believed that white Puritans were

God's chosen ones. Hence, demographics have always had an essential role in establishing who is on which side of this historical conflict, continuing to the modern day.

Perry and Whitehead's (2020) findings of the demographical membership of those who both support and oppose the movement make this transparently clear, since many Christian nationalists are not white evangelicals at all. In fact, "More than 15 percent [of Ambassadors] are black Protestants, Jewish, unaffiliated, or of a non-Christian faith." While many supporters only want more Christians in America, there are also many that favor this movement for its political undertones. "Christian nationalism [...]" the authors note, "is not an exclusively evangelical ideology. It exists independently" (p. 58). This explains why numerous Christians despise the movement, viewing it as an ideology designed to transform America into a theocracy based on an oppressive social order, rather than as simply a public appreciation of Christian beliefs.

Concerning political issues such as stricter gun laws, believing that Middle East refugees pose a terrorist threat to the country,[1] or even that citizens should be mandated to respect America's traditions, there is a visible correlation between opinions on these issues and Christian nationalist ideology. Fervent Christian nationalists rebuke gun reforms and firmly agree with the threat of Middle Eastern refugees and the necessity of mandated respect for American traditions. Yet this correlation significantly decreases the more believers live out their faith by reading the Bible, going to church, and praying (p. 84). The more one dedicates themself to living out their faith, the less they tend to politically agree with the stances of Christian nationalism. Thus, many

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[1] This also includes anti-immigration sentiment in general among Christian nationalists, the most recent example being immigrants crossing the Mexican border. Although border security is necessary, Christian nationalists are in favor of mass deportations and vehemently oppose border crossings over worries that many of those crossing are drug traffickers and criminals. This is despite the fact that most of these people are unviolent refugees or families, with 52% of all refugees for the 2023 fiscal year being Christian, according to the Migration Policy Institute. Additionally, between fiscal years 2010-2023, 49% (338,900 out of 697,800) of all refugees were Christian, with only 35% of refugees identifying as Muslim.

devout believers understand how the movement defies true Christianity; however, many do not. This is why the promotion of this hatred that desires an ideal society for white Christians — especially with the leadership of charismatics like Dr. Jeffress or Falwell Jr. — pose a dire threat to how Christians view their beliefs and live them out. This is one of the greatest dangers to Christianity in American history, threatening to overturn its peaceful belief system emphasizing God's mercy and justice into one that spews violence and hate.

The Threat to American Democracy

The dangers of Christian nationalism are not only restricted to the religion but also to American democracy and its structural security. It is more than implementing Christianity's symbols and beliefs in public life, but also about dictating how Americans can live in their private lives. Sociologist Mark Juergensmeyer (1996) highlights that Christian nationalism is comparable to other radical religious movements, such as Islamic Fundamentalism or India's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). All of them oppose a separation of religion and state while arguing for their respective countries to favor a specific religion with diminished privileges for minorities (p. 373-374). This is complemented by Perry and Whitehead's (2020) analysis of the goals of Christian nationalists' strongest supporters, whose political beliefs include establishing patriarchal family hierarchies, traditional gender roles, and an exclusively heteronormative society (p. 124), effectively favoring certain social groups at the expense of all others. Unsurprisingly, as Gorski et al. (2022) clarify, all these demands center around peoples' fears regarding a changing society where whiteness, Christianity, and America's imperialistic power are losing their dominance (p. 103). These are the guiding ideals of Christian nationalist thought, which in turn have caused evangelical leaders to advocate for a "return" to a traditionalist way of life where the social hierarchy could be reinstated and cemented. This is why so many people, even those outside of white evangelical Protestantism, voice their support for the movement.

In addition, social scientist Christian Fuchs (2018) explains that people are more willing to follow extremist ideologies after constant exposure to social media apps that give these hateful platforms even more attention. He expresses that extreme right-wing beliefs are spread across the internet through "... emotionalisation... polarisation... [and] manipulation," while emphasizing that online platforms promote and reward attention-grabbing posts and videos in the phenomenon known as the "*algorithmic amplification of online ideologies*" (p. 84). This means that when Christian nationalist leaders enhance peoples' fears of voting fraud, secularism, immigration, etc. with online messages and sermons, they are given an even greater online presence. As a result, Christian nationalists are trapped in a loophole of rage and fear as they are constantly exposed to this form of rhetoric in their churches and online communities. Christian nationalism's power and popularity thus begs to be viewed through a critical sociological lens so that its threatening reach may best be confronted, and its societal reign of terror ended.

For instance, the January 6th Capitol insurrection is a perfect example of the movement's growth and ferocity. On this day, Christian nationalists and extreme right-wing supporters stormed the Capitol building after Republican candidate Donald Trump lost the 2020 election and insisted that it was rigged to make Democratic candidate Joe Biden win. While many are quick to view this event as an anomaly of anger, it was rather the boiling point of what had been simmering in the pot of America's changing society for quite some time. Fear and rage are often violence's best conductors, given an even greater voltage by the voices of evangelical leaders who call for a return of our "Christian country." Their insistence of its takeover by anti-Christian secularists helped to set the fire of Christian nationalist sentiment ablaze, accumulating in the insurrection. Collectively, the rioters were not shy to show their Christian pride as they held Bibles, crosses, and signs proclaiming Jesus' name, believing that they were doing God's Will and taking their country back. This is not unlike America's European ancestors, who destroyed

and burned ancient Native American civilizations to conquer land that "rightfully belonged to them" as Christians. But the January 6th riot did not satiate Christian nationalists' desires or anger, leaving room for another, even more violent, national crisis in the future.

Gorski et al. (2022) agree with this thought, mentioning that "A second eruption [the first being the January 6th riots] would likely be larger and more violent than the first. Large enough to bury American democracy for at least a generation" (p. 103). In this quote, the movement's goal to uproot the United States' ideals of equality under law, the separation of church and state, and the freedom of religion is further exemplified. The same rhetoric that encouraged the January 6th rioters, however, can also be seen years earlier, during the 2017 "Unite the Right" rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, where groups supporting Nazism, white supremacy, nationalism, etc. protested the removal of Confederate statues. Shouting that they will not be replaced by Jews as they wielded weapons and flags with symbols of the Confederacy, swastikas, and *Deus vult* crosses according to Wikipedia, this protest had the same motivations as January 6th, with the same people and the same presented danger to the United States' future.

Christian Nationalism's Ties to Nazism

The swastika flags that these "Unite the Right" protestors bore on their shoulders are a belief system that is more intricately connected to Nazism itself than many would like to acknowledge. Sociologist Neil McLaughlin (1996) provides a gripping literature review of Erich Fromm, a German scholar who, in 1941, wrote an analysis of the social, political, and economic roots of Nazism in Germany. Fromm regarded individualism as a significant cause of isolation and feelings of powerlessness (p. 251), further exacerbated by capitalism's effect on the economy in the early twentieth century, causing German citizens to believe that their economic safety rested entirely on their shoulders. Religious individualism additionally contributed to the German peoples' lonely anguish, with Protestantism being "... the single best predictor for

Nazism" (p. 253). Rural Protestants were found to be the greatest demographic for initial support to the Nazi party. This is because Protestantism differs from other branches of Christianity by being a decentralized sect that encourages believers to live out their faith in a unique way based on the individual, rather than adhering to specific traditions and beliefs like in Catholicism or Orthodoxy. Thus, Protestants felt more responsible for their socioeconomic failures than others, making them more vulnerable to the Nazis' patriotic speeches and banners promising a better future.

Adolf Hitler's leadership appeared to be a beacon of hope in the dark abyss of Germany's loss in World War I and the economic turmoil of the Great Depression, allowing the German people to once again feel proud of their nation. They would even refer to the Weimar Republic — Germany's political system during both World War I and the Great Depression — as "fourteen years of shame and disgrace" (p. 255). The people were spurred on by the image of an idealized nation built on a mythical past of greatness and racial unity, where the country was home only to racially pure Germans that were "worthy" of belonging. That dream convinced the German people to place their trust into the psychotic hands of Hitler, pride not only being the downfall of biblical angels but also of the country, plunging Germany into a time centered around war and fear that would forever live infamously in history books.

Interestingly, McLaughlin (1996) states that groups who hindered the Nazi's rise to power were "Unions and left parties in the cities and the Catholic Church in the countryside" while those who strongly supported the Nazi agenda were often "rural Protestants and the anti-left upper middle class" (p. 254). Modern America faces a social divide over Christian nationalism that closely resembles these exact demographics as well. Also, fear of America's declining global power and the harsh weight of socioeconomic individualism further aligns with the causes of Nazism. This is not to say that Christian nationalism is the Nazi movement itself,

but rather that it resembles its demographics and background. By understanding the movement's ties to those of the past, we can know what is in store for America if Christian nationalists continue to garner support — and we can learn how to confront it before it is too late.

Christian Nationalism's Policy Goals

The threat to American democracy and its ideals are not initiated solely by the regular members of Christian nationalism, but also by its leaders and supporting politicians. One significant initiative they have pertains to passing voting restrictions in a phenomenon all too similar to the Jim Crow era. Constitutionally, the only requirements to vote are that one must be a citizen, a resident of the state and election district they are voting in for at least 30 days before an election, and be at least 18-years-old, according to the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania's website. Yet Grubbs et al. (2022) explain how the leading faces of Christian nationalism seek to change this. Voter registration policies and voter ID laws protecting the integrity of voting are justifiable, but Christian nationalists take these laws to an extreme, making it clear, as many of these leaders openly admit, that it is about giving their movement a political advantage and restricting who may vote rather than caring for a fair election.

Significant support extends to strict voter ID laws and felon disenfranchisement, yet many Americans outside of the movement support these initiatives as well — albeit to a much lesser extent. This trend of overwhelming support shows that Christian nationalists tend to favor restrictive laws that shift American democracy away from a representative one and into an exclusive one. Many on the right also oppose registering to vote on Election Day, are against eligible citizens being automatically registered to vote, and feel that voter registration lists of people who have not recently voted should be purged (p. 7-8). The authors note that these issues do not specifically apply to Christian nationalists; however, because they are analyzed based on

political ideology and racial identity, both of which closely intertwine with Christian nationalism, it is a logical argument to make that these sentiments do apply to supporters of the movement. They also advocate for sociologists to research religion alongside political ideology because they have such a similar connection to one another (p. 8).

But even if average Christian nationalists are generally silent about voter ID laws, Grubbs et al. (2022) documents their leaders' much more vocal standpoints. For instance, Paul Weyrich, a Christian nationalist leader and co-founder of the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), an organization producing legislation to restrict voting access, once spoke unabashedly to other leaders of the movement. In his speech, he admitted, "I don't want everybody to vote. Elections are not won by a majority of people.... As a matter of fact, our leverage in the elections quite candidly goes up as the voting populace goes down" (p. 9). This echoes fellow Christian nationalist advocate Phyllis Schlafly, who believed in restricting the number of early voting days in the 2012 election, arguing that early voting helps the Democrats win. Also of note is former Governor of Arkansas and Christian nationalist Mike Huckabee, who stated in an interview during his campaign for president in 2016 that "I don't want everyone to vote... if they're gonna vote for me they need to vote, if they're not gonna vote for me they need to stay home... there are people who vote and they have no idea what our Constitution says" (p. 10).

However, as Arkansas' former governor and a presidential candidate, was it not his responsibility to ensure that citizens receive a quality education, one that would surely make them aware of the Constitution? As of 2022, approximately 81.8% of the nation's children attended public or private school[2], meaning that if people are unaware of America's founding

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[2] The American government's forum on Child and Family Statistics reports 72.5 million children living in the country in 2022. The National Center for Education Statistics states that approximately 49.6 million children were enrolled in public schooling in the fall of 2022, while also stating that 4.7 million students attended private school for the 2021-2022 school year. In

documents, that is an educational issue rather than one that demands a restriction of voting rights. But Huckabee does not mention any root issue of a lack of knowledge about the country's political system. This illustrates that his desire to restrict voting access is no different than his fellow Christian nationalist leaders who blatantly support restrictive voter laws to only allow certain people to be able to vote. It has little to do with any actual concern about a lack of awareness about the Constitution but is rather about a desire to limit who can participate in American politics.

Grubbs et al. (2022) mention that while little is still known about the relationship between ideology and supporting voter restrictions, they have found that "Christian nationalist ideology is among the leading predictors (and most often *the* leading predictor)" for believing that voter suppression in presidential elections is nonexistent. They also feel that voting is too easy, voter fraud is a grave issue, and disenfranchising certain criminals for life is reasonable. An additional belief is one implied by Mike Huckabee and further elaborated upon by these authors — that Christian nationalists also tend to be in favor of "... measures to restrict the vote to persons who could pass a basic civics test" (p. 5). The last form of legal civics tests that served as pre-requisites to vote were the literacy tests imposed in the American South during the Jim Crow era to prevent African-Americans from voting. Re-emerging support for such laws is a harsh flashback to this era of the late nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century, exhibiting an idealization of the society of this time, where only certain "acceptable" people could vote.

As a result, Christian nationalism, when its desire to restrict voting rights to only a worthy few are taken into consideration, threatens to destroy America's guiding ideal of equality under the law. It would transform the nation into allowing only certain demographics to partake

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total, this adds up to about 81.8% of all children residing in America that attended either public or private school during 2022.

in democracy while excluding all others, not unlike the early Puritanical practices of restricting governmental processes to white male Protestants. The underlying motivations of this movement are evidently to shift America back into a discriminatory nation where democracy closes its doors to the masses and only opens to a select few.

The Consequences for American Society: Civil War or the Next Jim Crow

If Christian nationalism continues to gain both momentum and power, America faces the possibility of entering a new era of Jim Crow or even a Civil War, one that may be the country's fatal blow. As shown, the movement's ideology and roots resemble that of early European colonization and Nazism. However, as Gorski et al. (2022) demonstrate, it is highly unlikely that America will find itself in a twenty-first century version of the Third Reich, or any form of totalitarian rule for that matter (p. 125). While the movement certainly shows drastic similarities to Nazism, the United States' sociopolitical mechanisms prevent this from occurring. The government was created to prevent the rise of totalitarianism by allowing each state to operate as its own force of government apart from the federal entity. Also, by establishing the three separate branches of the executive, legislative, and judicial powers, individual state governments and the federal government are prevented from consolidating power in one source.

Moreover, power is spread across the states rather than being located within one specific region, unlike nations where dictatorial coups have happened. States like New York, Texas, and California are all large economic contributors with their own diverse cultures and populaces, making a single takeover by force virtually impossible. This is also supported by economic freedoms that are beyond the federal government's control, such as the private ownership of universities and media sources like social media platforms and radio stations. These sources encourage a diversity of thought across the country while also withholding economic power from being in the hands of one group or individual. This prevents a seizure of power from occurring

because there are so many factions with their own ideologies that confront one another. Ironically, even America's religious communities fend off a Christian nationalist takeover, with numerous religions each having their own elite individuals and communities (p. 124). Thus, a singular majority cannot rise to "take back their country" as so many evangelical leaders hope because there are too many competing viewpoints that must be contended with. With this in mind, although Christian nationalism has increased in membership and support to a concerning degree, it is still not enough to reenact the Nazis' grip over Germany.

Rather than a dictatorial takeover, Gorski et al. (2022) discuss the more plausible reality of America's future, one that they call "Jim Crow 2.0" (p. 126), in which violence and discrimination will be rampant, alongside mass deportations, blatant xenophobia, and a significant rise in legal and social inequalities. Already, Christian nationalists have advocated for measures to ensure that this possibility becomes a reality. For example, Harvard Law School professor and legal scholar Adrian Vermeule has argued for the Catholic church to oversee the state, comparable to Francisco Franco's dictatorial rule over Spain. Additionally, Rich Lowry, editor-in-chief of the *National Review* magazine, has explicitly supported "a rejection of multiculturalism" in favor of one national culture. Even Calvinist author and theologian Peter Leithart's beliefs have affected Christian nationalism with his praises of the Roman emperor Constantine who made Rome's official religion Christianity and targeted all others (p. 117). These men clearly convey the society that this nationalist movement would create if given enough control. In fact, they have already sought to do so through radical efforts like Project 2025, a written plan suggesting that the president should consolidate the executive branch's power under themselves and away from the federal bureaucracy. They also believe that funding should be taken away from public services like daycare to instead be given to families for children to be raised at home, among other recommendations that all encourage a traditional,

patriarchal, and restrictive way of life. As these sociologists articulate, if Christian nationalism

was to become the controlling power of states, it would only be in enthusiastic right-wing states,

with left-wing regions opposing this political ideology. Yet they do acknowledge that if a

Christian nationalist government were to emerge in some states, it would be battled by others,

and if it lasted for twenty years or more, America may face its second and possibly last civil war,

one that "could be the dissolution of the Union" (p. 126).

The Solution: What We Can Do

It is important to underscore that there is an optimistic outlook to the crisis of Christian

nationalism: it has not yet achieved the needed capabilities to seize state governments and

systematically alter American society and politics. There is still time to solve this crisis before

the nation becomes unrecognizable or even lost entirely (Americans United for Separation of

Church and State, 2023; Gorski et al. 2022). This paper has sought to objectively analyze the

context, membership, and present as well as future problems that this movement poses and will

continue to pose to the country and to Christianity. But this abysmal future is not written in

stone, with outlets readily available to both confront and subdue this ideology before it firmly

takes root in America, just as preventative measures to illness are available before a virus takes

hold of and harms its human host.

Sociologist Ruth Braunstein (as cited in Americans United for Separation of Church and

State, 2023) highlights one of the more popular forms of resistance to Christian nationalism, one

she has dubbed "pluralist resistance." This effort endeavors to vanquish the movement's

presence across multiple fronts via numerous organizations and groups. For example, one front is

the religious community, where she explains how Christian nationalists feel that they must fight

to protect their country, are wary of non-Christians, and are fueled by a fear of outsiders. To

remedy this, groups like "Christians Against Christian Nationalism" and "Vote Common Good"

have outspokenly raised awareness of the movement while seeking to teach Christian leaders and communities how to confront this nationalism and avoid being sucked into its attractive yet lethal whirlpool. Braunstein then elaborates on the political front, where social rights groups such as the "Poor People's Campaign" not only protest outside of government buildings, but are also trying to pass measures of public policy that will defend all peoples' social rights and act as a barrier against the extremist legislation that Christian nationalist proponents wish to pass. Despite their diverse missions and supporters, these organizations have all united under the common goal of protecting America and its democratic ideals from Christian nationalism. They work in government, general society, and religious spaces to educate and fight against the movement and are calling for their fellow citizens to join.

By cautiously analyzing news sources to ensure their impartiality and dedication to factual reporting, people can avoid the trap of disinformation spreading across social media. They can also avoid the platforms of fear and power that many Christian nationalist leaders utilize to recruit and motivate supporters. Furthermore, by shedding the fear of openly discussing such a controversial topic, a productive exchange of ideas will ensue, helping to educate people on what the movement truly is rather than absorbing only the buzzwords surrounding it. By publicly speaking with one another about this issue, Christian nationalists can realize the truth of the movement, rather than believing it to be the glorification of Jesus and America that they perceive it to be. They may also come to understand that the country does not wish to restrict their right to worship, nor do they need to fear the dehumanized monsters that evangelical leaders claim atheists and secularists to be.

Gorski et al. (2022) agree with this notion, believing that a united effort among Americans is crucial, one where we all see the humanity within each other as opposed to demonizing the other side, which is a heavy contributor to modern polarization. And the

responsibility for unity and open-mindedness does not solely weigh on the shoulders of Christian nationalists or even the religious community but is also required of "secular progressives" who have a troublesome relationship with religion. This is especially true with their perspectives concerning faith, which they tend to view as "a mortal threat to personal autonomy or even as a form of 'child abuse'" (p. 129). It is essential that this group understand the ideological contradictions between religious fundamentalist movements like Christian nationalism and the belief system itself. If they did, perhaps they would be as grief-stricken as devout Christians are, as they watch their sacred and peaceful teachings that implore them to good works and glorify Jesus Christ become violently twisted to satisfy the political desires of a rising minority. And if secularists were willing to understand the beliefs of Christianity as well as the background of Christian nationalism, and religious followers were to collaborate with them, positive social change would be imminent. The same applies to those on the political left and right, whose civic duty as Americans beseeches them to cast away their differences to prioritize the looming storm that threatens to collapse the democracy that they both hold dear. However, unless an open dialogue is supported and voiced across the nation, this united effort that has already been started by many, with the potential to grow into a social movement garnering the support of the American majority, will remain as a hopeful fantasy. If silence, miscommunication, and disinformation continue to wrap their tendrils around the country's populace, and people continue to consume themselves with persistent finger-pointing and an us vs. them mentality, generations in the near-future will not have an America to grow up in.

The Importance of a Sociological Analysis

By analyzing the unique insights sociologists bring to the issue of Christian nationalism, we can understand how to end the silence surrounding the problem and allow for an informative picture of the movement to emerge, rather than the hazy threat that it often is. Sociologist Peter

Berger (1963) illustrates sociology as an honorable discipline, one founded upon active listening, neutrality, and research integrity (p. 166). The impartial lens through which sociologists study society is especially useful regarding controversial topics such as Christian nationalism. A political scientist may study the movement's growth in government as well as its political initiatives, while a psychologist may inquire further into the thought patterns and development of its members. Yet sociology combines the commendable work that these fields are doing into one broad yet crucial framework that we can peer through for a complete picture of Christian nationalism's beginnings, current patterns, and its possible future.

For instance, Perry and Whitehead (2022) provide a distinct sociological contribution to understanding the movement by analyzing its membership through the four social categories of Ambassador, Accommodator, Rejecter, and Resister. This provides a knowledge of who supports or opposes the movement and why based on their political beliefs and demographics. Additionally, the other sociologists mentioned in this paper all study Christian nationalism through a unique lens of politics, religion, culture, etc., helping them connect these aspects of the movement to its overall effect on society. To think sociologically is to think critically about society, where one studies both the unique and common aspects of the world to comprehend its hidden mechanisms. These sociologists do just that, analyzing the layers of Christian nationalism to identify its beginnings, problems, and its effects on general society. By this, sociologists have presented a helpful analysis of the movement and how it can be stopped, demonstrating why discussing the movement through a sociological interpretation is most essential.

Conclusion

Christian nationalism is an ethical issue that has become concerningly powerful in its popularity and violence, threatening to overturn both mainstream Christianity and American

democracy. Through sociologists' unique insights of the movement, they have conveyed how Christian nationalism has existed since the beginning of Europeans' conquests of the Americas and its evolution into the "Religious Right" political ideology. Moreover, its basis of membership has also been discussed in this paper, many of whom are white Protestants, although more diverse groups of people are in favor of the movement as well, like black Protestants, Jews, etc. This illustrates its political motivations that only superficially resemble Christianity, when it is more similar to other radical movements like Islamic fundamentalism or India's Bharatiya Janata Party in reality. The initiatives of its leaders and politicians have also been conveyed, especially how they wish to upend America's equal and democratic processes in favor of a restrictive nation with a rigidly oppressive social hierarchy. This is a goal that has already begun with efforts to restrict voting access and rights. Further, the violence and anger that consumed the movement has been communicated through events like the January 6th insurrection and the Charlottesville "Unite the Right" rally, in which Christian nationalism's hate and uncanny resemblance to Nazism is evident. Its ethical weight has been explored as well through its effects on American religion, politics, and society, all of which are possible to change if this movement continues to gain more power and influence. While many groups have risen in opposition against Christian nationalism across various religious and political fronts, silence surrounding this topic must end as well as the demonization of others so that the movement's destructive power of division can be fought against. Perhaps Christian nationalism will be written in future books and documented in films, in which it serves as a harsh lesson to America about what we are capable of if we allow disinformation and anger to fuel us. Or perhaps we will do nothing, and not only will the country be torn apart by polarization and violence, but the United States of America itself will meet its demise.

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