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Confronting the Conflation: The Use of Christian Nationalist Rhetoric at the Insurrection on January 6th, 2021

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Abstract

This project considers the rhetoric of Christian nationalism on display before, during, and after the insurrection at the United States Capitol on January 6th, 2021. I will show how Christian nationalism on Jan 6th can be framed using Jenny Edbauer's ideas of rhetorical ecologies and Thomas Rickert's ideas of rhetorical ambiance by considering the speakers at the insurrection and a pastor who has been publicly vocal about his motives. Next, I will consider the images used by major media outlets covering the insurrection and how they chose to frame the events visually by considering Kellie Sharp-Hoskins's ideas of rhetorical ecologies and the relationship between logos and pathos. Lastly, I will consider how Christian evangelical and faith leaders have worked to combat the Christian nationalism that was on display at the insurrection and how their efforts work as counter-rhetorics, empowered by the framework of rhetorical ecologies.

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Chapter 1: The Rhetorical Ecology and Ambient Rhetoric of Jan 6th

1. Christian Nationalism

Many in the United States were shocked in August 2017, when thousands of white nationalists, neo-Nazis, antisemites, neo-fascists, and other hate groups descended in Charlottesville, Virginia to "Unite the Right." Their reason for protesting was to speak against the removal of Confederate statues, primarily a Robert E. Lee statue, but the event is one of the most prominent recent instances of domestic extremism in the name of nationalism ("Unite the Right Rallies"). Also that year, America saw a travel ban on Muslims from then-president Donald Trump, an executive action targeting religious minorities in the United States (Tyler, "The Distorted"). Through mass shootings, protests, and other public acts of violence, extremism has become more prevalent, especially in the name of returning to a white, Christian nation (Tyler, "The Distorted"). More recently, politicians like Marjorie Taylor Greene have proudly worn the badge of "Christian nationalist," perhaps unaware of the danger that such nationalism can lead to extremism: at a Turning Point USA Student Action Summit in 2022, Greene said, "We need to be the party of nationalism and I'm a Christian, and I say it proudly, we should be Christian nationalists" (Tyler, "Opinion"). But already, Christian nationalism was and continues to be a form of domestic religious extremism.

On January 6, 2021, that extremism came to a head on the national stage when thousands of Trump supporters and far-right Republicans attended a Trump rally that escalated to an insurrection at the United States Capitol building, resulting in four deaths that day, and several in the days following (Cameron). Again, Christian imagery and ideology were present, and violent rhetoric was used in the name of Jesus Christ. Jan 6th is one of the most significant and recent public examples of the conflation of Christian values and American politics. With hearings

concerning Jan 6th continuing, and a highly contested election approaching, it is vital to understand how Christian nationalism is perhaps one of the primary justifications of the insurrection. How does Christian nationalism conflate Christian values and American values, and what role did Christian nationalist ideas play in the insurrection?

To have a solid understanding of the role that Christian nationalism played during the insurrection on Jan 6th [1], we must first have a solid understanding of rhetorical ecology to consider how pervasive Christian nationalist rhetoric is and how it manifests. By viewing Jan 6th as a rhetorical ecology, we can consider the discourse around Christian nationalism as it moves through that ecology, morphing as it comes into contact with other rhetorics within that ecology. In "Unframing Models of Public Distribution: From Rhetorical Situation to Rhetorical Ecologies," Jenny Edbauer argues for the importance of moving past the common rhetorical situation equation of audience, constraints, and exigence (8); instead, she proposes "a revised strategy for theorizing public rhetorics (and rhetoric's publicness) as a circulating ecology of effects, enactments, and events by shifting the lines of focus from *rhetorical situation* to *rhetorical ecologies"* (9). In her article, Edbuaer considered the city of Austin, Texas as a rhetorical ecology and explores the rhetorics within that ecology, such as "Keep Austin Weird" and how that saying picked up meaning and evolved within the larger ecology of Austin, Texas (14). Edbauer's theories will help us consider the broader rhetorical ecology that was shaped by the way insurrectionists spoke about Christian nationalism, as the manifestation of Christian nationalism was not limited to the "audience, constraints, and exigence" of the traditional

[1] Throughout this project, I will refer to the insurrectionist actions that took place at the US capitol as simply "Jan 6th" or "the insurrection." These events are separate from the Trump-led rally that took place before the event or the march to the capitol itself. Justification for my use of the term "insurrection" comes from President Donald Trump's consequential impeachment in 2021 on the grounds of "Incitement of Insurrection" (The House 109). While sources refer to the events as a "coup" or "rally," for the sake of consistency, I will refer to the actions *at the capitol* as an "insurrection."

rhetorical situation. Additionally, Edbauer writes, "I argue that this ecological model allows us to more fully theorize rhetoric as a public(s) creation" (9). Viewing Jan 6th then as a "public creation" proves that the utterances surrounding the event are part of a larger rhetorical ecology, rather than a formulaic rhetorical situation. Edbauer writes that while Lloyd Bitzer would argue for the traditional elements of audience, exigence, and constraints, we cannot use that view to consider Jan 6th because Bitzer's ideas do not allow for consideration of the baggage and bleeding of moves within a rhetorical ecology (9). For this reason, I will consider Jan 6th as the rhetorical ecology, just like Edbauer considered Austin as her site of exploration. Within this site, I can see how rhetoric and rhetorical terms of Christian nationalism bounced and reverberated off each other, moving within that ecology.

Another scholar who will help us evaluate the language of the insurrection is Thomas Rickert. While Edbauer speaks to the broader rhetorical ecology, examining the way that rhetoric can be viewed as "interaction" (9), Rickert argues that rhetoric has real, physical outcomes that are influenced by a rhetorical event's surroundings, helping us to understand how Christian nationalist rhetoric on Jan 6th was manifested in actions and not exclusively through verbal utterances. In his book *Ambient Rhetoric: The Attunements of Rhetorical Being*, Rickert defines rhetoric as being much more than simply words on a page. He writes, "Rhetoric, while traditionally taken as a discursive, intentional art, can and indeed must be grounded in the material relations from which it springs, not simply as the situation giving it its shape and exigence, but as part of what we mean by rhetoric. Rhetoric in this sense is ambient" (x). Rickert argues for a more holistic view of rhetoric. To see how ideas expressed rhetorically are influenced and enabled by their environments, we can apply Rickert's ideas, as he writes, "The transformations that are accomplished through rhetoric can and often do lead to actions,

however, one understands rhetoric to proceed. That is, performing rhetorical acts does not require completely grasping all that is entailed in the performance" (xiii). Rickert continues that ambient rhetoric manifests itself in numerous ways and provides more context for understanding persuasion in and about a space or event as a result of "being together in the world" (Rickert xiii). Rickert's theory will be applied to a specific pastor that was charged in his actions on Jan 6th. In order also to understand the Christian nationalist rhetoric used during the insurrection, we must have a solid understanding of Christian nationalism as an ideology within a larger rhetorical ecology.

Christian nationalism in the United States is not new. In her book *Jesus and John Wayne: How White Evangelicals Corrupted a Faith and Fractured a Nation*, Kristin Kobes Du Mez writes, "It was in the 1940s and 1950s that a potent mix of patriarchal 'gender traditionalism,' militarism, and Christian nationalism coalesced to form the basis of a revitalized evangelical identity" (11). Considering Du Mez's arguments, the aspects of militarism and Christian nationalism include some key phrases that represent the ecology of Jan 6th and can help to understand how the conflation of American identity and Christian identity has evolved since then. Du Mez also highlights the violence among Christian nationalists by showing the importance of the Second Amendment to their communities. Du Mez mentions similar sayings on merchandise in her book, such as "'Jesus loves me and my guns'" (Du Mez 288), a saying that we can view as similar to Edbauer's consideration of "Keep Austin Weird". The saying is exemplary of the rhetoric and ideology moving withn the larger ecology. Another motto she mentions that can also be seen heading into the 2024 election is "God, Guns, and Guts." Both sayings can be found on bumper stickers, t-shirts, yard signs, flags, and more. Used as signposts and representative of Christian nationalism, the merchandise confirms the conflation of Christian

identity and American identity, also partnered with a sense of violence through the highlighting of guns. Du Mez serves as a scholar who recognizes violence as being a major part of the Christian nationalist movement.

Similarly discussing a history of Christian nationalism in the United States, in the article "'In God We Trust?': Christian Nationalists' Establishment and Use of Theistnormative Legislation," Kristina Lee explores the idea of theistnormative legislation, primarily by examining the history and use of the phrase "In God We Trust" on American money. Lee views theistnormative legislation as a manifestation of the melding of church and state, evidence of Christian nationalism. As she makes a connection between theistnormative legislation and Christian nationalism, Lee describes Christian nationalism as a "framework that orients Americans' perspectives on national identity, belonging, and social hierarchies through an understanding of the United States as a Christian nation" (419). In other words, Christian nationalism is the conflation of the United States and Americanism with Christian identity. Christian nationalism argues that to be an American is to be a Christian, and to be a Christian is to be an American. Lee further explains that Christian nationalism is "a political ideology in which adherents generally believe that (typically white and Protestant) Christians have a right to political dominion" (418). Again, the conflation of rights as an American and beliefs as a Christian in a secular nation blurs the lines between Christian and American ideology and is an example of the discourse that moved within the ecology of Jan 6th. She writes that for many evangelicals, Christian nationalism "legitimizes their understanding of the United States as a Christian nation" (417). Coming from a history of looking at the United States as a Christian nation, "Contemporary Christian nationalism promotes a nostalgia for the privilege Protestant Christians enjoyed throughout history" (Lee 425). With this perspective in mind, part of the

violence associated with Christian nationalism comes from a fear of losing this privilege. In the case of Jan 6th, that fear was manifested through the perceived rigging of an election. The rhetoric promoting that fear turned into action, which was further justified by the idea that many insurrectionists felt they had a *responsibility* to stand up for their rights as Americans, supported by their identities as Christians.

What does Lee's concept of nostalgia for a privileged past look like? A goal of Christian nationalism is to restore the United States to an "imagined Christian nation" (Lee 425), one in which ideals and legislation reflect Christian faith and values, further putting Americanism and Christianity hand-in-hand. These values drive how individuals make national decisions and even vote, guiding evangelicals to often vote for candidates with the same views that they themselves hold. Du Mez writes that evangelicals "were primed to respond to those fears [of marginalized "liberal" ideologies] by looking to a strong man to rescue them from danger, a man who embodied a God-given, testosterone-driven masculinity" (13), believing that such a leader would help return to that "imagined Christian nation" (Lee 425).

With Du Mez and Lee's discussion of the Christian nationalists' argument for a return to an idyllic nation, violence has historically been presented as a valid method to try to return to that idyllic state. For example, Du Mez explores the imagery of Jesus having been replaced as an American John Wayne figure, a rough "spiritual badass" (33). With this replacement, Du Mez argues that when evangelicals view Christ as a rough-and-tumble-cowboy who is not afraid of violence, evangelicals' violence is justified and seen as a method of "secured order" (111). Consequently, if Jan 6th was a manifestation of Christian nationalism, violence could be expected. In the House January 6th Committee's report on the insurrection, Christian nationalism is not cited as a direct reason or motivation for the insurrection, but it is found within the

ideology of those who stormed the capitol, such as individuals from the extremist groups like the Groypers and QAnon that were present (The House 520). As I will argue using Edbauer's concept of rhetorical ecology, Christian nationalism can be seen as an ideology among many that reverberated and morphed into physical action during the insurrection, both overtly and covertly.

Although the House January 6th Committee's report does not cite Christian nationalism specifically, other scholars have noted a correlation between the events of Jan 6th and Christian nationalist sentiments, as have some major media outlets, which I will explore in Chapter 2. Again, with many individuals and groups espousing Christian nationalism individually, their unity and ability to plan the insurrection is an example of the creation of a rhetorical ecology from many smaller interactions. Lee supports the presence of Christian nationalism on Jan 6th and highlights some primary Christian nationalist language seen moving within my proposed rhetorical ecology in her article, writing,

> A mob of Donald Trump's supporters stormed the US Capitol in an attempt to overturn the 2020 election results. Many of the demonstrators held signs with phrases such as: 'Jesus is my savior, Trump is my president,' 'Jesus Saves,' and 'Jesus 2020'… These images reflect a deeply ingrained Christian nationalist ideology among Trump supporters who believe that 'God has a specific plan for this country, and that their vision for the country has been given to them by God.' (417)

It is the language found on these signs, for example, that shows how deeply conflated Christian language and American values had become, further justifying the insurrectionists' motivation to attend on Jan 6th. Sayings like those in the quote above can be seen as additional examples of "Keep Austin Weird" as addressed by Edbauer for the case of Jan 6th as a rhetorical ecology. The insurrection was a physical reaction to years of a rhetorical ecology created by the language of

Christian nationalism, modeled by the groups to which they belonged, and by the American leaders chosen by evangelicals, as seen through President Trump's call to action during the speech before the insurrection. While the rhetorical ecology was Jan 6th, we can view Christian nationalism and its associated language as rhetoric or ideology. Individuals like Lee and Du Mez help to see what language specifically exemplifies the Christian nationalist ideology through their examples of militarism and sequential violence, the conflation of the United States and Americanism with Christian identity, and the assertion of rights being a prominent theme in Christian nationalist rhetoric.

1. The Insurrection

One of the first instances of a physical action in the rhetorical ecology of Jan 6th and that exemplifies the theme of an overlap between Christian rhetoric and American values is the Jericho March event, hosted on December 12, 2020, a mere four weeks before the insurrection. Additionally, the Jericho March event in the House January 6th Committee's report is cited as one that helped to "pave the way" for Jan 6th (505). Jericho Marchers are described as "self-proclaimed 'Judeo-Christian'" (The House 530). Interestingly, in an article in *The American Conservative* published a month before the insurrection, writer Rod Dreher reflects on his observations of the Jericho March event. After his attendance, he grapples with what he saw and even seems to be foreshadowing Jan 6th, when he writes,

> What kind of person calls for spilling blood in defense of a political cause for which he does not care if any factual justification exists? What kind of person compares doubters to Nazi collaborators? A religious zealot, that's the kind. The only way one can justify that hysterical stance is if one conflates religion with politics, and politics with religion. ("What I Saw")

It is astounding to observe his realization of the dangers of Christian nationalism and even foreshadowing the potential for violence, defining Christian nationalism exactly through the same conflation of religious and nationalist values supported by Du Mez and Lee. Dreher's comments can also be seen as confirmation of the reverberation of the rhetoric used by Christian nationalists as it reflects rhetoric that will be considered later in this paper, confirming Jan 6th as a rhetorical ecology with circulation.

Another instance of Christian values in the rhetorical ecology leading to the insurrection was when Roger Stone, a Trump outside advisor, spoke at an event hosted by Virginia Women for Trump in Washington DC on January 5, 2021, saying,

> Let's be very clear. This is not fight between Republicans and Democrats. This is not a fight between liberals and conservatives. This is a fight for the future the United States of America. It is a fight for the future of Western Civilization as we know it. It's a fight between dark and light. It's a fight between the godly and the godless. It's a fight between good and evil. And we dare not fail, or we will step out into one thousand years of darkness. (The House 537)

Here, Stone projects Christian values onto the election outcome to justify and give credibility to the insurrection before it happens. Comments with similar contradictions will be seen later, proving the movement of Christian nationalist rhetoric through the larger ecology of Jan 6th. The phrase "fight between the godly and godless" gives ethos to Christian nationalism and frames the insurrectionists' actions as a holy religious endeavor instead of a nationalist endeavor, further contributing to the rhetorical ecology of Jan 6th. As seen in the quote from Roger Stone, his argument incorporating the dichotomy of "godly versus godless" solidifies the idea that to be a Christian is to be a *good* American who fights for his or her right as both a Christian and an

American. This theme will continue to reverberate through the rhetorical ecology through statements by those like Pastor Bill Dunfee.

Further contributing to the rhetorical ecology of Jan 6th, President Trump officially called his supporters to Washington on December 19th, one week after the Jericho March, when he tweeted, "Big protest in D.C. on January 6th. Be there, will be wild!" along with the allegation that the 2020 election had been stolen (The House 499). As a result of Trump's post, numerous right-wing extremist groups, such as the Proud Boys and the Oath Keepers, organized and encouraged their followers to obey the president's call to assemble in Washington DC on Jan 6th. The Jericho Marchers promoted the event on their website, using President Trump's "Be there, will be wild" statement to promote additional events and rallies leading up to Jan 6th (The House 531). Jan 6th began as a rally with President Trump delivering a speech at the Ellipse. Near the end of his speech, he said, "Because you'll never take back our country with weakness. You have to show strength and you have to be strong. We have come to demand that Congress do the right thing and only count the electors who have been lawfully slated, lawfully slated. And we fight. We fight like hell. And if you don't fight like hell, you're not going to have a country anymore" (The House 71-72). Consider the similarity in Trump's language to Stone's language and his allusions to darkness. This is evidence of the movement of similar language and ideology through the ecology of Jan 6th. From here, tens of thousands of Trump's supporters marched to the Capitol, where they searched for "traitors" such as Vice President Mike Pence and Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi (The House 37). They stormed the Capitol, injured capitol police officers, and wreaked havoc on the capitol building in an attempt to stop the certification of Joe Biden as the next president of the United States.

Each of these utterances, events, and interactions is evidence of the rhetorical ecology leading to Jan 6th. Beyond the audience, exigence, and constraints of a rhetorical situation, like dominos, Trump's call to action influenced each group and insurrectionists' actions, just as their actions affected others' actions, culminating in the mass exodus in Washington. Edbauer writes that "An ecological augmentation adopts a view toward the processes and events that extend beyond the limited boundaries of elements" (20), supporting the view that the events of Jan 6th extend beyond the boundaries of the elements of one rhetorical situation, and were shaped by a larger Christian nationalist ideology that encompassed many of those who participated in the event. Beyond Twitter, Trump's and others' rhetoric contributed greatly to the rhetorical ecology, largely during his rally that morning.

A. Trump's Continued Rhetoric

As I've already noted, while Christian nationalism is not cited as a guiding reason for the insurrection in the House January 6th Committee's report, Christian nationalist ideals can be found motivating the groups that organized Jan 6th, and those ideals become a large part of the rhetorical ecology that shaped the way the groups think about Christian nationalism. To consider the role that Christian nationalist language played in the insurrection, we will look at the rhetoric that was used before and during the events of Jan 6th.

The House January 6th Committee's report writes that even before Trump delivered his speech, he and his advisors, "knew enough to cancel the rally" based on the violence and anger within the crowd, which was encouraged by the rhetoric of Trump and the other speakers (69). Trump's attorney, Rudy Giuliani, set the stage for Trump's remarks at the Ellipse that morning and used violent language, including "Let's have trial by combat," further encouraging the chaotic behavior that would follow (The House 72). At the end of his speech, President Trump

stated, “And after this, we’re going to walk down, and I’ll be there with you, we’re going to walk down, we’re going to walk down… we’re going to walk down to the Capitol” (The House 73). Given the rhetoric on display and regardless of the president’s intentions, which are still up for debate on the national legal stage, the participants followed the president’s instructions, another contribution to the discrete events within the ecology of Jan 6th.

Trump’s tweets were additionally crafted very carefully during and after the events to remind the insurrectionists of their Christian faith. For example, in his final tweet of the day, the president wrote, “These are the things and events that happen when a sacred election landslide victory is so unceremoniously & viciously stripped away from great patriots who have been badly & unfairly treated for so long. Go home with love & in peace. Remember this day forever!” (The House 93). Instead of condemning his supporters for their actions, President Trump justified and encouraged them, and he also used the word “sacred” to describe the election at hand, giving a holy connotation to the American election. Again, President Trump was highly strategic in his use of religious rhetoric to maintain his following. Each of these Christian nationalist utterances, events, and acts contributes to the larger rhetorical ecology of Jan 6th. While a major motivation for the insurrection was because of the rhetoric of the leaders, the insurrectionists’ language is also important to consider.

B. Insurrectionists’ Rhetoric

There were several groups represented on Jan 6th, and in considering the language and rhetoric of some of those groups, we can better understand the rhetorical ecology present leading up to Jan 6th. Chapter 6 of the House January 6th Committee’s report outlines the extremist groups present on Jan 6th, including the Proud Boys, the Oath Keepers, Three Percenter Militias, QAnon, Jericho March, and the Groypers, and the rhetoric that the groups used and espoused

leading up to the insurrection (499-576). Edbauer works to decenter the value of location in her ideas of rhetorical ecology, focusing instead on the importance of the "in-between en/action of events and encounters" (10), and the idea of in-between as a site for rhetoric is seen within the organization and planning of Jan 6th. For example, an entire section of the Committee's report, titled "QAnon: 'Operation Occupy the Capitol,'" examines how QAnon gathered their members on the forum 4chan (525-527). The section discusses how in 2020, QAnon was working to spread election misinformation and conspiracy theories on 8kun, another anonymous message board forum (The House 526). Rhetoric on these sites adding to a larger ecology, paired with users' ability to remain anonymous on sites like 4chan and 8kun, helped QAnon to gain supporters and organize for Jan 6th (The House 525).

Another group with Christian nationalist ties that was present is the Groypers organization: "For years, the Groypers have repeatedly promoted white supremacist and Christian nationalist beliefs, often cloaked in wind-and-nod humor, puns, or religion" (The House 520). The group rose to prominence originally in 2017 while rallying in Charlottesville at the "Unite the Right" events (The House 520). The organization's leader, Nick Fuentes, has been notorious for spreading election misinformation and organizing on behalf of the "Stop the Steal" movement (The House 520). Again, though Christian nationalism is not mentioned outright in the House January 6th Committee's report other than the Groyper's association, I argue that Christian nationalism allowed and encouraged groups like Groypers to use Christianity to justify their actions, absolving the groups of the responsibility to think or act rationally.

Religious rhetoric was also present in the language of the insurrectionists during the attack on the capitol, visual proof of the rhetorical ecology that had been forming online and privately for years prior. A reporter filming for the *New Yorker*, Luke Mogelson, followed some

of the insurrectionists into the Senate Chamber where they took the opportunity to have a prayer. In a video of the events that Mogelson posted to YouTube, Jacob Chansley, also called the "QAnon Shaman" removes his fur and horned hat to pray, addressing God and saying, "Thank you for filling this chamber with patriots that love you and that love Christ, " while others raise Trump flags and shout in support. Chansley adds, "Thank you for allowing the United States to be reborn" (Mogelson). Consider the contradiction that Chansley labeled himself the "QAnon Shaman," a term often used within indigenous religions, but he prays a Christian prayer. By this point, it should be abundantly clear that Christian nationalist rhetoric, as a rhetorical conflation of American values and Christianity, was present and visible *on* Jan 6th. To consider this conflation in action, we will consider a pastor who defended his actions on Jan 6th with his Christian values and continues to do so even as he is being sentenced for his participation in the events. He exhibits Rickert's ambient rhetoric through his prior rhetorical moves, his actions on Jan 6th, and the way that he continues to defend himself.

2. Pastor William Dunfee

One individual who felt that the attack on the capitol had a holy justification was William Dunfee of Warsaw, Ohio. Dunfee serves as an example for seeing how Christian nationalism emboldened and altered one individual's rhetoric relating to national politics, and the ambient rhetoric of his church enabled him to shape his rhetoric the way that he did. Working as the pastor of New Beginnings Ministries Warsaw ("About Us") and as a business partner and owner of Cross Builders LLC, based out of Coshocton, Ohio ("Meet Our Team"), Dunfee is one of many who participated at the Capitol on Jan 6th and was subsequently charged for his activities. There is even a video of Dunfee inciting the crowd with a bullhorn and marching to the Capitol building before he is pepper-sprayed (United States "Statement" 10).

Understanding some of Dunfee's actions and comments before the events of Jan 6th can lend insight into how his rhetoric changed as the event approached. For example, he is quoted in *The Kenyon Collegian* in 2017 as saying to an audience, "'Do we want to put our faith in Donald Trump? A man that sways too easily in the wind?" After hearing a "no" from the audience, he responds, "Who do we put our faith in?" His congregation responds, "God" ("New Beginnings"). As we will see, Dunfee's approach to the conflation of Americanism and Christian values seems to change when he equates Donald Trump with Christ after later being charged (New Beginnings, Feel the Heat).

Dunfee's actions on Jan 6th were not the first time that he had been on the national stage for confrontational behavior. There are a variety of publications profiling Dunfee's charge in 2014 to his church to protest the town's local strip club, with even an article in the *New York Times* titled, "From Pole to Pulpit, a Club and Church Do Battle" (Gabriel). Yet another instance can be found of Dunfee protesting a local billboard that read "Jesus is Muslim" and providing statements of protest for a variety of local news outlets (Viviano). With both of these previous incidents in mind, we can see that Dunfee already had a confrontational tendency, making his actions on Jan 6th not surprising.

For his actions on Jan 6th, Dunfee was charged with civil disorder, obstruction of an official proceeding, entering and remaining in a restricted building or grounds, disorderly and disruptive conduct in a restricted building or grounds, engaging in physical violence in a restricted building or grounds, disorderly conduct in a capitol building, and acts of physical violence in the capitol grounds or buildings (United States, "Criminal Complaint"). As recently as January 22, 2024, he was found guilty of two felony charges of obstruction of an official proceeding or aiding and abetting and civil disorder. Additionally, he was convicted of a

misdemeanor of entering and remaining in a restricted building or grounds ("Ohio Man"). He is set to be sentenced in May 2024 ("Ohio Man"). Each of these charges was brought based on evidence gathered from the New Beginnings Ministries' website, photos and recordings taken during the insurrection, and statements made by Dunfee in those photos and recordings (United States, "Statement of Facts" 2).

Even within the public legal documentation, Dunfee's Christian nationalist sentiments are clear. Throughout the United States District Court for the District of Columbia's "Statement of Facts" for Dunfee's federal case, it becomes evident that Dunfee's motivation for attending Jan 6th was rooted in his Christian beliefs. The Statement notes that Dunfee told his congregation before the insurrection, "The Government, the tyrants, the socialists, the Marxists, the progressives, the RINOs, they fear you. And they should. Our problem is we haven't given them a reason to fear us…" (5). Additionally, he is quoted as saying in a previous sermon, "'[T]hey used to tell us, you know what, you settle your differences at the ballot. How did that work out for us? It's not over. [January] the 4th through the 6th, we are heading to D.C. Who's going with us?'" (5). Here, we can see a clear intention to go to Washington in anger over a perceived injustice relating to the election, as well as Dunfee trying to gather support from his congregation, further evidence of the movement of rhetorics and ideology toward the rhetorical ecology of Jan 6th.

Also, I argue that we can see ambient rhetoric at work as Dunfee's words and actions seem to be occurring primarily within the physical spaces of his church. As I will discuss in the next section, the ambiance of these spaces shapes the language that he uses within them, and then Dunfee uses that same language in other places, such as on Facebook and at the Capitol. Because he was affected by the environment created in the church, he was able to maintain similar

appeals and values when communicating with church members and the public after the insurrection.

Dunfee's Christian nationalist views are reflected in the legal documents outlining his charges. The "Statement of Facts" shows how Dunfee was caught: a tipster provided screenshots from the church's Facebook page which read, "My local ministry group was there and members of our group 'stormed' the Capital for a redress of our grievances. Leading the way was Pastor Bill. We as Christinas [sic] have the duty to overthrow evil" (2). Again, the post shows a Jan 6th participant making a blatant defense of their actions by arguing that storming the capitol was the responsibility of Christians as Americans in a Christian nation. Additionally, the "Statement of Facts" cites that Dunfee was wearing a black jacket with the word "Cross" on the left breast in white text, which was later realized to be his business logo (5). Rhetorically, Dunfee's choice to wear a jacket with religious and Christian connotations puts him into the category of "Christian" on the national stage and within documents such as the "Statement of Facts." Beyond his clothing, verbally Dunfee invokes Christian rhetoric after another insurrectionist says, after exiting the capitol building, "We did it, we shut 'em all down. We did our job." To this, Dunfee replies, "Hallelujah," as if this endeavor was a holy mission (11).

A. "Feel the Heat"

Dunfee first refers to his legal troubles in a sermon delivered on October 23, 2022, in which he preaches on the idea of prudence. The layout of his space, the church, clearly encourages rhetorical genres like preaching, and preaching allows him the chance to address his audience directly about his actions. In the recorded sermon titled, "Feel The Heat," Dunfee mentions repeatedly that a variety of groups are "watching," including the prosecutors and the FBI; he finishes with "the god haters are watching" (New Beginnings, Feel the Heat). This

language creates a parallel between the prosecutors, the FBI, and "god haters." Consider also the evolution from Stone's statements about the "godly versus the godless," another instance of a reverberation of similar language through the ecology of Jan 6th. He then goes on to joke that his lawyers have asked him to "use prudence," earning laughs from his audience. He mentions that he read of five other pastors who were arrested for Jan 6th activities, saying, "I don't know why there was no national news on them" (New Beginnings, Feel the Heat). He then asks for information on those pastors so that he can "let them know kudos to them" and that he is "proud of them for taking the stand in the name of Jesus Christ" (New Beginnings, Feel the Heat). In the comments under this video from later that day, a congregant links four articles citing some of these other pastors, showing Dunfee's ethos and influence among his congregants. In the sermon, Dunfee goes on to justify and support the other arrested pastors by saying that they stormed the capitol in "the name of Jesus Christ," which is a clear allusion to Christian nationalism (New Beginnings, Feel the Heat). Because Christian nationalism is an acceptable theme within his church, the rhetorical ambiance of the space permits Dunfee to compare the stand at the Capitol to a stand for Jesus Christ, proving also how his Christian nationalism was homegrown and coming from his church. As Dunfee mentioned several times in this very sermon, their church and his statements were on a national stage where he continually claimed a blatant conflation between President Donald Trump and Jesus Christ.

Grasping the role of rhetorical appeals can help us analyze how Dunfee is so successful in defending his actions to his congregation. Dunfee constructed his statement and the "Feel the Heat" sermon intentionally around the values of his congregation, which are both evident in the church's earlier protests and promoted on the church's website and Facebook page. He already had a high level of credibility, but the rhetoric in his Facebook posts was still strategic in

maintaining the specific audience of his congregation, as he knew their values. Even regardless of his current legal trouble and past inflammatory remarks, his congregants trust his credibility over anything.

B. The Facebook Post

In a post of about 1,500 words to New Beginnings Ministries Warsaw's Facebook page on November 27, 2022, Dunfee went beyond just referencing his legal troubles and released his official statement on his arrest and involvement on Jan 6th. He begins by establishing his ethos as a pastor, describing his relationship with his wife and family, and coming across as a loving husband, father, grandfather, and pastor of his hometown church. He goes on to explain that "the Lord called me to go to the J-6 'Stop the Steal' Rally in Washington DC. I did not go to hear President Trump's speech" (New Beginnings, Pastor Bill's). Dunfee goes on to explain that he attended Jan 6th for "Prayer," "Preaching," "Proclaiming," "Rebuking and Admonishing," and "Protesting," and a section of his Facebook post explains each reason. In the "Preaching" section, Dunfee claims, "Since this is what I am called to do, I went to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ and to point people to Him." In the "Proclaiming" section, he writes, "I went to proclaim that 'God is Sovereign over nations, and more specifically, that God is Sovereign over this nation and Capitol Hill'" (New Beginnings, Pastor Bill's). This rhetorical clarification of "specifically" infers that the US as a nation is *especially* covered by God's sovereignty, again justifying the insurrectionists' efforts to prevent the election certification as holy actions.

In the "Rebuking and Admonishing" section, Dunfee uses verses from the New Testament of the Bible to defend his actions, specifically 2 Timothy 4:2: "Preach the word; be instant in season and out of season. Reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long-suffering and Doctrine" (*Authorized King James Version*). Dunfee writes, "This is exactly what I did, and for a

good length of time while at the Capitol" (New Beginnings, Pastor Bill's). Again, Dunfee frames his actions as a holy calling instead of a criminal act. Dunfee then goes on to defend himself against the claims made in the US District Court for the District of Columbia's "Statement of Facts." He claims that if someone had listened to or observed his actions on Jan 6th (or "J-6" as he writes), they would see he "did not cause the civil discord," "did not obstruct official business," "never attacked a police officer," and "never committed acts of violence" (New Beginnings, Pastor Bill's). Dunfee acknowledges some of the claims he made in recordings which are referred to in the "Statement of Facts," but insists that he meant the statements (such as "taking this House") as being purely figurative instead of literal (New Beginnings, Pastor Bill's). Again reflecting the ideas of Edbuaer, Dunfee points out that his rhetoric's impact differs from his original intent, just like the use of "Keep Austin Weird" in Austin.

The only claim in the "Statement of Facts" that Dunfee agrees to is that he did enter and remain on restricted grounds. However, he claims that as soon as he arrived at the Capitol Building steps he "turned around and tried to stop the crowd from advancing further" (New Beginnings, Pastor Bill's). While the "Statement of Facts" document does confirm that Dunfee dissuaded the other insurrectionists from violence, the document also states that Dunfee did not turn away from the Capitol building doors for another thirty-one minutes after these statements (United States 9-10). In a final attempt to solidify his ethos with his audience, Dunfee writes,

> In summary, this is what I did do on J-6:
>
> - I exercised my First Amendment rights and responsibilities
> - I moderated the certification of the election
> - I prevented the Capitol Building barricade from being broken
> - I tried to stop people from advancing up the Capitol Building steps

- I tried to stop someone from breaking into the Capitol Building. (New Beginnings, Pastor Bill's)

Each of these items is presented as the right and respectable action to take as an engaged citizen, or patriot, according to Dunfee (New Beginnings, Pastor Bill's). Reading any of these items out of context, the reader would likely support Dunfee's actions. Unless the reader was researching and finding the government documentation, Dunfee's actions would be seen as noble and patriotic, further earning support from his congregation, as he knew what they valued. Dunfee finishes his post by pointing out that the Department of Justice used his sermons in the "Statement of Facts" court document, almost bragging about being able to share his religious beliefs with the DOJ and saying that "those sermons serve like book ends to the criminal charges against me" (New Beginnings, Pastor Bill's). He then includes information for his legal team as well as a link to the church giving website, saying, "should you feel led to help with my legal expenses" (New Beginnings, Pastor Bill's).

For the New Beginnings Ministries Warsaw church, Dunfee's actions and sermons do not appear to be the first time that American values have been conflated with Christian values and identity. On the church's website is a welcome video in which both Dunfee and his wife speak about the church. At the 2:08 mark in the video, a couple embraces side-by-side, looking at what appears to be the front of the church with a massive American flag hanging in the background ("About Us"). Here, we see a rhetorical association between the American values, represented by the flag, and the Christian ideas within Dunfee's church, further adding to the Christian nationalist ambient rhetoric within the church community. Even on the introductory page of their website, which is meant to orient a visitor to the church's beliefs, the church emphasizes within the video the value of American ideals through the focus on the flag. Analysis of Dunfee's words

and actions following Jan 6th help to show that Dunfee's church had a rhetorical ambiance that enabled him to say what he did, and help us understand how he carried the ideas from the space of the church to the capitol.

3. Conclusion

Both Jenny Edbauer's rhetorical ecology and Thomas Rickert's ambient rhetoric help to frame how Christian nationalism became such a pervasive ideology, to the point of an insurrection on January 6. While Christian nationalism has been a prominent ideology in the rhetorical ecology formed by various groups and individuals throughout American history, as discussed by Du Mez and Lee, the insurrection is one manifestation of that ideology. The insurrectionists' use of Christian rhetoric added fuel to the proverbial fire as each rhetorical action contributed to the larger outcome of Jan 6th. Beyond Jan 6th as a rhetorical ecology that housed Christian nationalism and its different iterations and representations, we should also consider how ambient rhetoric can encourage action, like in the case of Pastor Bill Dunfee. By considering Dunfee's Facebook posts, actions, and church website, we can see how effective his rhetoric was leading up to and following Jan 6th and how the rhetorical ambiance of his church continues to enable Dunfee to defend his actions.

While Dunfee, Trump, Stone, Guiliani, Fuentes, and others may or may not be completely aware of their rhetorical choices, choices like these are what have perpetuated and enabled religious extremism in the United States. As I mentioned before, although not cited explicitly in the House January 6th Committee report, it is abundantly clear that Christian nationalism was a prevalent theme and continues to be a justification for the insurrection, even three years later. It is necessary to recognize the rhetorical conflation of American ideology and Christian values and its consequences so that we can work to prevent physical manifestations of

that ideology, such as an insurrection, on such a scale again. Harmful language was encouraged by harmful ambient rhetorics and harmful rhetorical ecologies, leading to highly harmful actions. In the next chapter, I will turn to how the insurrection was represented in the national media and whether or not the participants' Christian nationalism was evident in these media representations.

Chapter 2: Differing Representations of Christian Nationalism

1. Introduction

Given the role that Christian nationalism played on January 6th, one would think that there would be a variety of photographs taken that day showing the insurrectionists' Christian affiliation. For example, as I discussed in my analysis of William Dunfee in the last chapter, his standing as a Christian was made clear through his jacket, as well as his statements. Also, as I mentioned in the first chapter, Dunfee referenced several other pastors who were also charged for their participation, confirming that Dunfee was not alone with his Christian nationalist sentiments on Jan 6th. Moving forward with the assumption that there would be images that displayed Christian nationalism, I searched through the website of Fox News, a conservative major media outlet, to find the photos that they chose to include in photo collections that represent what happened on Jan 6th. To balance that perspective, I did the same with CNN, a liberal major media outlet. The differences in their selected photos show how each side exhibited Christian nationalism's role or lack thereof in the insurrection. I assumed that the images that these two media outlets show would reveal each outlet's political perspective. I also predicted that the portrayals of the events by Fox News and CNN would reflect their respective political views.

While I will be focusing largely on the visual representation of the events in the media outlets, an article for *American Behavioral Scientist*, titled "News Framing in the Aftermath of the January 6 Attacks on the U.S. Capitol: An Analysis of Labels, Definitional Uncertainty, and Contextualization," helps understand the verbal reporting of the events (Zulli et al). Specifically, Zulli et al. consider the terms used to discuss Jan 6th to explain how each news outlet framed the insurrection. They consider the difficulty of definitional uncertainty, writing, "Decades of news

framing research has shown that the words chosen to define a given event can affect attitudes and decision-making" (Zulli et al. 703). For example, Zulli et al. explore the use of the term "insurrection," including how it gained traction quickly in the week following Jan 6th and how the term was used in Trump's impeachment. Zulli et al. assert that "insurrection" carries a more political meaning than a word like "protest" or "riot," reflecting how the difference in word choice can alter audience perspectives (709). Zulli et al's work shows how linguistic framing is achieved by news outlets, and it is not a stretch to see how photos are used for the same effort. On the importance of framing, they write, "News organizations, through the specific elements of an issue they highlight or downplay, can make certain associations more likely in the minds of their audiences" (Zulli et al. 704). Interestingly, they write that CNN used a variety of severe labels interchangeably and in combination with each other to describe Jan 6th, while Fox was the main outlet that did not use the severe labels outlined in the study. Some of these more "severe" labels included "insurrection," "terrorism," and "coup" as examples (Zulli et al. 711). Referencing Fox News's refusal to use such extreme words, they write, "To the extent that challenge occurred, it did so almost exclusively on Fox News, where conservative viewpoints predominate" (Zulli et al. 715). Beyond labeling, the photos chosen by Fox News and CNN will show their visual rhetorical framing.

Kellie Sharp-Hoskins's idea of rhetorical ratios is another useful tool for examining the photographs that CNN and Fox News use. Specifically, she argues that there is a distinct relationship between logos and pathos, writing, "Using logos in the sense of composition and pathos an organization of social relations, one could say that logos narrates pathos" (Sharp-Hoskins). She argues that logos, in this case, is defined as "a gathering of parts that creates a particular, powerful whole" and can then give shape to what she calls "cultural politics of

emotion" (Sharp-Hoskins). In effect, Sharp Hoskins writes, "Logos as composition does not gather its parts in a disinterested or dispassionate way: its narrative work is ideological, its effects potentially violent." If logos can be used to narrate pathos through its composition, a speaker can be just as effective through their visual organization and presentation as with any logically written argument. Sharp-Hoskins's connection between logos and pathos is relevant to the images on Fox News and CNN because, as we will see, both Fox News and CNN engage their audience in larger ideologies through the organization of their articles.

Sharp-Hoskins's ideas are valuable when considering the narratives of different news outlets, specifically narratives created through the outlets' visual rhetorical organization. These news outlets are highly intentional in the way that they logically arrange their photos and use the images to contribute to their narrative. The organizations can then be strategic in how they sway their audience *emotionally*, which creates what Sharp-Hoskins calls a "cultural politics of emotion." The logical arrangement of the photos evokes an emotional response from the audience. As seen with Zulli et al., Jan 6th continues to be a highly controversial event in news coverage through news framing. Sharp-Hoskins shows how the images are being used rhetorically and intentionally to further Fox News's and CNN's respective narratives.

Another way to consider the rhetoric of Fox News's and CNN's coverage of the events is through Richard Weaver's ideas of "god terms" and "devil terms" as rhetorical absolutes in his book *The Ethics of Rhetoric.* Weaver defines "god terms" as "that expression about which all other expressions are ranked as subordinate and serving dominations and powers" (212). In other words, he writes, "This capacity to demand sacrifice is probably the surest indicator of the 'god term,' for when a term is so sacrosanct that the material goods of life must be mysteriously rendered up for it, then we feel justified in saying that it is in some sense ultimate" (Weaver 214).

When such terms are used, audiences often value those terms above all else in political circles because they carry blessing and demand sacrifice. Weaver writes, “Some terms of repulsion are also ultimate in the sense of standing at the end of the series, and no survey of the vocabulary can ignore these prime repellants,” describing his idea of “devil terms” as the opposite of the “god terms” (222). These terms evoke disgust and disapproval from their audience. Rhetorically, we can consider the terms that Fox News and CNN use or don’t use as examples of “god terms” and “devil terms” to stoke their respective audiences. As Zulli et al write about Fox News’s hesitancy to use terms like “insurrection,” we can consider “insurrection” as a devil term used by Fox News to influence their audience. Whether Fox News and CNN are cognizant of their use of “god terms” and “devil terms” or not, their uses guide the discussion of Jan 6th nonetheless.

We can also use Weaver’s ideas of “god terms” and “devil terms” to apply to the visual rhetoric within Fox News’s and CNN’s collections. Within their respective audiences, Fox News and CNN know the pathos that will guide their audiences in their biases, either in disdain or support of the state. We can consider the differing representations of the state by Fox News and CNN as an example of the visual use of “god terms” and “devil terms.” Using Sharp-Hoskins and Weaver together, we can look at how Fox News and CNN take advantage of what I call god images and devil images to direct the pathos of their audience. Fox News uses images that demonize the state through devil images and CNN uses god images among their audiences to show the vulnerability and humanization of the state, guiding the pathos of the audiences toward disdain for the government in Fox News’s collection and compassion for the government in the CNN collection.

Before turning to an analysis of the photographs used by Fox News and CNN, it is important to clarify the origin of photos on these major media outlet websites. While some

outlets have their own staff photographers, others rely on contracts with outside media organizations or individuals and can then choose from their collections. Fox News and CNN both rely on outside media sources for their collections, including outlets like the Associated Press and Getty Images. Looking at Fox News's and CNN's selected photos versus the total photos available for them to choose from will reveal how the narratives that CNN and Fox News want to tell about Jan 6th are rhetorically shaped through the images that each news outlet selects.

Going into this analysis, I hypothesized that Fox News, the politically conservative outlet, would downplay the role of Christian nationalism or Christian symbolism present. The result would be a photo collection with minimal images with any sort of Christian nationalist representation. To do this, I assumed that Fox would logically arrange their photo collection in a way that minimizes any role of Christian nationalism in the insurrection. I also hypothesized that the politically liberal outlet, CNN, would pick images that display Christian nationalism, or at least not attempt to downplay the presence of Christian nationalism at the insurrection. I assumed that their logical organization would also evoke emotions in their audience that support Fox News's or CNN's respective narratives.

2. Fox News Representation

Fox News's collection of photographs is titled "Chaos Erupts on Capitol Hill during Electoral College Certification," and it was published on January 7, 2021. Their narrative of events becomes clear in the twenty-one images of the collection. The first photo in the slideshow collection (Fig. 1) shows a protestor holding a "Don't Tread on Me" flag while being pepper sprayed by law enforcement directly in the face.

Fig. 1. Photograph by Kent Nishimura in Fox News's collection.

Fig. 1 is credited to Kent Nishimura for the *Los Angeles Times* via Getty Images. The photo makes the authorities look like the aggressors, with the insurrectionists being attacked unprovoked. Nishimura's photograph is part of a *Los Angeles Times* article about Jan 6th that contains other photos not included in Fox News's collection showing the aggression of the insurrectionists toward the capitol police officers (Nishimura and Potts). We can look at Fig. 1 as an example of a devil image, drawing on Weaver's ideas, as it showcases the violence of the authorities toward the insurrectionists, drawing support for the insurrectionists from the audience. As Sharp-Hoskins supports, the logical arrangement of the image in the collection contributes to the larger intended pathos. For example, Fig. 2, which was not included in Fox News's collection, shows an officer wincing in pain.

Fig. 2. Photograph by Kent Nishimura in a *Los Angeles Times* article.

Also in Nishimura and Potts's *Los Angeles Times* article, but not in the Fox News collection, the photograph in Fig. 3 shows National Guard troops in their fatigues sleeping in the Capitol building a week after the insurrection. Compare the different representations of law enforcement in Figs. 1, 2, and 3: there is a clear contrast in the actions of law enforcement and military members. Fox News chose the photo that made the insurrectionists look more like victims and law enforcement look more like the aggressors. We can compare Fig. 1 and Fig. 3 as direct examples of god images and devil images. Fig. 1 can stand to be a devil image for Fox News's audience because it evokes feelings of disgust and disdain from the audience, whereas Fig. 3 shows the vulnerability of the National Guard members.

Fig. 3. Photograph by Kent Nishimura in a *Los Angeles Times* article.

Another photographer whose work is featured heavily throughout Fox News's slideshow collection is the Associated Press's John Minchillo. Below are Minchillo's images (Figs. 4-6) that are featured in Fox News's slideshow.

Fig. 4. Photograph by John Minchillo in Fox News's collection

Fig. 5. Photograph by John Minchillo in Fox News's collection

Fig. 6. Photograph by John Minchillo in Fox News's collection

Again, we see a clear representation of aggression and conflict, mainly coming from the authorities. Without doing more research and considering the wider context of the images, one may believe that Jan 6th was an exhibition of power and abuse of power on the part of the Capitol police officers. Upon further investigation, it becomes apparent that these images were taken from the collection of photos that John Minchillo took on Jan 6th and posted to his personal website, many of which show the violence of the insurrectionists (Minchillo). Beyond the violence of the insurrectionists, Minchillo captured images of Christian nationalism on display. Below is a profound image (Fig. 7) that can be found in Minchillo's larger collection but not in Fox News's collection.

Fig. 7. Photograph by John Minchillo on his personal website.

Rhetorically, Fig. 7 is incredibly powerful in speaking to the presence of Christian nationalism at the insurrection. Fox News had the option of using Fig. 7 in their collection, as they used others by Minchillo, but they opted for images that made the authorities and the police officers look like the aggressors, rather than images that showcased Christian nationalism.

In images like Fig. 8, found in the Fox News collection, Fox News is attempting to create a narrative around the event which supports the idea that the event consisted of peaceful Trump supporters fighting against the harsh and violent authorities attempting to carry out a rigged election.

Fig. 8. Photograph by John Minchillo in Fox News's collection.

Interestingly, Fig. 8 is an example of Christian ideology on display. Though it may seem innocuous and unrelated to the insurrection, the flag next to the gold star added to the image reads, "God, Country, Notre Dame." Placing "God" before "country" in the phrase rhetorically emphasizes God being of more importance to the country. "God" and "country" being linked so visually highlights the main idea of Christian nationalism: a conflation between Christian ideology and American identity. We can also view this as an another extension within the rhetorical ecology of Jan 6th because of the saying's similarity to those mentioned in Chapter 1 as presented by Du Mez. Discourses within the rhetorical ecology of Jan 6th continually evolve and reverberate off of each other, increasing the movements of the rhetoric through the larger ecology.

The rest of Fox News's slideshow continues the idea of the inappropriate use of force from authorities toward insurrectionists.

Fig. 9. Photograph by Jose Juis Magana in Fox News's collection.

Fig. 10. Photograph by Julio Cortez in Fox News's collection.

Fig. 9 and Fig. 10 are two of dozens that were taken by photographers Jose Luis Magana and Julio Cortez during Jan 6th. On photographer Julio Cortez's personal photography website, other images show the violence of the insurrectionists as well as toward law enforcement (Cortez). However, Fox News maintained its narrative by only including photos that made the insurrectionists look milder. In Fig. 9 and 10, the insurrectionists look like the victims, minimizing their culpability to the audience, and not addressing the presence of Christian nationalism at the event. Fox News is taking advantage of the logos of the collection to affect the pathos for the viewer (Sharp-Hoskins), driving them to support the insurrectionists instead of the authorities or state. Especially knowing their audience, Fox News's collection strategically guides that pathos through the photos that they choose.

Additional photos in Fox News's collection attributed to Associated Press photographer Jacquelyn Martin (Figs. 11-13) show a militaristic view of Jan 6th by highlighting National Guard members at the capitol in full shields and defense gear.

Fig. 11. Photograph by Jacquelyn Martin in Fox News's Collection.

Fig. 12. Photograph by Jacquelyn Martin in Fox News's Collection.

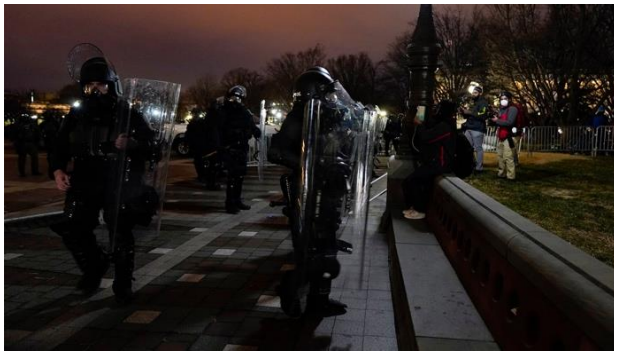

Fig. 13. Photograph by Jacquelyn Martin in Fox News's Collection.

With an orange sky and a focus on the uniformed officers, the authorities appear aggressive again in Figs. 11-13. Compare these to Fig. 3 by Kent Nishimura, in which the National Guard soldiers are sleeping on the floor of the capitol. There is a clear contrast in the representation of the role of the armed guards. Additionally, Figs. 11-13 do not feature any insurrectionists, placing more emphasis on the actions of the authorities than those of the protestors. Fox News continues its consistent politically conservative narrative by visually deflecting the responsibility of the insurrectionists. They push their narrative through their reporting as well.

Upon some further investigation on Fox News's website, there is no reference to Jan 6th as being an "insurrection," but rather it is called the "capitol protests." This was reflected also by Zulli et al. when they mentioned Fox News's hesitancy to use the labels that they categorized as

more severe, with “insurrection” being one of their labels. Zulli et al comment on this when they write that for Fox, “Ideologically conservative commentary is the norm. Fox News host Tucker Carlson, for instance, said: ‘So Democrats are hyperventilating about a coup. It’s not enough to say this was bad. It has to be Pearl Harbor again. Why are they saying that? Obviously, so they can get more power’” (712). Carlson’s attitude of downplaying the insurrection and the insurrectionists is reflected in Fox News’s photo collection. Continually, because conservative viewpoints dominate within Fox News, they present the events with conservative bias.

Additionally, it is difficult to find articles and coverage of Jan 6th on Fox News’s website as their narratives consistently show a calmer and more peaceful version of Jan 6th than other outlets portray. Consequently, they may not feel it is worth coverage. As hearings have been continuing for the insurrectionists, Fox News has not covered any of these trials or hearings, creating a massive gap in coverage. Many of the times that Christian nationalism is mentioned within their reports, it is placed in quotations as “Christian nationalism,” indicating a skepticism of its very existence. For example, Christian nationalism is found in quotes in an article titled, “Reporter Lashes out after Blowback for Claiming ‘Christian Nationalists’ Believe Rights ‘Come from God’” (Wulfsohn). Another article title reads, “‘Christian Nationalism’ Movement Will ‘Break’ American Democracy, New York Times Essay Warns” (Parks). Beyond the way they write about Christian nationalism, Fox News’s ambivalent attitude toward Christian nationalism is likely why the images that portrayed the ideology were not included or acknowledged, as again, Fox News knows its audience.

There is one photo in Fox News’s collection that portrays Christian nationalism, but the viewer must carefully examine the photo to notice. Regardless, the presence of Christian nationalism on Jan 6th is confirmed in Fig. 14.

Fig. 14. Photograph by Jose Luis Magana in Fox News's collection.

At first glance, Fig. 14 may look like a sea of MAGA flags, United States flags, and various Trump merchandise. Within this photo, however, there are two crosses and two signs containing Christian messages.

Fig. 15. Detail of Fig. 14

Fig. 15, which zooms in on a detail from Fig. 14, shows two crosses being held up by protestors. Additionally, we can see the word “Jesus” on a white poster in the crowd, though the rest of the text is difficult to make out.

Figure 16. Detail of Fig. 14

In Fig. 16, also zooming in on details in Fig. 14, a sign reads, “Yet will I rejoice in the Lord,” coming from Habakkuk 3:18. The full Old Testament verse from the Bible reads “Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior” (*New International Version*). This is the only image that is included by Fox that displays any sort of Christian imagery, and even these details may not be recognized by the average viewer. Despite the inclusion of this image, it is clear that Fox was driving a particular narrative of the events of Jan 6th as seen through their chosen photos, their cleansing of the use of “insurrection,” and their downplaying Jan 6th as a whole.

While the images featured here are just a few examples from the twenty-one-image collection, the collection’s general angle is that the insurrectionists were not entirely to blame for

the events that took place. Because Fox News is such a supporter and backer of Donald Trump, the outlet is hesitant to include images that make Trump supporters look badly. Their choice to include, exclude, or emphasize aspects of a situation shapes the narrative of their viewership, a clear effort at rhetorical framing.

Fox News is intentional in the way that they use the logical organization of the collection to guide the pathos of the audience toward disdain for the government and support for the insurrectionists, as seen through the ratios presented by Sharp-Hoskins. Logically, their photos show the insurrectionists as the victims or passive participants: see Fig. 1 or Fig. 10 for examples. By deflecting culpability visually, they can convey to their audience that the capitol police were the primary aggressors. In fact, the last photos in the collection are Fig. 11, Fig. 12, and Fig. 13. Visually, the photos are highly militaristic and show intimidation from the Capitol police officers, leaving with audience with those as the last pictures they view of the events. This is an example of the "violence" that Sharp-Hoskins mentions can be done when a speaker's narrative work is highly ideological. The choice to end the slideshow with those photos is driven by Fox News's ideology and their desire for their audience to share that same ideology. Sharp-Hoskins's ideas of arrangement help us understand how Fox News guides the pathos of their audience toward disdain for the state and in support of the insurrectionists through their chosen photos, choosing devil images to push their audience further toward that pathos.

3. CNN

CNN's collection of images profiling Jan 6th reveals a more well-rounded coverage. Their collection is titled "In Pictures: The January 6 Capitol Riot." Included at the top of the collection is a short explanation of the events, describing how the riot happened, including the facts that more than 1,000 people are being charged by the Justice Department for their participation in the

event and Trump has been federally indicted for his involvement. The explanation finishes with a statement from Jack Smith, a special counsel who investigated the events ("In Pictures").

CNN appears to source its photos from the same places as Fox News, including images from photographers like John Minchillo and Julio Cortez. Additional photographers that are included in both Fox News's and CNN's collections are Andrew Harnik and J. Scott Applewhite. One main difference between the CNN collection and the Fox News collection is that the CNN collection focuses on the inside of the Capitol building on Jan 6th by including images of the Senate floor before the insurrectionists' entrance (Fig. 17 and 18), the effort to move the electoral votes to a secluded location (Fig. 20), and even what was happening as Congress members and staff members were hiding from the insurrectionists (Fig. 18). Of the twenty-four images included in CNN's collection, eleven focus on the actions of Congress members and other staffers to defend themselves from the insurrectionists, focusing more on the violence and danger of the insurrectionists, as opposed to Fox News, which focused more on the violence of the authorities. Roughly every other photo in CNN's collection focuses on the chaos inside the Capitol building.

Fig. 17. Photograph by Erin Shaff in CNN's collection.

Fig. 18. Photograph by Andrew Harnik in CNN's collection.

Fig. 19. Photograph by Andrew Harnik in CNN's collection.

Fig. 20. Photograph by Carolie Brehman in CNN's collection.

Interestingly, as opposed to what I had guessed in my hypothesis, I did not find a single representation of Christian nationalism in CNN's collection. Perhaps this is because there was a heavier focus on the perspective of Congress members and other staff members to show the fear present that day. Because there were fewer photos of the insurrectionists themselves, there was less opportunity to showcase Christian nationalism. We can also apply Weaver's ideas of "god terms" and "devil terms" to the visual construction of CNN's articles. As mentioned earlier, we can consider CNN's images taken inside the Capitol building as "god images" as they evoke a different sense of humanity than those in the Fox News collection. CNN's intended pathos is clear: they chose photos that place more emphasis on the fear of the insurrection. An example is the second photo in the collection, Fig. 21 taken by John Minchillo, whose work was also featured in the Fox News collection.

Fig. 21. Photograph by John Minchillo in CNN's collection.

While Fox News chose to include photos by John Minchillo, the photos that they used from him were more focused on the violence being perpetrated by the authorities toward the insurrectionists (see Fig. 4 and Fig. 6). Fig. 21 from the CNN collection, on the other hand, showcases the centrality of Donald Trump and his supporters on Jan 6th. Considering Fox News's audience and the outlet's lack of coverage of the Jan 6th hearings, including Trump's indictment, it is obvious why Fox News would choose not to include such an image as Fig. 21.

Many of the photos in CNN's collection also highlight and name the insurrectionists, showcasing their individual actions in the insurrection. For example, as identified in CNN's caption for Fig. 22, the "QAnon Shaman," also known as Jacob Chansley, is highlighted, while other insurrections are named directly in the captions of similar photos. Again, we can see a contradiction in Chansley's dress, appearing to mimic an indigenous animal headdress, but praying a Christian prayer and espousing Christian values in the Senate Chamber. The visual rhetoric does not match the prayer. Fox News does not name a single insurrectionist in their photo collection. This may be because Fox News's collection was posted on January 7, 2021, but they could have edited the collection to update information.

Fig. 22. Photograph by Win McNamee in CNN's collection.

In total, CNN provides a more rounded view of the events, while Fox News's attempt at rhetorical framing is more obvious. While Christian nationalism is not viewed explicitly in any of CNN's images, CNN places more emphasis on the insurrectionists' actions. While CNN's collection may be simply a list of images, their choice and ordering of these photos are highly intentional, contributing to their visual rhetorical framing, just like Fox News.

Whereas Fox News does not discuss Christian nationalism directly, CNN has multiple articles and reports on Christian nationalism and its connection to the events of Jan 6th. One article that features images as examples is a piece by John Blake, titled "An 'Imposter Christianity' Is Threatening American Democracy." This article features Fig. 7 by John Minchillo, again proving the contrast to how Fox News chose its photos to guide a narrative. Also in Blake's article are Figs. 23 and 24.

Fig. 23. Photograph by Win McNamee in CNN's collection.

Fig. 24. Photograph by Stefani Reynolds in CNN's collection.

Blake dives into some of the origins and dangers of Christian nationalism, as seen through the events of Jan 6th. The article discusses three core beliefs of Christian nationalism, including first the idea that "the US was founded as a Christian nation." Blake then lists "a belief in a 'Warrior Christ,'" and cites Kristin Kobes Du Mez's *Jesus and John Wayne*, which I referenced in Chapter 1. Blake last lists the belief that there's such a person as a "real American," an element of Christian nationalism also discussed by Du Mez.

Echoing Sharp-Hoskins's ideas of logical arrangement narrating an audience's emotional investment, the order of the photos in CNN's collection contributes to their larger narrative as well. By alternating photos from inside and outside the Capitol building, the viewer sees a narrative examining both sides of the insurrection. As opposed to Fox News's selection of photos, the audience can see more photos from inside the building with the CNN collection. The photos argue that the event was not simply a break-in to an empty building, but an attack on politicians as they worked and then hid in the upper Senate chambers. Photos depicting fear evoke similar feelings of fear in their audience, proving the severity of Jan 6th. Additionally, CNN's highlighting and naming of individual insurrectionists makes the attack more personal, carried out by individuals with clear intentions and motivations rather than a hive-minded mob as shown in Fox News's collection. Within the broader articles about Christian nationalism, like the

one by Blake, those photos foreground visual evidence of Christian symbolism present during the insurrection. By Blake placing the photo with the cross, Fig. 23, immediately at the top of his article, viewers associate Jan 6th with Christian ideology and carry that visual throughout the article.

4. Conclusion

The insurrection has become a major source of scholarship in recent months. While there may be a consensus among scholars and some journalists that Jan 6th was a site for Christian nationalism, it is worth considering how the major media outlets spun the narrative of events to the American public, as well as how they continue to do so through their coverage or lack thereof. Just like we saw William Dunfee's words and actions change to justify Jan 6th in the first chapter, so we have also seen the major media outlet Fox News craft a version of events that defends the actions of the insurrectionists. My analysis, drawn from Sharp-Hoskins and Weaver, reveals that Christian nationalism has been further shaped through the construction of the outlets' images. The way that each media outlet portrayed the events shapes the way that their audiences think about Christian nationalism. Continually, as mentioned in Chapter 1, we can consider how the discourses around Christian nationalism continually bounce off of and engage with each other, further adding to the general rhetorical ecology. In my final chapter, I will consider the ways that evangelical organizations and faith leaders have been condemning Christian nationalism since the insurrection and how they recommend separating Christian identities from American patriotism.

Chapter 3: Christian Responses to Christian Nationalism

1. Introduction

For the final chapter, I will consider how Christian evangelical groups and faith leaders have responded to the Christian nationalism on display on Jan 6th. Additionally, I will explore how each group or leader confronts and condemns the ideology of Christian nationalism and Christians' actions on Jan 6th. Christian nationalism, as an ideology, manifested in physical, violent action on Jan 6th. I will focus on sources such as an open letter read during the Ash Wednesday National Prayer Service Livestream that calls on pastors and ministry leaders to condemn Christian nationalism and its consequential radicalization and a letter written to the Select Committee to Investigate the January 6 Attack on the United States Capitol from the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty (BJC) that points out the risk of Christian nationalism to religious freedom. Finally, I will consider a joint report by the BJC, the Freedom from Religion Foundation, and Christians Against Christian Nationalism. Together, these groups recognize the racial element of Christian nationalism and present both an alternate model to white Christian nationalism and a list of principles to separate Christianity and patriotism actively.

Lastly, I will consider how the sources examined in this chapter respond directly to what Jenny Edbauer would call the rhetorical ecology of Christian nationalism, which I explored in Chapter 1. The faith leaders who composed the sources examined in this chapter critique prominent themes within the rhetorical ecology of Christian nationalism: radicalism, violence, and white supremacy. I will examine how these faith leaders fight Christian nationalism by using what Edbauer calls "counter-rhetorics" (20) to combat these prominent themes and present alternative models of Christianity. As Edbauer also explains, the rhetorical ecology view allows

for more opportunity for counter-rhetorics to "respond to and resist the original exigence" (20). The sources in this chapter do not simply condemn Christian nationalism and its rhetorical ecology. They provide feasible examples and alternatives to decrease radicalism, acknowledge violence, and confront white supremacy. By considering the ideology of Christian nationalism leading to Jan 6th as a larger rhetorical ecology rather than a straightforward rhetorical situation, the sources in this chapter can respond to elements beyond the typical exigence, audience, and constraints. Whereas Edbauer considered Austin, Texas as a rhetorical ecology, I have been considering Jan 6th as a rhetorical ecology, tracking some of the moves and circulations within that ecology as represented through Christian nationalist language and images. Now, I can consider how various faith groups have responded to those specific moves within that rhetorical ecology, further expanding the ecology itself.

To continue considering the ideology of Christian nationalism as a larger rhetorical ecology, let us consider the sources mentioned in this chapter as an effort of "counter-rhetorics" (Edbauer 20). Remember that in her article, "Unframing Models of Public Discourse: From Rhetorical Situation to Rhetorical Ecologies," Edbauer considers Austin, Texas, as a case study of rhetorical ecology and public rhetorics. She discusses Austin's slogan "Keep Austin Weird" as a response to the urban sprawl in the early 2000s (Edbauer 15-16). Edbauer explains some examples of counter-rhetorics when she explains the alternative slogans that came in resistance to the revitalized community, such as "Keep Austin normal" (Edbauer 16). Rhetorical acts like this, which Edbauer describes as coming in direct contrast or resistance to the larger rhetorical ecology, "expand the lived experience of the original rhetorics by *adding* to them" (Edbauer 19, italics original). In Edbauer's example, the anti-weird rhetoric in further contributed to the larger rhetorical ecology.

According to Edbauer, a benefit of considering the rhetorical ecology instead of the rhetorical situation is that the ecological stance "adopts a view toward the processes and events that extend beyond the limited boundaries of elements. One potential value of such a shifted focus is the way we view counter-rhetorics, issues of cooptation, and strategies of rhetorical production and circulation" (Edbauer 20). Edbauer argues that the interconnected nature of a rhetorical ecology allows for elements outside the typical boundary of the rhetorical situation to alter how counter-rhetorics impact the larger ecology. Edbauer writes "Not only do these counter-rhetorics directly respond to and resist the original exigence, they also expand the lived experience of the original rhetorics by *adding* to them – even while changing and expanding their shape" (20). Based on Edabuer's description of counter-rhetorics as rhetorical acts that speak against other language within the larger, more dominant rhetorical ecology, I will consider the overarching points of contention from the sources in this chapter to view how they attempt to alter the rhetorical ecology of Christian nationalism at large.

2. Radicalization and Freedom of Religion

A. Ash Wednesday Public Letter

The first source I will consider is a public letter crafted by more than 100 pastors, ministry and seminary leaders, and other prominent evangelicals (McCammon). Although no date is attached to the letter, it was read on Zoom during the Ash Wednesday National Prayer Service Livestream on February 17, 2021, a little over a month and a half after the insurrection ("Evangelical Leaders Statement"). Titled "Sign On: Evangelical Leaders Statement Condemning Christian Nationalism's Role in the January 6th Insurrection," the letter opens, "As leaders in the broad evangelical community, we recognize and condemn the role Christian Nationalism played in the violent, racist, anti-American insurrection at the United States Capitol

on January 6" (Vote Common Good). The letter was made available to the public as a Google Form that asks for signatures from faith leaders who also agree. Housed on the more extensive website of *Say No to Christian Nationalism*, the form had approximately 2,700 signers and was still active as of March 30, 2024.

This letter focuses on the risk of radicalization within Christian communities and calls out white racism as a part of Christian nationalism. The letter reads, "We recognize that evangelicalism, and white evangelicalism in particular, has been susceptible to the heresy of Christian nationalism because of a long history of faith leaders accommodating white supremacy" (Vote Common Good). Because faith leaders historically have not called out the white supremacy that often accompanies white evangelicalism, the letter argues that Christian nationalism was able to grow and gain traction as an ideology. Working in circulation with individuals like Dunfee who used their position as a faith leader to strengthen their arguments, this public letter works as a direct counter-rhetoric to the specific moves within the rhetorical ecology of Jan 6th. White supremacy is a theme of Christian nationalism that will continue in the ways that the other sources also talk about Christian nationalism.

Bible verses are also used throughout the letter. Citing the New Testament of the Bible, the letter's authors write, "As Jesus himself said, 'They will know that you are my disciples by the way that you love' (John 13:35). No Christian can defend the unChristlike [sic] behavior of those who committed violence on January 6. Not only was it anti-democratic, but it was also anti-Christian" (Vote Common Good). The writers highlight the violence of the insurrectionists and the risk they posed to democracy on Jan 6th. This is another instance of the letter acting as a direct counter-rhetoric to the rhetoric also found in the larger ecology of Jan 6th, for example by speaking against rhetoric brought forth by Stone and Trump, urging their audiences toward

violence. Just like Edbuaer talked about the direct counter mottos to "Keep Autin Weird," this letter speaks in direct opposition to the language of the sayings like "God, Guns, Guts," or like the saying in the Fox News image, "God, Country, Notre Dame." The insurrectionists' actions go directly against how they are called to act within the Christian faith, as seen through John 13:35. The letter argues that the insurrectionists' dedication to their American identity is antithetical to their Christian identities, further contributing to Christian nationalist ideology. Viewing Christian nationalism as a "perversion of faith," the letter's writers say, "We know from experts on radicalization that one of the key elements is a belief that your actions are 'blessed by God'… This allows so many people who hold a Christian Nationalism view to be radicalized" (Vote Common Good). Like the definition of Christian nationalism given by Lee in Chapter 1, the letter's writers view Christian nationalism as a form of religious radicalization and then present direct steps for the letter's signers to oppose that radicalization. A prominent theme of the Christian nationalist language moving through the rhetorical ecology of Jan 6th, speaking against radicalism is a one way that the letter works as a counter-rhetoric. The Ash Wednesday Public Letter writes, "We know from experts on radicalization that one of the key elements is a belief that your actions are 'blessed by God' and ordained by your faith. This is what allows so many people who hold to a Christian Nationalism view to be radicalized." Using the Ash Wednesday Public Letter's description of radicalism, radicalism was prevalent in the words and actions of both Trump and his supporters leading up to Jan 6th. For example, consider the way Dunfee defended his actions after the fact, even using Biblical verses to claim that his actions were coming from his faith. Additionally, within the House January 6th Committee report, the extremist groups that organized before Jan 6th are defined as "radicals," including groups like the Groypers and QAnon, both explored in Chapter 1 (The House 503). The sources work as

counter-rhetorics to radicalism within the rhetorical ecology of Jan 6th primarily by directly describing a key element of radicalization as being the belief that actions are "'blessed by God'" (Vote Common Good). The letter works as a counter-rhetoric as defined by Edbauer by continuing to engage with the moves that evolved in the larger rhetorical ecology that was Jan 6th.

Calling the faith leaders to sign into action, the letter gives them direct instructions for how to work toward deconstructing the systems that enable Christian nationalist radicalism:

> We will seek to repair and heal the wounds of the past. We will seek racial justice on a personal, ecclesial, and systemic level. We will support organizations led by people of color. We will listen to and amplify the voices of people of faith who have been marginalized by the colonizing force of white supremacy and Christian nationalism. We will do our best to be faithful to Jesus, and to those Christ called 'the least of these.' (Vote Common Good)

The quote above is referencing the New Testament Bible verse Matthew 25:40, in which Jesus says, "The King will reply 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me'" (*New International Version*). By "least of these," Jesus refers to the needy, the hungry, the sick, the imprisoned, or other marginalized groups. Considering BIPOC individuals as a marginalized group, the letter's writers use Biblical verses to condemn the white supremacy of Christian nationalism. Again pointing out the white supremacy that comes along with Christian nationalism, the letter uses both Biblical verses and the influence of American evangelical leaders to deconstruct Christian nationalism as the writers see it within their churches, manifested through conspiracy theories, racial prejudice, and violence. They cite conspiracy theories within evangelical spaces as a huge factor in the rise of

Christian nationalism. Still, these faith leaders expand their letter to include racial prejudice as a significant facet of Christian nationalism, too. However, another letter addresses another danger of Christian nationalism by presenting the threat it poses to the freedom of religion in the United States.

The sources in this chapter each work to call out the violence by working in direct opposition as counter-rhetorics to address the violence seen in the larger rhetorical ecology surrounding Christian nationalism. Specifically, the Ash Wednesday quote specifies "calls to violence" (Vote Common Good), seeming to speak directly to Trump's calls to "fight like hell" in his initial tweets and speeches (The House 72). The "calls to violence" idea also echoes Dunfee's invitation to his congregation regarding Jan 6th.

B. The Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty (BJC)/Christians Against Christian Nationalism

A source that uses an entirely different approach to condemning Christian nationalism than the source previously discussed is a letter from Christian leaders to the United States House Select Committee on the January 6 Attack. Written by The Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty (BJC) and Christians Against Christian Nationalism, the letter addresses Congressman Bennie Thompson, chairman of the United States House Select Committee on the January 6 Attack. The letter is signed by twenty-one coordinators of the Christians Against Christian Nationalism initiative. The first signature is Amanda Tyler, Executive Director of the BJC and the Lead Organizer for Christians Against Christian Nationalism. Many of the same individuals who signed the Ash Wednesday public letter appear among the other twenty signatures. For example, Pastor Doug Pagitt, who signed both, is listed on the BJC website as a signer and

Executive Director of Vote Common Good, the creator of the Google Form discussed in the previous section.

The letter, sent on June 2, 2022, begins by defining Christian nationalism as a "political ideology and cultural framework that merges American and Christian identities" ("Statement"). The letter's writers go a step further as they also address the racial dimensions of Christian nationalism and call it "white Christian nationalism" ("Statement"), supporting the ideas of the Ash Wednesday Public Letter. Addressing the Select Committee, the statement continues, "We urge you to focus questioning and discussion on Christian nationalism and the role it played in bolstering, justifying, and intensifying the January 6 attack" ("Statement"). While the other sources I have examined called for civic engagement from Christians, this statement is an example of the civic engagement that faith leaders can replicate to speak against Christian nationalism. The letter serves as an example of the civic engagement that they explain as a responsibility of engaged and responsible citizens, contradicting the insurrectionists' view of "rights and responsibilities" as described by Lee and Du Mez. Further reverberating, we can see concretely how phrases and language bounce off each other within the rheotrical ecology of Jan 6th, picking up and altering meanings through the counter-rhetorics as explained by Edbauer. The final paragraph of the statement addresses how Christian nationalism poses a threat to religious freedom. None of the sources explored so far have mentioned the risk to religious liberty that Christian nationalism poses. The letter reads, "Christian nationalism also directly challenges the promise of religious freedom for all, which is enshrined in our Constitution and the First Amendment" ("Statement"). While the sources that I have discussed thus far have addressed Christian nationalism's risk to democracy and the risk of radicalization, none have presented the argument that Christian nationalism threatens other religions. The final section of this chapter

will focus on a more extensive joint report titled "Christian Nationalism and the January 6, 2021 Insurrection," including the report's reasons for condemning Christian nationalism and recommendations for separating Christianity and patriotism.

Further evidence of the reverberation of violent language in the larger rhetorical ecology is the continued discussion of violence, also as addressed by the Ash Wednesday Public Letter. Similarly, the BJC/Christians Against Christian Nationalism letter to Congressman Bennie Thompson writes, "[W]e saw violent attackers brandish the symbols and language of Christianity." Lastly, as Butler talks about the evolution of Christian nationalism, she writes, "Violence would also become an effective way to promote white Christian nationalism" (5). Violence was clearly a part of the rhetorical ecology as established in Chapter 1. Beyond the physical outcomes of violence, some other consequences described by the sources in this chapter include threats to religious freedom, as stated by Amanda Tyler in the joint report to be considered next. By acting as counter-rhetorics like those described by Edbauer, the sources can add to and alter the rhetorical ecology surrounding Christian nationalism.

3. Moving Forward

A. Christians Against Christian Nationalism/BJC/Freedom from Religion Foundation

"Christian Nationalism and the January 6, 2021 Insurrection" is a joint report by the Christians Against Christian Nationalism, the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty, and the Freedom from Religion Foundation. Referenced multiple times in the letter to Congressman Thompson that I discussed in the previous section, the joint report was published on February 9, 2022, and it includes many familiar names from the sources mentioned earlier. For example, Amanda Tyler, the first signature in the letter to Congressman Thompson from the

BJC/Christians Against Christian Nationalism, introduces the joint report and a section titled "Christian Responses to Christian Nationalism After January 6" (41). Similarly, Anthea Butler, another signer of the letter to Congressman Thompson, writes a section titled "What is White Christian Nationalism?" (4). Interestingly, the joint report is the first source that includes nonreligious individuals working alongside Christian individuals to condemn Christian nationalism collectively. The Freedom from Religion Foundation, represented in the report by constitutional attorney Andrew Seidel, works to "promote the constitutional principle of separation of state and church, and to educate the public on matters relating to nontheism" ("About the"). From both secular and religious perspectives, the joint report offers a variety of frameworks, backgrounds, and examples of activism toward a common goal.

Rather than focusing on the entire report, I will focus on several main chapters directly addressing Christian nationalism. As a part of the guidance, the joint "Christian Nationalism and the January 6, 2021 Insurrection" report uses largely empirical data to frame its arguments and establish the existence of Jan 6th. An example of the use of empirical data is Section 1 by Andrew Whitehead and Samuel Perry, both Associate Professors of Sociology, who present a list of attitudes that are statistically more likely to be attributed to Americans who embrace Christian nationalism, such as "support Trump and Trumpism in the last two national elections" or "hold anti-democratic attitudes favoring restricting the vote and denying the existence of voter suppression" (3). Other sections take an historical view to confront Christian nationalism, such as Anthea Butler's section, "What is White Christian Nationalism?" and Dr. Jemar Tisby's section, "The Patriotic Witness of Black Christians."

The other sources that I discussed have mentioned the overt white supremacy of Christian nationalism, and Anthea Butler also confronts race head-on in her section. She argues

that white Christian nationalism is "[t]he belief that America's founding is based on Christian principles, white protestant Christianity is the operational religion of the land, and that Christianity should be the foundation of how the nation develops its laws, principles, and practices" (4). She argues that white Christian nationalism had been brewing as far back as slavery and the Civil War and that the destruction of the Confederacy and subsequent "Lost Cause" ideology enabled groups like the Ku Klux Klan to form in the name of Christian nationalism (5). She describes how Christian nationalism was called upon to protest the Civil Rights Movement in the 20th century and came to be viewed as a form of patriotism, disguising its innate racism (5). She writes that "Finally, the election of President Barack Obama, the nation's first African American president, would bring out both fringe elements of white Christian nationalism as well as mainstream religious white Christian nationalism" (5), paving the way for Trump's election. Christian nationalism's goal, then, is not only to conflate Christian identities and American identities but also to conflate *white* Christian identities with *white* American identities, leaving Christian and American people of color on the margins.

The section following Butler's, titled "The Patriotic Witness of Black Christians," is written by historian of race and religion Dr. Jemar Tisby. Tisby asserts that "the white Christian nationalist version of patriotism is racist, xenophobic, patriarchal, and exclusionary" (7). Tisby describes an alternate model for patriotism, citing the Black church tradition. Referencing Frederick Douglass, Fannie Lou Hamer, a "sharecropper turned national civil rights activist'," and Black soldiers of the Civil War, turning their experience into action during the Civil Rights Movement, Tisby gives examples of healthy patriotism supported by Christian faith (7). Specifically, Tisby references how the Black church has traditionally advocated for the rights of *all* citizens, dating back to the Declaration of Independence's statement that men are "endowed

by their Creator with certain unalienable rights" (7). Carrying great weight to Black Christians in the Revolutionary Era, according to Tisby, that statement was essential to Black Christians throughout history (8). Tisby writes, "Black Christians throughout U.S. history have often hearkened back to the nation's stated commitment to freedom and democracy to fight for greater inclusion. They saw this form of patriotism as a coherent, integrated expression of their Christian faith" (8). According to Tisby, there are healthy ways for individuals to balance their identities as both Christians and Americans. Following the model of the Black church, deconstructing white Christian nationalism at large requires the understanding that America is not solely a white man's country (9).

The joint report finishes with a section by Amanda Tyler titled "Christian Responses to Christian Nationalism After January 6." Tyler's section references the open letter released on Ash Wednesday and the establishment of Christians Against Christian Nationalism as an organization. She quotes Christian leaders and discusses how they reconcile their identities as Christians and Americans. For example, she quotes Reverend Elizabeth A. Eaton, saying, "Christian nationalism is different from being a patriot. God knows I love my country. But my primary allegiance as a Christian isn't to my country, but to God" (43). Highlighting various ways the organization Christians Against Christian Nationalism has worked to produce resources, Tyler closes with Christians Against Christian Nationalism's unifying principles. While several of these principles were listed in the letter from the BJC and Christians Against Christian Nationalism to Congressman Thompson, all of the principles are listed at the end of this section of the joint report. Here are the principles, listed in full:

- People of all faiths and none have the right and responsibility to engage constructively in the public square.

- Patriotism does not require us to minimize our religious convictions.
- One's religious affiliation, or lack thereof, should be irrelevant to one's standing in the civic community.
- Government should not prefer one religion over another or religion over nonreligion.
- Religious instruction is best left to our houses of worship, other religious institutions and families.
- America's historic commitment to religious pluralism enables faith communities to live in civic harmony with one another without sacrificing our theological convictions.
- Conflating religious authority with political authority is idolatrous and often leads to the oppression of minorities and other marginalized groups, as well as the spiritual impoverishment of religion.
- We must stand up to and speak out against Christian nationalism, especially when it inspires acts of violence and intimidation—including vandalism, bomb threats, arson, hate crimes, and attacks on houses of worship—against religious communities at home and abroad ("Christian Nationalism" 44).

These principles are an actionable and realistic charge for individuals to separate their Christianity and patriotism. Coming from the organization Christians Against Christian Nationalism, the principles are not an attack upon Christians but a call to accountability. Designed to be a public document to serve as a resource for advocacy against Christian nationalism, readers should view the principles as examples of civic behavior. Christians have primarily contributed to and written the report, but they advocate for the safety of and opportunities for other religions, further advocating for religious freedom. Instead of invoking the mythic idea that America was founded as a Christian nation, the principles specify that the

United States has a historical "commitment to religious pluralism" (44). Additionally, the principles' authors speak directly to a Christian audience when they refer to the conflation of religious authority with political authority as "idolatrous," referencing the common sin of idolatry within Christianity (44). Reflecting the tradition of Black Christianity as referenced by Tisby, the principles listed use Christian convictions to advocate for the well-being of all, not just for other Christians.

Lastly, we can use Weaver's ideas of "god terms" and "devil terms" also to consider the continued circulation of language in the rhetorical ecology of Jan 6th, further acting as a direct counter-rhetoric. For example, consider the joint report's assertion and use of the words "rights and responsibilities" in the first principle. Much of the language in Chapter 1 circled around the insurrectionists' rights and responsibilities to attend Jan 6th in the name of their faith. To the insurrectionists, "rights and responsibilities" could be recognized as "god terms," but the authors of the principles work to decenter them as an act of counter-rhetorics. Another example is the similar application of "patriotism," especially so close in proximity to "rights and responsibilities." The use of "patriotism" specifically, also used by Tisby in his chapter "The Patriotic of Black Christians," reverberates off of Dunfee's and other's uses of patriotism as a term that encouraged insurrectionists' behaviors on Jan 6th. Again, we see how language within a larger ecology echoes and reverberates, adding to the larger ecology.

The last theme that appears prominently across the sources in this chapter is a critique of the presence of white supremacy and racism within the ideology of Christian nationalism. Identified by all sources in this chapter, white supremacy is perhaps the most prominent theme of the Christian nationalist rhetorical ecology that the sources attempt to confront. As argued by Butler and Tisby, white supremacy has been a significant theme and founding principle of

Christian nationalism since the Civil War, another example of how the rhetorical ecology of Christian nationalism at large has been forming across centuries in the United States ("Christian Nationalism" 5). The Groypers are one of the strongest examples of white supremacy within the rhetorical ecology of Christian nationalism as they are described in the House January 6th Committee report as "promot[ing] white supremacist and Christian nationalist beliefs" (*The House* 520). Additionally, the Anti-Defamation League wrote that "Groypers believe they are working to defend against demographic and cultural changes that are destroying the 'true America' – a white, Christian nation" ("Groyper Army"). The Groypers are just one organization that is blatant about their white supremacy being innately connected to their Christian nationalism. However, Tisby writes that beyond just Jan 6th, "the white Christian nationalist version of patriotism is racist, xenophobic, patriarchal, and exclusionary" ("Christian Nationalism" 7). Acting as extremely powerful counter-rhetorics by speaking in direct opposition to exactly what was clearly seen within the larger rhetorical ecology, each source in this chapter calls out the white supremacist nature of Christian nationalism. However, Tisby's suggestion of Black Christians as an example of "patriotic witnesses" speaks directly to the rhetorical ecology of Jan 6th by presenting an alternative model ("Christian Nationalism" 7). More than condemnation, Tisby's counter-rhetoric speaks in direct opposition to the discourses within the dominant rhetorical ecology and offers concrete action to interrupt the rhetorical ecology of Christian nationalism that led to Jan 6th.

4. Conclusion

While some evangelicals cited a damaged reputation as a possible consequence of Christian nationalism, others saw the ideology as a risk to democracy, an encouragement of radicalization, and a threat to religious freedom. However, others have pointed out the innate

racism of Christian nationalism and the ideology's potential for violence. However, with the example of the Black church and the principles from the joint report by the BJC, Christians Against Christian Nationalism, and the Freedom from Religion Foundation, still others are working to create a healthier view of patriotism that is not tied to Christian identity.

Although the first two chapters have considered the harmful rhetoric of the Christian nationalist rhetorical ecology and its culmination on Jan 6th, many individuals and organizations are working to dismantle the conflation of Christian identity and American identity at the heart of Christian nationalism. The words of individuals like Donald Trump, Rudy Giuliani, Roger Stone, and Pastor Bill Dunfee show how deeply Christian nationalist rhetoric had taken root before Jan 6th, paving the way for violence at the Capitol. By considering Dunfee, we saw how Christian nationalist rhetoric manifested in individual churches as ambient rhetoric before the insurrection. By then considering the differing ways that Fox News and CNN represented the events visually, we saw how rhetorical framing shaped and continues to shape biased narratives of Jan 6th. Although my assumption in Chapter 2 that Fox News would not address Christian nationalism due to their audience was correct, Chapter 3 has proven that some within Christian circles are confronting Christian nationalism. While many Christian leaders, such as Dunfee, have not addressed the dangers, some Christian evangelicals are working to address the risks of Christian nationalism and white supremacy, protect democracy, and offer a different version of Christianity on the national stage.

Since the events of Jan 6th, Christian nationalism has become a more prominent topic of public conversation. In February of 2024, famed producer Rob Reiner produced a documentary film that was released to theaters nationwide titled *God and Country*. Directed by Dan Partland and including talking heads such as Kristin Kobes Du Mez, Anthea Butler, Doug Pagitt, Andrew

Whitehead, Andrew Seidel, and others mentioned in this paper, the documentary film considers the history and implications of Christian nationalism and the way it harms the nation and representation of Christianity. Through mainstream releases like this documentary, the joint report, and the reporting on CNN, the nation can openly discuss the presence and risks of Christian nationalism. Historically, the rhetoric around Christian nationalism has been used as a weapon, seen manifested in Jan 6th. The rhetorical ecology was not created overnight and will not be dismantled overnight. However, the work of the sources in this chapter is a solid start to confronting the rhetorical ecology. By adopting more healthy relationships between the way Christians discuss and view Christian identities and American identities, we can deconstruct Christian nationalism and confront the ways it has fractured our nation.

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