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Christian Nationalism in the United States. Why Does It Matter in the 21st Century?

Introduction

The First Amendment of the United States Constitution provided Americans with religious freedom many European societies could have merely dreamed of in the 18th century. Over the past two hundred years, religion has acquired an indispensable position in the United States. Apart from that, it has spread to the public sphere¹ as well, in which it has even strengthened this bond. After all, the Pledge of Allegiance says: "I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all."²

However, recent events have initiated a trend that utilizes Christian values against precautionary measures implemented in response to the spread of the coronavirus disease, allegations of the 2020 presidential elections' fraudulent nature, and other political agenda. Such opinions do not remain merely in everyday conversations, the United States has witnessed the birth of a new kind of religious congregations that not only preach Christian values, but concurrently combine them with political beliefs, conspiracy theories, and anti-vaccination sentiment.

The following article is devoted to Christian nationalism, the presence of which in everyday American conversations has thrived in the recent years. However, its connotations vary among the authors who have debated it. Whereas some conjunct it with the imposition of a theocracy,³ others perceive Christian nationalism primarily as

¹ The United States witnessed a dramatic resurgence of religious language in politics in the early 1950s. In 1955, President Eisenhower signed a bill placing the phrase 'In God We Trust' on all American currency. During the next year, it was adopted as the first official motto of the United States. This step was mostly ideological, rather than purely religious. The phrase 'In God We Trust' must have primarily differentiated the United State from the atheist Soviet Union.

MISLIN, David. 2018. "The complex history of 'In God We Trust'". In: *theconversation.com* [online]. [cit. 2021-11-17]. Available from: <https://theconversation.com/the-complex-history-of-in-god-we-trust-91117>

² BRITANNICA. 2021. *Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America*. [online]. [cit. 2021-11-17]. Available from: <https://www.britannica.com/event/Pledge-of-Allegiance-to-the-Flag-of-the-United-States-of-America>

³ MAHDAWI, Arwa. 2021. "Radicalized Christian nationalism is a growing threat to American democracy." In: *theguardian.com* [online]. [cit. 2022-03-26]. Available from: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/dec/11/radicalized-christian-nationalism-growing-threat-american-democracy>

a tool of Donald Trump's campaign.¹ Therefore, the article's main objective is to provide Czech and European security communities with an overview of its historical development and modern form. Moreover, it emphasizes the most prominent narratives that have been adopted by the newly organized congregations and proposes its unified conceptualization. To logically proceed in such ambition, three core sections shape this article. Historical development of Christian nationalism and its modern form launch our observation. Subsequently, the political activism of religious groups together with examples of nationalistic congregations follow. Thirdly, our roadmap ends with the deliberation of security threats the contemporary Christian nationalism poses to American democracy.

Christian nationalism in historical perspective

The rise of Christian nationalism is not a product of the 21st century, its origins are ranging as long as to the 18th century. Unlike Europeans who understand nationalism through shared history, identity and nation states, the United States was founded as a nationless country missing social patterns rooted in belongingness to one nation or ethnic group. Beliefs in mutual principles and the liberating role of the American Revolution allowed settlers to unify and interconnect the North American colonies. Even today, American identity does not possess one clear definition of Americanism or mutual lines providing one unanimous definition. Therefore, instead of cultural, ethnic, and historical commonalities, Americans supplemented these missing elements by moral principles and beliefs that led to an early form of American nationalism, which served as a predecessor of Christian nationalism. Moreover, tangible religious nationalism developed during the early years of the United States but did not merely coincide with Christianity. To follow Haselby's definition, it was derived from a set of conventions evolved from religion and elements oriented around the way the Revolution legacy adopted in American political discourse throughout its development.²

Christian nationalism might have numerous subforms, however, a connection between Christianity and the Founding Fathers always appears as an enduring element. Its advocates claim that thanks to their religious affiliation together with the dominant Christian nature of the settlers, the United States was established as a Christian nation. Therefore, in the minds of Christian nationalists, both federal and state legislative levels should follow the Bible in order to preserve this foundation. However, a deeper look at historical sources suggests several counterarguments that disclaim this simplified perception, which has been shaped throughout the last two centuries. Historical accuracy in many cases blurred with evolved fallacies. Unquestionably, the Founding Fathers were men of faith, however, these claims isolate their religious language from the cultural context that significantly differed from the United States we know today. Cherry-picked statements corresponding with the modern understanding of religion are being exploited without any acknowledgement of possible deviation in the religious language of the 18th century. There is little evidence

¹ STEWART, Katherine. 2022. "Christian Nationalism Is One of Trump's Most Powerful Weapons". In: *nytimes.com* [online]. [cit. 2022-03-26]. Available from: <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/06/opinion/jan-6-christian-nationalism.html>

² HASELBY, Sam. *The Origins of American Religious Nationalism*. 1st ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 2015, pp. 21-22. ISBN 978-0-19-932957-1

indicating that their religious beliefs had later influenced the formulation of constitutional provisions of the United States of America, which was essentially founded as a secular state.¹ Thus, this perception is based merely on myths that had emerged in the early 19th century in response to the pursuit of a national identity initiated by the second- and third- generation of Puritan apologists. Unlike other nations, namely the European counterparts, Americans did not possess an element that would clearly differentiate the young republic from other countries. Christianity pragmatically served as the unifying element that, on the one hand, distinguished them from other societies and, on the other, provided the newly established nation with its own identity.²

Fifty years after its foundation, the United States experienced a period of instability connected to three major cleavages: fear of national division, shifting demographics, and breakup of the religious establishment. Firstly, American society was greatly divided over the election of 1800 between Jefferson's Democratic-Republicans and Adams's Federalists. This conflict line transformed American politics in a way respecting party struggle for the support of various parts of the electorate. The Whig party,³ after the collapse of the Federalists, strove to secure the integrity of the nation through the promotion of unified America's origins simultaneously mixed with its own political agenda offering a vision for the future. The mutual roots of Puritan heritage, belief in markets, and advocacy for increased development of infrastructure were the most dominant narratives. Although one might argue that the above described campaign did not bear many Christian elements, the Whigs did not merely appeal to the idealized legacy of the Puritans but adopted a vision of American culture as fundamentally Protestant. Such consideration was put forward in order to oppose the Democratic advocacy for a nation separated from the past by revolutionary ideas for its greatness based on democracy, equality, and individualism. Secondly, shifting ethnical and regional demographics significantly contributed to the growing political instability caused mainly by the increasing power of new states. Therefore, a unifier compounded of the Revolution's legacy and adoration of George Washington served as a response to the environment full of political hostility and regional fragmentation that threatened the country. Thirdly, Evangelical Protestantism dissolved in this era into many congregations, such as Congregationalist or Presbyterian churches, that subsequently adopted competing claims employed in order to gain new congregates. The role of religion in the United States became a divisive element, i.e., Christian nationalism evolved only as one movement. Concurrently, its general role during the early Republic should be perceived accordingly: 1) a set of fears and motives of political representatives who dealt with a fractured, not unified, state; 2) religious leaders who were afraid of the changes in the society; and 3) the intelligentsia

¹ GREEN, Steven K. *Inventing a Christian America, The Myth of the Religious Founding*. 1st ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 2015, pp. 152-153. ISBN 978-0190230975.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 242-243.

³ One of the two dominant parties in the United States between the late 1830s and the early 1850s. Its collapse strengthened the Republican Party. The Whig party brought together a coalition of united groups that opposed President Andrew Jackson. Nevertheless, during the 1850s when the North and South had become extremely polarized over slavery, the Whigs lost most of their northern affiliates who joined the newly formed Republican Party. MCKENNA, Amy. 2021. "Whig Party". In: *britannica.com* [online]. [cit. 2021-11-24]. Available from: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Whig-Party>

desperately striving for a unifying national heritage/myth the United States could be built upon.¹

Christian justification of slavery in the Southern states

Ever since the first settlers started arriving in the New World, religious affiliation clearly drew, in consecutive steps, the line indicating who was going to face enslavement. Initially, the Act of 1670 declared all non-Christian individuals coming by sea slaves for life. However, due the fact that Native Americans did not fall into this category, the law of 1682 clarified the understating of inferiority. Once again relying on religion and nativity to define slavery, it labeled individuals whose origins/parentage or native country were not Christian to be slaves. Furthermore, the final element was a statute that deprived slaves of being considered humans and made them property. However, the American Revolution forced many Americans to rethink the status of slaves regarding the Declaration of Independence that guarantees equal rights and treatment. Whereas Northern states thus abolished slavery, the Southern states found themselves increasingly dependent on it and, more importantly, became deeply convinced of its morality and necessity.² Such dispute regarding the theological justification of slavery around the 1840s spread across southern Baptist, Methodist, and Presbyterian churches that refused to reconcile with the new reality. Justification for slavery, which started to be preached, came from the biblical definition of marriage; therefore, Southern ministers considered it a necessary part of Christianity. Under this perception, the relationship between owners and slaves was identical to the biblical superiority of husbands over wives and children. Moreover, such theological justification allowed slave owners to believe that not only God permits slavery, but its perpetrators were better Christians who obey God's word more faithfully.³

Modern perception of Christian nationalism

Observers of Christian nationalism must acknowledge two overlapping spheres that independently influence the American society, religious and political affiliation, whose existence is mutually inclusive. In its modern form, Christian nationalists utilize this dichotomy as the source for their narrowly formulated definition of "true" Americans. Thus, to be considered a citizen of the United States, according to Christian nationalists, one must be both an American citizen and a Christian. However, even if they objectively know that not every Christian is American, they could still believe that "their" kind of Christians are American. Two principles of modern Christian nationalism, although rooted in myths, are derived from this simplified perception: 1) the United States is God's chosen country, a "city on a hill"; 2) to maintain such status, the United States must uphold God's commands and not break the covenant. Based on the latter, decision-making at both levels, federal and state, must obey the biblical principles in

¹ GOODNIGHT, Ethan. William Apess, Pequot Pastor: A Native American Revisioning of Christian Nationalism in the Early Republic. *Religions*. 2017, 8(2), pp. 18-20.

² FINKELMAN, Paul. Slavery in the United States: Persons or Property? In: ALLAIN, Jean (ed.). *The Legal Understanding of Slavery*. 1st ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012. pp. 113-115, ISBN 978-0-19-966046-9

³ WILLS, Matthew. 2018. "How Antebellum Christians Justified Slavery". In: *daily.jstor.org* [online]. [cit. 2022-03-25]. Available from: <https://daily.jstor.org/how-antebellum-christians-justified-slavery/?msckid=a8b17e0bac1711ecba13e4f4357732fa>

order to uphold the former. These tenets were mostly formulated by numerous leaders belonging to the New Christian Right in the 1970s and 1980s.¹

As debated within the previous paragraph, Christian nationalists bind the United States to Christianity that represents its very foundation as well as spiritual guidance to public and private life with a goal of maintaining the religious status quo. Interestingly enough, the same advocates do not reject the First Amendment, which guarantees religious freedom, but are committed to uphold Christian superiority. However, traceable divergence among different groups indicates some dissimilarities in such a perception. Whereas some have advocated for a constitutional amendment that would ultimately recognize the American Christian heritage, others have striven for the reestablishment of prayers in public schools, and many have pushed forward their interpretation of American history in school curricula including beliefs that promote America's godly superior position among other countries in the world. Beside those proposals, some Christian nationalists advocate for introduction of new immigration restrictions that would limit a number of people coming from non-Christian states who could contribute to the fragmentation of status quo dominated by Christianity.²

Regardless of these differences, such dichotomy that separates the "true" Americans from the others clearly infringes the very foundation of the American religious freedom guaranteed by the First Amendment. Although Christian nationalists do not strive its revocation and allow the existence of other religions, non-Christians would face a subordinate position depriving them of the fundamental democratic rights protected by the Constitution.

Conceptualization of Christian nationalism

To provide readers with a rigorous summary leading to a conceptualization, Christian nationalism must be understood as an ideological framework comprised of a collection of myths, symbols, and narratives rooted in American history and Christianity that is employed in order to create unifying elements that constitute a suppositious American identity together with guidelines shaping both public and private sphere in the United States. Despite the enduring element represented by the Founding Fathers' religious affiliation, its modern form has absorbed a heterogeneous variety of influences, due to the creation of independent groups across the United States, in a range from nativism, white supremacy, patriarchy, authoritarianism, and militarism. Moreover, Christian nationalism might justify violence in extreme scenarios if its employment contributes to the endeavored ideological objectives.³

¹ WHITEHEAD, Andrew L. and Samuel L. PERRY. A More Perfect Union? Christian Nationalism and Support for Same-sex Unions. *Sociological Perspectives*. 2015, 58(3), pp. 424-426.

² MILLER, Paul D. 2021. "What Is Christian Nationalism?". In: *christianitytoday.com* [online]. [cit. 2021-12-08]. Available from: <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2021/february-web-only/what-is-christian-nationalism.html>

³ FASKIANOS, Irina A. 2021. "Andrew L. Whitehead: The Rise of Christian Nationalism". In: *cfr.org* [online]. [cit. 2021-12-08]. Available from: <https://www.cfr.org/event/rise-christian-nationalism>

The New Christian Right

The New Christian Right is an umbrella term that provides coverage for a wide coalition of groups whose mutual objective is moral and social restoration of American society that has diverged from its fundamental Christian culture. In his book, Heywood argues that two converging factors contributed to the creation of this interconnected coalition, the extension of the public sphere and stronger political influence of minority groups. The former had started forming right after the end of World War II when liberal streams gained stronger influence. Rural conservative communities in the South perceived implemented social reforms, e.g., social security or the revocation of school prayers, as strong jeopardy against the traditional values and lifestyle intentionally perpetrated by the liberal establishment in Washington DC. The latter was mainly connected with the changing role of African Americans, women, and homosexuals whose influence was seen as a threat to tradition social structures in rural parts of the country and small towns. At the point when these two factors converged in the 1970s, the New Christian Right emerged to fight for restoration of the traditional family values with an objective of limiting the growing power of feminism and LGBT groups. Later in the 1980s and 1990s, the New Christian Right's campaign leaned more towards anti-abortion policies. Although Catholics played an important role within those efforts, Evangelists seized the most influential position. Nevertheless, one should not perceive the New Christian Right as a homogenous movement; throughout its existence, numerous groups have been formed with different beliefs. Since the 1980s, these groups have started supporting Republican candidates who ran against liberals on more conservative platforms bound to anti-abortion resentment and reinstatement of mandatory school prayers. Although the New Christian Right movement experienced its peak during the Reagan administration, its influence has floated throughout the years. Notwithstanding, the waning power supplemented by political failures forced some streams to adopt more militant strategy. The most extreme example is a formation of paramilitary militias, e.g., the Christian Patriot movement, inclined to terrorist attacks such as the Oklahoma City bombing in 1995.¹

The difference between Christian nationalism and the New Christian Right

To adequately proceed in our observation, one important differentiation must be drawn. While Christian nationalism and the New Christian Right might appear similar in many aspects, the above literature review indicates that whereas the former represents an ideological framework comprised of symbols and myths rooted in American history, the latter constitutes a typological coverage of heterogeneous groups that campaign for an increased Christian influence in American politics. Therefore, Christian nationalism represents one of possible ideological standpoints groups belonging to the New Christian Right movement can adopt.

¹ HEYWOOD, Andrew. *Politické ideologie*. 4th ed. Plzeň: Aleš Čeněk, 2008, pp. 317-319. ISBN 978-80-7380-137-3

Fig. 1 - Simplified model of groups belonging to the New Christian Right movement (own processing)



Political activism of religious congregations

Many incorrectly associate the rise of Christian nationalism solely with the Trump administration, but such a generalization bears many fallacies. Although Donald Trump successfully opened numerous topics, which had been suppressed for years, in his presidential campaign, the 2016 presidential race merely helped them to reach the surface of public debates. It is true that during the Trump administration Christian nationalists gained a feeling of self-recognized legitimacy from President Trump's public statements, e.g., in January 2016 said: "We will respect and defend Christian America, Christianity will have power."¹ On the other hand, it is questionable whether he intentionally employed such narratives or merely utilized them in his populist campaign, which targeted sensitive neglected themes. Blaming Donald Trump would be misleading, his rhetoric has only bestowed Christian nationalism with pursued legitimization of its belongingness to the 21st century. Moreover, religious advocacy has been associated with American politics in two main ways, administrative activities and active participation. Whereas the former is primarily connected to distribution of voter guidelines, registration, or debate groups, the latter purposefully engages in ideological activities, such as lobbying, demonstrations, or marches on behalf of various issues.²

In spite of American secularism, coexistence between politics and religion has been, to some extent, accepted as part of public debate. However, one diverging element is traceable to the post-Trump America. Congregations have not succeeded in maintaining neutrality against divisive political clashes, which emerged throughout Trump's mandate. Their subversiveness created cleavages that subsequently diverted many congregants to churches in which political issues, such as the 'Stop the Steal'³

¹ SWING, William E. 2021. "Christian nationalism and its role in insurrection and impeachment". In: *sfchronicle.com* [online]. [cit. 2022-02-16]. Available from: <https://www.sfchronicle.com/opinion/openforum/article/Christian-nationalism-and-its-role-in-15941456.php>

² EVERTON, Sean. 2021. *For God and Country: The Political Activism of Religious Congregations in the United States* [online]. [cit. 2021-12-13]. Available from: https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3859035

³ A label that is being used by pro-Trump supporters who believe in the fraudulent nature of the 2020 presidential election. It originated in President Trump's claim that subsequently

movement, racial unrest, and coronavirus disease, were not considered taboo anymore and have acquired very influential position. The empirical reality suggests that religious leaders of these churches adopted elements of traditional Christian nationalism together with the current inflammatory issues thanks to which nationalistic congregations legitimize their existence.¹

To supplement theoretical deliberation with tangible evidence, the following section contains empirical examples of nationalistic congregations together with transcripts of preaching, whose purpose is to increase the authenticity of the presented conjunction between the traditional Christian nationalism and divisive topics of the post-Trump America.

Empirical cases of nationalistic congregations

More candidates might have been incorporated into this section, two prominent representatives were chosen, Patriot Church and Global Vision Bible Church, in order to provide readers with cases that speak for such an ambiguous group. Although this part primarily operates with transcribed speeches, their employment should help readers to better comprehend the gained knowledge about Christian nationalism. However, one important difference, which European audience must bear in mind, ought to be addressed. The American understanding of free speech slightly differs from the European one. The First Amendment protects any language unless a speech is employed in order to incite or produce imminent lawless action and, concurrently, its nature is likely to incite or produce such an action. If both conditions are positively evaluated, governmental authorities may interfere in otherwise constitutionally protected free speech.² Unlike the European tradition of militant democracy,³ which possesses the right to restrain free speech, American tolerant democracy⁴ has only limited power to act against its ideological enemies unless the Brandenburg test is positively evaluated.

spread over the internet. Social media groups labeled 'Stop the Steal' acquired hundreds of thousands of followers.

BOND, Shannon and Bobby ALLYN. 2021. "How the 'Stop the Steal' movement outwitted Facebook ahead of the Jan. 6 insurrection". In: *npr.org* [online]. [cit. 2021-12-12]. Available from: <https://www.npr.org/2021/10/22/1048543513/facebook-groups-jan-6-insurrection?t=1639341639128>.

¹ GILBERT, David. 2021. "These Pastors Are Telling People Trump Is Still President and Are Ready for War". In: *vice.com* [online]. [cit. 2021-12-12]. Available from: <https://www.vice.com/en/article/y3vmnb/these-pastors-are-telling-people-trump-is-still-president-and-are-ready-for-war>

² CORNELL LAW SCHOOL. 2021. *Brandenburg test* [online]. [cit. 2021-12-08]. Available from: https://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/brandenburg_test

³ MAREŠ, Miroslav and Štěpán VÝBORNÝ. *Militantní demokracie ve střední Evropě*. 1st ed. Brno: Centrum pro studium demokracie a kultury. 2013, pp. 14-15. ISBN 978-80-7325-326-4.

⁴ ZILVAR, Martin. *Ozbrojené nestátní milice v USA v období prezidenství Donalda Trumpa*. *Bezpečnostní teorie a praxe*. 2021, 22(2), pp. 76.

Patriot Church

Founded in September 2020 in Knoxville, Tennessee, by pastor Ken Peters, later expanded to Spokane and Moses Lake, Washington, and Lynchburg, Virginia.¹ Before diving into its affiliation with Christian nationalism, one dichotomy must be explained to flawlessly comprehend Ken Peters' organization. Whereas Patriot Church refers to four individual above mentioned congregations, Patriot Network, according to its official webpage, is an ideological movement engaged in liberation of American communities from tyranny. A published statement justifies this aim of the ongoing attack on the United States led by demonic principalities whose ultimate goal is the destruction of the cultural and religious structure through implementing policies in the field of racial disparity, social programs diminishing economic inequality, and pro-immigration. Its congregants believe in an inevitable clash between good and evil bound to four narratives jeopardizing the existing religious status quo: Roe v. Wade ruling about abortion, Critical Race Theory, the 1619 Project, and coronavirus disease. Moreover, they argue that this transformation has already begun due to the closure of churches across the country as a result of the coronavirus pandemic. Therefore, Patriot Network portrays itself as a successor of the Black Robe Regiment, a mythic group of Christian ministers that lead their congregants to battle against the British during the American Revolutionary War.² Although each congregation desires to be seen as a traditional religious group, empirical activities together with a disclosed proclamation, which underlines Patriot Network's political ambition, suggest the contrary. Firstly, the Patriot leadership wants to expand across the United States through mobilization of pastors who would connect their congregations to the supranational movement that strives to counter the rising leftist radicalism. Subsequently, after gaining enough affiliates, religious enlightenment should be carried out through democratic processes. According to the proclamation, if the elected officials have refused to join the movement, its congregants must run against them and take over their offices. Based upon successful motivation of enough pastors and congregants, it endeavors to establish 5,000 sanctuary cities and counties that would outlaw abortion and CRT in order to protect Christian principles and concurrently challenge policies introduced by the state and federal government.³

Transcripts of preaching in Patriot Church

Two unmodified transcripts of service preaching delivered by pastors Ken Peters and Shahram Hadian are presented in the next section. Changes were made only if the used language contained grammar mistakes or needed adjustments in its written form.

¹ GILBERT, David. 2021. "These Pastors Are Telling People Trump Is Still President and Are Ready for War". In: *vice.com* [online]. [cit. 2021-12-12]. Available from: <https://www.vice.com/en/article/y3vmnb/these-pastors-are-telling-people-trump-is-still-president-and-are-ready-for-war>.

² LECAQUEL, Thomas and JL. TOMLIN. 2021. "Pastors claiming the mantle of the 'Black-Robed Regiment' get the history wrong". In: *washingtonpost.com* [online]. [cit. 2021-12-13]. Available from: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2021/10/15/pastors-claiming-mantle-black-robed-regiment-get-history-wrong/>.

³ PATRIOT CHURCH. n.d. *Patriot Network*. [online]. [cit. 2021-12-13]. Available from: <https://patriotchurch.us/patriot-network>.

Pastor Ken Peters on January 10, 2021, during a service held in Knoxville, Tennessee, said:¹

Do I have any soldiers in the house this morning? If you are not a soldier, hang out here. You will end up a soldier. It is time to strap pull up your bootstraps and put your hard hat on. It is time to battle for Jesus Christ. Amen! Do not believe what you see on the press. There was over a million wonderful people who were singing worshiping songs, loving Jesus, and I did not know it at that time, but we eventually learned that Antifa incited the crowd. You always have a few guys named bubba with pickup trucks. It does not take much to get them going right, so Antifa led the way. Then there were, we have heard, also special forces that were there to get the laptops. I was super happy that Trump people went to the Capitol because they had the barricades a half mile away from the Capitol so nobody could get even close. That is wrong, that is tyranny. They did not want to hear us outside the Capitol. I was happy, sorry about it, they broke over the barricade, right to get to the Capitol and I did not want to do all that terrorist stuff, that is just destructive, that is just the devil. But we have the right to peacefully assemble, and they were trying to stop us from peaceably assembling on the Capitol steps. That Capitol building is the people's building and they tried to keep us half a mile away from. So, they would not have to hear us, could do all their crimes. The crime what happened inside of there was bad, not the peaceable stuff. But is not even half as bad as what those politicians and Mike Pence did inside that Capitol building, not even half as bad. What those politicians did was way eviler than what those rowdy people did. And now the left is just like they use the coronavirus to do what they want. They are using this debacle and shutting everything down, folks. They are taking down our communications, but we are still here. Do not fear, we are on the run right now. But we are regrouping underground. All the leaders and the patriots are regrouping. I think we ought to be done with the Republican party. We need a new party. It is time for the patriots to arise. Amen!

¹ STRONGER TOGETHER SPOKANE. In: *Youtube* [online]. January 10, 2021. [cit. 2021-12-14]. Available from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CMBw7QvEgM8>. Channel Stronger Together Spokane.

Fig. 1 – Pastor Ken Peters' appearance on January 5, 2021, at pro-Trump rally (Insider News 2021)



Pastor Shahram Hadian supplemented Peters' preaching with the following:¹

I was excited, like pastor Ken, when we saw them go say “we are going to occupy the steps of the people’s house”. Because Americans if you want to stop a coup, you got to understand what it is going to require stopping a coup both spiritually and in the natural. I lived this in my birth country, Iran, but sadly right now as we speak many Americans are not yet there and do not have the stomach for what is coming. Literally, we were all there. People were worshiping. I heard a group singing raise a hallelujah that we sang this morning because the spirit of the Lord was there. But how many of you know, there comes a time to overturn the tables in the temple. And most Christians do not have the stomach for it. You go with, Shahram, you are advocating violence. No, I am not. I am advocating resistance to tyranny and evil. When we are going to be enslaved not just for now but for generations to come until the Lord comes back. If this coup is successful, you understand that must be resisted. The greatest coup in modern history, the greatest treason in American history. You understand what is at stake, church. When you understand what is at stake, you understand that you must act and stand and put the fear of God in those who are committing the coup. There was no insurrection, no mob storming the Capitol, no treasonous terroristic acts. This is the scorn of the enemy to accuse the brethren. And many believed it. But we shall not. Let’s sit down with the enemy and try to find unity. You know Christians, it is time to accept Biden as the President and let’s just start praying for him. No, I am going to pray for him to turn his heart to Jesus Christ if not Lord take him out. That is what I am praying for Biden. Our dear friend got a beautiful vision while we were talking. You know, the Lord still gives visions. She got a picture and said here is what to pray for Trump. Let him be like Samson. He was in chains, exhausted, and beaten down. But he had his hands against those pillars. And all it was needed one more push, one more push and the whole thing would come down. That is how close we are. Spirit of the Lord is saying we are that close, the whole

¹ STRONGER TOGETHER SPOKANE. In: Youtube [online]. January 10, 2021. [cit. 2021-12-14]. Available from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CMBw7QvEgM8>. Channel Stronger Together Spokane.

thing has been exposed. We just need President Trump, one more push and the entire thing is going to come down. That is how the army of God operates. So, one more push. Amen!

The Global Vision Bible Church

Founded in 2012, according to Facebook, by pastor Greg Locke in Old Lebanon, an outskirts of Nashville, Tennessee. What began as a small congregation has grown into a size that required moving to a circus tent. Moreover, substantial media coverage was given to the Global Vision Bible Church over the last year due to the numerous public preachings together with social media posts claiming that the coronavirus pandemic was fake, vaccination a scam, the 2020 presidential election fraudulent, and 2021 United States Capitol attack prepared by outside world infiltration.^{1,2} Unlike its counterpart Patriot Church, whose webpage openly discloses political ambition apart from religious services, the Global Vision Bible Church appears as any other congregation. Three pillars of its activities together with six core beliefs shaping preached values, in the range from the Bible's interpretation to eternal salvation, are manifested on its webpage. Nothing indicates affiliation with Christian nationalism or dissimilarity differentiating the Global Vision Bible Church from other ordinary Christian congregations.³ On the other hand, its Facebook page discloses narratives of Christian nationalism in the form of shared video recordings of church services.⁴

Transcripts of pastor Greg Locke's interview and preaching

To provide readers with rigorous evidence of elements belonging to Christian nationalism in pastor Locke's services, two speeches are transcribed. Opinions captured from an interview with CNN and church service are firstly presented, followed by a speech delivered at Health and Freedom Conference organized by Rhema Bible Church held in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

The first transcript captures pastor Locke's answers presented during an interview with CNN together with captured parts of his service:⁵

If you think for one minute that those political elites actually got that vaccination, you are smoking meth in your mama's basement. I am not getting no sheep shot in my arm, do not care what Biden and the rest of the fraudulent administration says. I am not getting it, I am not promoting it, and I discourage everybody under this tent to get it because if you think that you are going to get healthy over a vaccine that is supposed

¹ REEVE, Elle; GUFF, Samantha and Lacey RUSSELL. 2021. "How a pastor's spread of Covid misinformation divided one Tennessee family". In: *edition.cnn.com* [online]. [cit. 2021-12-14]. Available from: <https://edition.cnn.com/2021/05/28/us/pastor-greg-locke-tennessee-family-covid-19/index.html>

² KUZNIA, Rob and Majlie de PUY KAMP. 2021. "The Pastors". In: *edition.cnn.com* [online]. [cit. 2022-02-07]. Available from: <https://edition.cnn.com/interactive/2021/06/us/capitol-riot-paths-to-insurrection/pastors.html>

³ GLOBAL VISION BIBLE CHURCH. 2021. *About us*. [online]. [cit. 2021-12-14]. Available from: <https://globalvisionbc.com/aboutus>

⁴ GLOBAL VISION BIBLE CHURCH. [Home] In: *Facebook* [online]. [cit. 2021-12-20]. Available from: https://www.facebook.com/GlobalVisionBibleChurch/?ref=page_internal

⁵ CNN. In: *Youtube* [online]. May 29, 2021 [cit. 2021-12-14]. Available from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kAfgkWGlf70>

to do away with a virus that has a 99.9% survival rate, you have been watching too much Fox News and CNN at the same time. I have not changed my stance; I have strengthened my stance against the vaccine. It is not FDA approved. There is no pandemic, Covid is not a pandemic. I am 44 years old we have not had one in my lifetime. People can call us conspiracy theorists or what they want to. But there are aborted fetal fetuses within the context of all of these vaccines.

Pastor Greg Locke delivered the following speech on March 14, 2021, in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Due to its length, it was shortened. The most relevant parts are presented:¹

You can be seated all over the house, thank you for being here. If you love Jesus, say Amen. If you love the Bible, say Amen. If you love America, say Amen. It was President Andrew Jackson on his deathbed that leaned over and pointed his finger at a copy the eternal word of God and in his last dying breath said, and I quote: "that book, sir, is the rock on which the Republic rests". I want you to know this nation was founded on the principles of the word of the living God. The Bible is the book for me. I stand alone in the word of God, the Bible and yet the left and so many in the cultural woke church, which is a joke church, wants us to believe that we just need to roll over and quit talking about politics because the Bible and our history are not that important. But I am here to tell they are not taking our rights from us. We are gladly giving them away every single day. And I say no more. Anybody that would deny the reality that this is a Christian nation, I will sue their brain for non-support. Something is wrong with them. You got to smoke a lot of meth in mama's basement to believe that this nation is not blessed by almighty God. So, they come to me as a pastor and say: Well, you know you pastors need to stay in the pulpit and out of politics. That is exactly what is wrong with the Church. It is exactly what is wrong with politics. We could talk about that for a long time. They showed up at our church and asked why you have to talk about Trump. I said because I like him for one thing. They said why cannot you just preach the Bible. Why cannot you just preach about Jesus. I said if I preach the Bible and Jesus, then I got to call out corrupt politics like Jesus did. Because what we do not recognize is if we do not call out corrupt politicians in wicked politics, we are not going to have a platform from which to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ. We are living in days when even right now over a year into this diabolical nonsense. By the way, it was nonsense when it started, it is nonsense right now. We are over a year into this and 60 percent of the churches in America are still closed. Now look, I did not ask permission before I said this, but I am going to say it anyhow. If you go to a church that is still closed, then it is pastored by a coward. You can tell him that pastor Greg Locke said so. There is no reason that any church in the United States to be closed right this very moment. I say every church ought to be open. Jesus wants his church back. This is about authoritarianism. This whole year has been nothing but an experimental dress rehearsal. They just want to know who they can control and who's going to be a problem moving forward. Yes, we better stand up, take our liberties back. CNN showed up and this whole thing went down. They said we would like to know why you are so arrogant. Why would you be willing to kill every elderly person within 250 miles. They showed up all masked up and were freaked out we were not wearing them. I tell our folks; do not wear a mask at our church. Christians have been wearing masks far too long anyhow. They asked why you would dare to keep your church open when all

¹ LOCKE, Greg. In: Youtube [online]. May 14, 2021 [cit. 2021-12-14]. Available from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dg6VsA4niQY>. Channel Pastor Greg Locke

the other compliant pastors have decided to close down. I said and I quote: "They will be serving frosties in the lake of fire before pastor Greg Locke ever shuts down his local church because a buck wild demon possessed tyrannical government told him to". We are under religious persecution.

We better get uncomfortable church. I believe that we are not praying for another great awakening, we are going to see the greatest awakening that God has ever given us. It is going to be politically and religiously bigger than anything we have ever imagined. Because Ephesians 3:20 says he can do exceedingly abundantly above all that we could ever ask or think. I believe it is here and coming. I believe meetings like this are indicative of the hunger and the pushback of the craziness that is happening around us. May I encourage you; it is time to stand up and stand out, speak up and speak out, this is your Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego moment. Whatever you call them, they stood for righteousness in the midst of a politically corrupt organization that was so nonsense that everybody in the church and the world bowed down to the golden idol except three boys. If we are the last ones, let's suit up. This means war. We will not surrender through silence. We are going to fight and talk back. Get spiritually smart. Mouthed if we have to and we are going to stand up and say enough is enough. We want this nation back. It is going to come back because the church of the living God gets revived. John the Baptist had the personality of a rock. You could not carry on a fluid coffee conversation with John the Baptist. You know, what the Bible says about him. All of Jerusalem, Samaria, the regions around Jordan came to hear John. He was a voice crying in the wilderness. People today are hungry for a voice. They are hungry for somebody that will stand up and say: "Serving Jesus Christ will not cost you something, it will cost you everything". They are willing to pay the price. We want our Christian nation back in the name of Jesus. It belongs to us. It is time that we push back, pray, and stand up. This means war, it is time to fight! Open the churches! If you believe it, say Amen!

The key narratives adopted by nationalistic congregations

Employed narratives do not significantly diverge from the core foundation of Christian nationalism, they reflect two categories: traditional and modern. While the former promotes the fundamental bond between the United States and Christianity that entrusted it with a divine role among other countries regardless its historical inaccuracy and simplification. On the other hand, the latter catalyzes a divisive stream derived from the post-Trump American development. Arguably, if Christian nationalism had not adopted these narratives, it would not be able to attract new sympathizers. They bestow Christian nationalism with appealing image enabling mobilization of supporters. The following topics play an indispensable role in the contemporary Christian nationalism beside the traditional ones:

- the coronavirus disease, vaccination, and precautionary measures;
- alleged fraudulent nature of the 2020 presidential election;
- Donald Trump's supposititious godly role in American politics;
- the 2021 United States Capitol attack's legacy;
- CRT, abortion, and alleged ongoing cultural war subverting the religious status quo;
- anti-leftist rhetoric.

It is worth mentioning at this point that only a small number of congregations have been politicized. Although just few pastors adopted elements of Christian nationalism, social media have enabled their quick proliferation. Moreover, American society faces one of the biggest divisions in its history; therefore, individuals with mutual political opinions and religious beliefs are likely to seek a congregation that offers some level of godly justification for these views. One might argue that nationalistic churches serve as a harbor for individuals with similar political opinions not solely based on Christianity but conservatism as well. The gap between the Republican and Democratic Party has widened so much that Christian values have become a part of the GOP's agenda.

Potential security threats connected with nationalistic congregations

Whether or not the modern form of Christian nationalism involves possible violent acts is very difficult to foresee. The recent events might display what Christian nationalists could be potentially capable of. Although many try to downplay the severity of the 2021 United States Capitol attack, it clearly indicated where American security has weaknesses. Committed by an ambiguous group of perpetrators belonging to the far-right community in the range from self-proclaimed armed militias, neo-Nazis, QAnon followers to Christian nationalists who played a much bigger role than it is believed. Although the Oath Keepers, Proud Boys together with QAnon sympathizers are being predominantly associated with the insurrection, many religious leaders not only participated but delivered speeches during the rally, e.g., pastor Ken Peters is perhaps the best-known due to his preaching and presence in Washington D.C.^{1,2} Moreover, his transcribed preaching above undoubtedly glorifies the deadly event, which is linked to several casualties and more than a hundred injured.³ Thus, this article argues that the most probable security threat does not directly lie in Christian nationalism itself but the possible radicalization of congregants. Narratives combining the 2021 United States Capitol attack and alleged backsliding of American democracy could overwhelmingly contribute to an increase of the lone-wolf terrorism. As Ganor suggests, the internet allows interconnection of like-minded individuals/groups whose mutual interaction contributes to radicalization.⁴ Although Ganor built his claim on cases belonging to Islamic terrorism, this article proposes that a similar trajectory could be feasibly initiated within Christian nationalists who use online communication channels as the primary tool. In this respect, this Islamic storyline should serve as security assessment guidelines for nationalistic congregations. What began mainly as an online movement represented by only a small number of individuals has grown into a considerable size. This claim is supported by the findings published by Davies, Wu, and Frank whose analysis has proven that right-wing groups dominated in the field of online radicalization and recruitment among the extremist community throughout the

¹ INSIDER NEWS. In: *Youtube* [online]. April 24, 2021. [cit. 2021-12-20]. Available from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gttqzP68HHQ&t=207s> Channel Insider News.

² KUZNIA, Rob and Majlie de PUY KAMP, 2021. "The Pastors". In: *edition.cnn.com* [online]. [cit. 2022-02-07]. Available from: <https://edition.cnn.com/interactive/2021/06/us/capitol-riot-paths-to-insurrection/pastors.html>

³ CAMERON, Chris. 2022. "These Are the People Who Died in Connection With the Capitol Riot". In: *nytimes.com* [online]. [cit. 2022-02-10]. Available from: <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/05/us/politics/jan-6-capitol-deaths.html>

⁴ GANOR, Boaz. Understanding the Motivations of "Lone Wolf" Terrorists. *Perspectives on Terrorism*. 2021, 15(2), pp. 23.

coronavirus pandemic.¹ One should bear in mind that the most extreme form of Christian nationalism legitimizes use of violence when pursued goals are at stake.² Perhaps, it is time for the American authorities to alter its position hitherto focused merely on Islamic extremism more towards Christian nationalism that could produce an environment suitable for possible radicalization.

Fig. 2 - Pro-Trump protesters in front of the Capitol building on January 6, 2021



Social inequality is a problem American society has suffered from for a long time. Effects of Christian nationalism could potentially exacerbate this problem. Whether law enforcement in the United States truly engages in discriminatory behavior towards black Americans this article does not address, however, a recent study suggests that closer to Christian nationalist ideology Americans get more likely to believe that the police treat white and black Americans equally. Furthermore, they more probably consider perpetrated gun interference against communities of color as adequate due to their higher violent nature in comparison with white Americans. Nevertheless, such perception seems to influence the racial attitudes of people of color similarly to the way it does for white communities, at least in terms of the racial bias of law enforcement towards black Americans. In these terms, Christian nationalism must not be associated only with white congregations. Although it certainly bolsters white supremacy, Christian nationalism concurrently represents a set of cultural patterns and values that do not

¹ DAVIES, Garth; WU, Edith and Richard FRANK. 2021. *The Potential Effects of COVID-19 on Radicalisation to Violent Extremism*. [online]. [cit. 2021-12-20]. Available from: <https://gnet-research.org/2021/09/21/the-potential-effects-of-covid-19-on-radicalisation-to-violent-extremism/>

² WHITEHEAD, Andrew. 2021. "The Growing Anti-Democratic Threat of Christian Nationalism in the U.S.". In: *time.com* [online]. [cit. 2021-12-20]. Available from: <https://time.com/6052051/anti-democratic-threat-christian-nationalism/>

require those who believe in them to be white in order to understand them in the same manner. By its nature, Christian nationalism is a cultural framework that may transcend racial identity.¹

On the other hand, students of the modern Christian nationalism should not solely focus on the post-January 6 period. Suppression of the insurrection has not prevented subsequent spread of false accusations of the 2020 presidential elections' fraudulent nature. Lawmakers in 47 states have proposed over 350 bills that endeavor to decrease possible voter fraud by limiting mail, early in-person, and election day voting through stricter ID requirements, conditions bound to vote absentee eligibility, or fewer voting hours. Although one might argue these precautions would contribute to strengthening American democracy, their introduction should not have been triggered by false accusations and wide-spread support from right-wing groups. A hidden problem behind the above precautionary measures is rooted in their very nature. If more restrictive electoral laws were approved, communities of color would be very likely disproportionately impacted.² Under no circumstance, this article connects the initiatives advocating for stricter voter rules solely with a right-wing agenda, however, concurrently claims that analysis of their contribution is necessary in order to understand the attitudes of the involved parties due to their affiliation with President Trump, who has been the key figure behind the 'Stop the Steal' movement. Christian nationalists' perception divides those chosen by God represented by conservative white, natural-born Christian citizens. Thus, solely the elected ones possess political rights connected to political control in the country, while the others must be closely scrutinized, discouraged, or even denied political participation. Having in mind the problematic history of limiting who can vote in the United States together with very likely disproportional consequences, such electoral reform could pose a serious threat to American democracy.³ As Whitehead argues:

"Just as the January 6th insurrection and recent voting laws are not aberrations but a reflection of similar events in our nation's history, they too may be a bellwether of events to come if we do not acknowledge and confront Christian nationalism. Our democracy is at stake."

This article suggests that the above debated security threats might not appear in the near future; however, their prolonged disregarding could in the long-term foresight either plant a seed undermining the democratic principles of the United States or lead to prospective lone-wolf terrorism directed against the American public.

¹ PERRY, Samuel L.; WHITEHEAD, Andrew L. and Joshua T. DAVIS, God's Country in Black and Blue: How Christian Nationalism Shapes Americans' View about Police (Mis)treatment of Black. *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity*. 2019, 5(1), pp. 140-141.

² BRENNAN CENTER FOR JUSTICE. 2022. "The Impact of Voter Suppression on Communities of Color". In: *brennancenter.org* [online]. [cit. 2022-02-10]. Available from: <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/impact-voter-suppression-communities-color>

³ WHITEHEAD, Andrew. 2021. "The Growing Anti-Democratic Threat of Christian Nationalism in the U.S.". In: *time.com* [online]. [cit. 2021-12-20]. Available from: <https://time.com/6052051/anti-democratic-threat-christian-nationalism/>

Conclusion

This article endeavored to introduce Christian nationalism to Czech and European security communities. The interpretation of its historical development, core principles, modern form, and adopted narratives in the post-Trump era together with transcribed preaching should provide readers with essential knowledge about this complex topic, which uninterruptedly develops. Christian nationalism is not a new ideological stream, its foundations were set primarily during the early existence of the United States. Whereas promoted core beliefs remained relatively unmodified, secondary narratives generally emerge from occurring social cleavages that have changed over the past decades. Notwithstanding, it constitutes one of many ideological approaches religious groups belonging to the New Christian Right might adopt.

To answer our initial question, this article proposes two explanations. Firstly, one might disregard its seriousness due to a fact that it has been tied to the United States since its foundation, therefore, might appear not as dangerous. Many, especially after the 9/11, have solely focused on security threats embodied in Islamic terrorism and ignored those associated with Christian nationalism. Secondly, its unquestionable ability to exploit two highly divisive narratives, the 2020 presidential election and coronavirus pandemic, has exacerbated its potential to expand even further and subsequently attract more sympathizers. All three pastors interpreted above built their services around these two events together with religious worshiping. Thus, this article considers such behavior an ideal environment for possible radicalization that could, in the most extreme scenario, lead to violent activities carried out primarily by lone-wolf terrorists. Moreover, the dichotomy between the “true” and other Americans undoubtedly subverts the very foundation of the American democracy that grants equal rights to all citizens. These are the reasons why Christian nationalism still matters and should not be treated as a second-class security issue.

To conclude, although American and European approaches towards religion differ, observers from the Old Continent should not forget that only very few congregants can be associated with Christian nationalism. A comprehensive observation together with the understanding of cultural differences precondition any successful assessment.

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- Fig. 2 - Pastor Ken Peters appearance on January 5, 2021, at pro-Trump rally
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S U M M A R Y

This article is devoted to Christian nationalism in the United States with regard to its historical development, modern form, and potential security threats. Primarily aims at providing the Czech and European security communities with essential knowledge about this topic that has become closely associated with the Trump administration in recent years. Besides a theoretical discussion, it describes two prominent nationalistic congregations. Moreover, to increase the authenticity of presented facts, readers are provided with transcribed church services of three American pastors. In its conclusion, the article suggests why Christian nationalism constitutes a relevant security issue for American democracy.

Keywords: Christian nationalism, Christian nationalists, congregations, narratives, the United States.

RESUMÉ

ZILVAR, Martin: KŘEŠŤANSKÝ NACIONALISMUS VE SPOJENÝCH STÁTECH. PROČ NA NĚM STÁLE ZÁLEŽÍ VE 21. STOLETÍ?

Článek představuje české a evropské bezpečnostní komunitě problematiku křesťanského nacionalismu ve Spojených státech s ohledem na jeho historický vývoj, současnou podobu a potenciální bezpečnostní rizika. Primárně cílí na poskytnutí klíčových znalostí tohoto velmi diskutovaného tématu často spojovaného s Trumpovou administrativou. Kromě teoretické diskuze popisuje dvě prominentní nacionalistické kongregace. Čtenářům zároveň poskytuje přepisy bohoslužeb tří amerických pastorů. Ve svém závěru zhodnocuje, proč je křesťanský nacionalismus stále relevantním bezpečnostním rizikem pro americkou demokracii.

Klíčová slova: křesťanský nacionalismus, křesťanští nacionalisté, kongregace, narativy, Spojené státy.