

## CHAPTER 2

# Zombie Nationalism

*The Sexual Politics of White Evangelical Christian Nihilism*

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### ABSTRACT

*Despite their purported demographic and institutional decline, White evangelical voters were instrumental in the election of Donald Trump in 2016, and even more so in his 2020 loss. The story of Trump’s electoral successes among Christian voters in the last two elections is in large part the story of religious nationalism—and White Christian nationalism in particular—because Trump personifies the convergence of nationalism-infused forms of messianism and apocalypticism intrinsic to White evangelicalism, which culminate in QAnon cultic ideology. However, these same ethnoreligious/nationalist patterns and logics extend much further back than Trump’s insurgent candidacy. This chapter traces the recurring, resurgent patterns of “zombie nationalism” among White evangelical Christians in the United States over the last half century that emerged in response to periods of significant societal change and certain recurring sociopolitical issues. In particular, alongside established elective affinities around ethnicity (Whiteness) and religion (Christianity), this chapter makes the case for incorporating*

*gender and sexual politics as key factors in the articulation and legitimation of religious nationalism in the United States. White Christian nationalism tends to reemerge as a salient political force during periods of rapid social change and diversification, driven by racialized religious grievances symptomatic of Nietzsche's concept of resentment, or the paradoxical internalization and reprojection of a person's or group's perceived endangerment, victimhood, and/or suffering, in order to gain power. Drawing on examples of marriage equality and reproductive rights, this chapter demonstrates how an understanding of sexual politics is key to both apprehending and breaking the cyclical reanimation of White Christian nationalism. Escaping the nihilistic impulses driving these cycles will require White evangelicals to develop new hermeneutical tools capable of transforming the exclusionary patterns of racism, ethnocentrism, heteronormativity, and patriarchy that fuel the engine of resentment animating zombie nationalism.*

Reports of the death of White Christian America have been greatly exaggerated. Amid numerous predictions of its impending demise in the second decade of the twenty-first century, White Christian America has resurged again politically and culturally. If not as bombastic as the emergent Moral Majority of the early 1980s, nor as institutionally consolidated as the Christian Coalition of the 1990s, the latest self-assertion of White Christian America is more concentrated and immediately politically influential than either earlier episode.

White Christian political mobilization was a central driver that delivered Donald Trump to victory in the 2016 U.S. presidential election. White Christians self-identifying as “evangelical”—26 percent of voters in the 2016 election<sup>1</sup>—marshaled their votes for Trump in greater numbers than for any single candidate in the previous four presidential elections, a rate of 81 percent.<sup>2</sup> White Catholics followed closely, voting for Trump at a rate of 60 percent.<sup>3</sup> Nor was the 2016 election a momentary forced “choice of a lesser evil” for White evangelicals. A broad plurality of White evangelicals supported Trump throughout the primaries leading up to the general election, despite having a slate of alternative candidates from which to choose.<sup>4</sup> More significantly, White evangelicals increased their support for Trump and his policies throughout his presidency. They

supported his constricting immigration and walled border policies (including separating children from their asylum seeking parents<sup>5</sup>), his prohibition of immigrants from various Muslim-majority countries (upheld by the Supreme Court in June 2018), and his deploying federal troops to violently quell peaceful protests in the Black Lives Matter uprisings of 2020.<sup>6</sup> By the end of Trump's presidency, the more frequently a White evangelical attended church, the stronger his or her support for the Trump agenda was likely to be.<sup>7</sup> In full awareness of what a Trump presidency would be like, White evangelical Christian support trended further upward for Trump's attempted reelection in 2020 (84 percent).<sup>8</sup>

Religious nationalism accounts for much of the upsurge of White evangelical voting in the 2016 and 2020 elections.<sup>9</sup> And yet, elements of nationalism do not merely explain the backlash voting patterns in two elections. Rather, they illuminate an animating—and *reanimating*—impulse, pattern, and logic that has surged and resurged for more than a half century in White Christian America.

In this chapter I demonstrate how tracing the multiple, interwoven threads of religious nationalism in White evangelical Christian America illuminates the complex reasons that it is far from its death throes. The nationalism of White evangelicals in the Trump era is not a new phenomenon. It is one that reanimates past—and recurring—logics and patterns of ethnoreligious nationalism in the United States.<sup>10</sup> This dynamic is manifest in encounters with (allegedly) threatening societal change. It persists by self-protectively morphing and resurging sociopolitically, at distinctive points in time, and by reigniting in response to specific issues. I describe this persistently recurring dynamic and pattern as “zombie nationalism.”

Whiteness and Christianity have long endured as legitimating forms of American nationalism.<sup>11</sup> And yet, focus upon Whiteness and Christianity alone leaves multiple dynamics of ethnoreligious nationalism of White evangelicals obscured from view. Attending to gender norms and sexual politics as drivers of ethnoreligious nationalism is equally indispensable.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, I argue that White Christian sexual politics uniquely illuminate the elective affinities between ethnicity, religion, and nationalism in this case, as they are inextricably interwoven with the normative ideals of White evangelical Christianity. Sexual politics, I will show, infuse the sociopolitical processes by which zombie nationalism asserts and reasserts itself—time and again—in a rapidly changing context.

Nationalist dynamics sometimes camouflage themselves. They may persevere through seemingly transformational processes where the rhetoric and surface appearance changes, but the purposes and effects are re-created, rescripted, and reinforced in new ways. In my second section, I argue that, in the case of White evangelical Christians in the United States, this process of preservation through transformation is propelled by a dynamic that Friedrich Nietzsche termed *ressentiment*, an attitude toward the world that animates the “zombie nationalism” White evangelical Christians have exemplified for sixty years. In short, by illuminating the recurrent patterns of sexual politics propelling zombie nationalism, I demonstrate that the beating heart of much contemporary, White evangelical Christianity is, in fact, Nietzschean nihilism.

In the third section, I explicate the reasons that the zombie nationalism of White Christian evangelicals cannot be reduced without remainder to the interlacing, elective affinities of ethnicity, religion, and nationality. I examine in detail the ways that *sexual politics* operates as a distinct driver of zombie nationalism, and how the nihilism associated with Nietzsche’s account of *ressentiment* facilitates this. The most recent resurrection of White evangelical nationalism bears patterns of refusal, resistance, political reanimation, and resurgence that recur in new form, yet distinctly replicate earlier episodes of refusal and resistance, specifically regarding earlier bans on interracial sex, marriage, and procreation. In the concluding section, I explore what it might mean theologically and hermeneutically for White evangelical Christians to engage transformatively, rather than reacting protectively and oppositionally, in the face of the changes that characterize the present context.

#### THE ZOMBIFICATION OF WHITE CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM

Recent studies indicate that White Christian America is rapidly aging and diminishing in population, its institutions are receding, and its influence waning. If demography is destiny, the argument runs, the relevant demographic trends indicate that White Christian America is dying.<sup>13</sup>

Amid these projected realities, Robert Jones warns of the emergence of a White evangelical Christian “Frankenstein’s monster,” an entity stitched together from the remnant fragments of formerly hegemonic cultural and

institutional bodies. Though long decaying, they become reanimated and propelled by the surging currents and organizing shocks of mobilizing for specific political and culture war causes. Frankenstein's monster thus stands in as a metaphor for the kind of aggressive, concentrated culture war resurgence that White evangelicalism has taken on in the face of its demographic decline, and that it has opted for in its political resurgence under Trump, and in successive waves of *Trumpism* (which has surged beyond the Trump presidency itself).<sup>14</sup> And yet, careful inspection of Mary Shelley's classic narrative shows that Jones's analogy breaks down in ways that are detrimental to the point he seeks to convey with it. Exploring the analogy further reveals that there is a more descriptively and analytically illuminating comparison available.

Throughout the modern and late modern world, one finds many expressions of fascination with monsters. Mary Shelley perhaps most famously and influentially portrayed monstrosity in the modern world through her creation of Dr. Frankenstein's monster. Shelly infused her creation with acute self-awareness, hyper-self-reflexivity, and (ironically) compassion as an essential feature of natural life. The creature's desire for empathetic relationship, yet acute recognition of his loneliness and power—a beautiful soul enshrouded within the body of stitched-together corpse fragments and inspired by the overreaching genius of modern medical materialism—could only be hated and shunned for the monstrosity of its external appearance.

At one level, Shelley's monster was a model of true humanity—vulnerable, compassionate, and, because of that, suffering a life brought into being out of death. It was the marginalization of the creature's humanity, interspersed by his desperate search for empathetic, charitable companionship, that drove him to terrorize, but ultimately mourn the death of his creator, Victor Frankenstein.<sup>15</sup> Paradoxically, in virtue of their revulsion at the unnaturalness of his external features, the humans he encountered could only perceive the unalloyed humanity of Dr. Frankenstein's creation as a form of repulsive monstrosity. Their perception of a monstrous creature was, in effect, a mirror image of the destructive monstrosity incipient in the heart of modern humanity.

In contrast to Jones's analogy of a White evangelical "Frankenstein's monster," the ethnoreligious nationalism that animates contemporary U.S. White evangelicalism is fashioned much more in the image of the zombies of George Romero's film *Dawn of the Dead* (1978). Like Romero's

zombies (and in diametric contrast to Shelley's creation), this mutation of nationalism has demonstrated little capacity for the kind of self-discovery, hyper-self-reflexivity, critical-reflectiveness, compassion for the living, and desire for an evolving relationship conveyed in the tragic vulnerability of Victor Frankenstein's monster.<sup>16</sup> In the Romero original, the zombies emerge slowly. They traverse the terrain with seemingly infinitesimal motions. Their power is in the ways they pursue their objectives in mindless, lock-step conformity, and with undeterrable resolve. So, it is for the social and ideological patterns that inspire the latest resurrection of White evangelical Christian political resurgence. This pattern is reflected in dynamics of re-animation born of motivating commitments and beliefs ("worldview") that are not amenable to contrary evidence.<sup>17</sup> Such recurring dynamics are fueled by U.S. White evangelical Christians conceptualizing themselves as an increasingly marginalized remnant in a society that (putatively) originally did, and (allegedly) should still, reflect their central identity and values.<sup>18</sup> They perceive themselves to be perennially persecuted victims of an aggressively anti-Christian "secular" society.<sup>19</sup> For White evangelicals, these grievances infuse (and further propagate themselves through) pop-culture variations on spiritual warfare, end-time apocalypticism, and messianism. This renders White evangelicals susceptible to extreme forms of cognitive dissonance, and radicalization.<sup>20</sup> As a result, many Trump-era evangelical Christians are primed to embrace "end-time" and messianism-inflected conspiracy theories dressed in the garb of Trump-driven, Republican politics. From this ensues a proclivity to position their political and cultural opponents on the far side of a Manichaeic divide, and to infuse contemporary politics with cosmic urgency.

During the Trump presidency, for example, White evangelical Christians were recruited in ever-increasing numbers into QAnon conspiracy ideology.<sup>21</sup> Some evangelical thinkers have sounded the alarm about this trend among White evangelicals. They see the evangelical embrace of QAnon as a departure from true evangelicalism into an altogether different, heretical religious movement.<sup>22</sup> And yet, this makes evangelical denial of its relation to QAnon too easy and un-self-critical. Clearly, not all evangelicals are QAnon followers. And not all QAnon followers are evangelicals. However, in fact, many White evangelicals are primed to embrace QAnon ideology for reasons intrinsic to twentieth- and twenty-first-century White evangelicalism. Indeed, ethno-religious

nationalism—and the distinctive form of zombie nationalism I describe here—is one form of connective tissue creating the symbiosis between much White evangelicalism and QAnon conspiracy ideology.

*QAnon and White Evangelical Nationalism*

QAnon theories, and internet “drop” events associated with them, emerged in the second year of Trump’s presidency and quickly evolved into an increasingly mainstream religio-political movement promoted by Trump (via Twitter).<sup>23</sup> They portray him as a messianic figure who is a bulwark for U.S. White evangelicals and other putatively “patriotic” populations against assaults upon Christian culture. “Q” is a clandestine (that is, “anonymous,” hence, “QAnon”) internet presence whose viral posts and YouTube videos—frequently sprinkled with quotations from Christian scripture (e.g., 2 Chronicles 7:14) and soliciting prayer from his/her followers—purport to expose the insidious inner workings of the “deep state,” and the intrinsic deceptiveness of “mainstream media.” “Q” purports to reveal how the struggles against these are infused with apocalyptic significance, cohere with end-time biblical prophecy, and aim at the retrieval and defense of the United States’ true identity as a Christian nation.<sup>24</sup>

In its most acute form, QAnon conspiracy ideology alleges that the Democratic Party is controlled by a cabal of global elite (“globalist”) and “deep state” anti-Christian and anti-Trump actors (specifically naming the Rothschilds, George Soros, Bill and Hilary Clinton, Bill Gates, and “Hollywood” figures, among others). It further alleges that this cabal engages in pedophilia, child sex-trafficking, ritual cannibalism of children, and worships Satan.<sup>25</sup> This ideology amplifies Trump’s baseless claims that he won the 2020 presidential election, and that that election was stolen from him and his followers.<sup>26</sup> Though they seem so ridiculous as to be dismissed out of hand, in fact, White evangelicals in the United States embrace these claims at astonishing rates, rates far higher than their nonevangelical, Republican counterparts.<sup>27</sup>

Examined in terms of their religio-cultural structures, these conspiracy-fueled patterns of demonization and scapegoating of opponents are neither novel nor especially unusual. They reanimate distinct features of widely circulated antisemitic conspiracy theories, such as the Protocols of the Elders of Zion, an early twentieth-century Russian czarist fabricated

account of a Jewish economic and political elite allegedly controlling global politics and economics. QAnon crosses various “Protocols” tropes with the recurrent “blood libel” accusations that inspired numerous Christian pogroms against European Jews, namely, that Jews kidnapped Christian children and used their blood in ritual observance. QAnon demonizes and scapegoats its targets in similar ways, and similarly inspires violence.<sup>28</sup> The antisemitic contours of QAnon ideology make it especially attractive to White supremacists and White nationalists (e.g., the Proud Boys). Its ethno-nationalist elements, intermingling with its religious dimensions, create an intoxicating elixir for White evangelicals who may think of themselves as sharing little in common with avowed White nationalists or card-carrying White supremacists. Yet, their elective affinities, as Philip Gorski also examines in his contribution to this volume (chapter 1), converge in the connective tissue of ethnoreligious nationalism.<sup>29</sup>

Trump-era White evangelicals have widely adopted various messianic interpretations of Trump. Many of these feed directly into QAnon claims that Trump is an “end-time” defender of U.S. Christian culture.<sup>30</sup> American evangelical culture amplifies these claims and dynamics exponentially. QAnon is, in effect, one part Frank Peretti spiritual warfare,<sup>31</sup> one part *Left Behind* series apocalypticism,<sup>32</sup> one-part Elders of Zion antisemitic conspiracy theory, and one part *Celebrity Apprentice*.

End-time, apocalyptic, messianic drivers of White evangelical Christian nationalism are not new. They have a long history among White U.S. evangelicals. The best-selling, end-time prophecy publishing industry of the 1970s and 80s, launched by Hal Lindsey’s *The Late Great Planet Earth* (1970), and its influence on evangelical political engagement in the 1980s, is one prior example of the various entanglement of strands that reemerge in evangelical Christian enmeshment in QAnon ideology. The 1970s and 80s end-time prophecy and apocalypticism shaped White evangelical attitudes toward U.S. national identity in the Cold War. It informed their views toward political policy, for example, regarding the prospects of nuclear war, which many evangelicals viewed as the form that biblically prophesied apocalypse might take. Indeed, Lindsey claimed, it was the Antichrist that would “delude the world with promises of peace.”<sup>33</sup> Ronald Reagan catered to his evangelical base by occasionally entertaining their apocalypticism at various points throughout his presidency.<sup>34</sup> This occurred again with the

release of the *Left Behind* book series during the 1990s. Selling about 80 million copies altogether, this series shaped evangelical views about the State of Israel, and especially fueled Christian Zionism.<sup>35</sup>

QAnon ideology symbiotically feeds upon the impulses toward apocalypticism and messianism that are intrinsic to White evangelicalism. It infuses these with Republican politics, retrieving and synergistically reanimating prior patterns of religious nationalism. These occur, for example, in reemergent concepts of the Christian nation (peoplehood) as a victimized-yet-faithful and long-suffering remnant, that conception's interwovenness with embattled Christian identity and culture (a myth of origin), and the exceptional role of the United States in God's providential plan within world history (the exceptionalism of a "new Israel"), and especially the return of the Christian messiah (messianism). The cyclical resurgence of these dynamics exemplifies "zombie nationalism."<sup>36</sup>

Rather than the demise prognosticated by social scientists, the case of "the end of White Christian America" is an example by which to examine how forms of religious authority and identity navigate conflicts precipitated by rapid change, relativized significance in a diversifying context, and might vie for constructive transformation—or retrenchment through insidious radicalization—in the shifting contexts of modernity. Particularly illuminating are the ways that White evangelicals innovate—or degenerate—using modern discourse on religion, law, and nationalism to consolidate and reassert their positions, rather than reject or modify those. Equally instructive are the ways they innovate—or degenerate—using their own religious self-understandings and scriptural practices in these circumstances.

Any hope for constructive transformation will entail grappling with changes in registers that have emerged in U.S. society more broadly, registers of race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality. At the same time, responding intelligently and intentionally requires that White Christians, in a spirit of teachability, come to terms with past—and recurring—patterns of racism, ethnocentrism, heteronormativity, and patriarchy that remain extant (if at times sublimated or camouflaged). The extent to which they persist in the future in various forms will depend on whether White evangelical Christians deal with these, and how. It is here that the distinct terms of nationalism discourse are currently limited, but hold great promise, to illuminate the nature and character of the problems.

*Limitations of the Standard Terms:  
Race, Religion, Nationalism*

“Nationalism” can be a blunt a category left without qualification. For my purposes here, I situate that concept in a line of thinking indebted to Max Weber. On this account, it is an analytical concept that is intrinsically multifocal because of, in part, its elective affinities with other modes of constructing, justifying, and legitimating group identity and cohesion. Some define “nationalism” as an intrinsically religious category in the sense that it entails an idolatrous worship of the nation and the nation’s manifestation in the machinations of statecraft.<sup>37</sup> In contrast to this, the Weberian categories admit of more nuance and flexibility.<sup>38</sup>

The term “ethnic” indicates “origin by birth or descent.” And, in fact, Weber influentially defined “ethnicity” as a “subjective belief in common descent.” According to this definition, whether common descent is based on objective realities is largely beside the point. A fluid list of features are frequently invoked as material bases for shared ethnic identities (e.g., language, manners and mores, shared origin stories, among others). The key for Weber is the commonly held *belief* in, or basic perception and embodied sense of, the “naturalness”—frequently conceived as inherited or received—of shared membership in the group, and the community’s common origin and ensuing destiny. In the United States, being “White” is a category that has been fluid enough to gradually encompass differentiating identities that were initially mutually exclusive (Irish, Italian, Polish, and even Ashkenazi Jews, among others).

In sum, then, both nationality and ethnicity are historically produced or constructed. Both occur in a group’s unifying account of, and belief in, its “common descent” and constituent features of shared identity.<sup>39</sup> The concepts of nation and ethnicity differ in that nations and national identities tend to be intricately linked to concerns for legitimation of themselves in sociopolitical contexts and purposes. These pertain to political autonomy, authentication and justification of the state with which that people administers its nationhood (i.e., nation-state), or to the demarcation and preservation of a group’s boundaries and identity in a diverse national context.<sup>40</sup>

Methodologically, the multifocal Weberian lens has the virtue of deploying distinctions, instead of presuming dichotomies, which illuminate elective affinities—as opposed to identical (or dichotomously defined)

essences—between religion, nationalism, and ethnicity.<sup>41</sup> This lens highlights how both ethnicity and religion (fluidly conceptualized as they may be) can interweave and become mutually reinforcing (and often tend or gravitate toward one another) for the purposes of demarcating and legitimating a political entity, claims for autonomy or political influence, or for cultural prestige, defense, and/or identity preservation. Identifications and justifications demonstrating such an elective affinity would be “ethnoreligious,” and reflect the elective affinities between ethnicity and religion for such purposes, on Weber’s account. In such an example, with a shared belief both in a common descent and in shared, identifying cultural features (ethnos), a group generates even greater practical and institutional cohesion by interweaving these with the practices, understandings, and institutions of a religious tradition. Or, if elective affinities did not occur in formal interconnection between ethnicity and religious elements of a historical religious tradition, the affinity might occur through “selective retrieval” of elements from proximal religious traditions and practices, deployed for purposes of interpreting the meaning and amplifying a sense of transcendent or world-historical significance of the bonds that bind (*religare/religio*) that group together. Generally, such ethnoreligious justification would relate to nationalism insofar as its purposes in demarcating the group also served purposes of generating and amplifying the shared belief in, cohesion, and legitimation of that group for sociopolitical purposes, historical significance, and cultural prestige.<sup>42</sup>

To take one example, ethnoreligious nationalist identification would construe White Protestant Christians as distinctive inheritors of the legacy of Anglo-Protestant Christian values. It would base this understanding in the conceptions, symbols, cultural meanings, manners, and mores considered to be distinctive of the American nation in its founding along Anglo-Protestant lines. It might invoke a claim of “origins” to justify its understanding of the nature, character, and identity that the nation-state was intended, and/or ought, to reflect in perpetuity. Such claims would maintain, for example, that the United States is a nation founded upon “Christian” or “Judeo-Christian” values. It would find these encapsulated in, say, the Ten Commandments, and also in values of religious freedom, individual liberty, and the belief that it is a nation “chosen” by God and designated a vessel to spread those values throughout the world. This would reflect an example of “ethno-religious nationalism.”<sup>43</sup>

As a matter of fact, the above reflects many of the self-understandings of White Protestant Christians through the nineteenth- to the mid-twentieth-century United States. Indeed, ethnoreligious nationalism fitting such a description was at the heart of Protestant, anti-Catholic xenophobia throughout the nineteenth century and twentieth century. The hierarchy and authority structure of the Catholic Church (derided as antithetical to the Protestant doctrine of “the priesthood of all believers” and more democratic church politics) was deemed inimical to religious liberty. Allegiance to the pope and Vatican, and Catholic Churches that reflected distinctive ethnonational cultures (e.g., Irish-Catholic, Polish-Catholic, Lithuanian-Catholic, and so forth) were portrayed as “dual,” “multiple,” or “conflicting allegiances,” and as antidemocratic, rendering questionable the sincerity of Catholics’ loyalty to the United States.<sup>44</sup>

Of course, many White Christian Americans (including White Catholics) now hold similar views of Muslim Americans through the first decades of the early twenty-first century. Indeed, it was the anti-Muslim rhetoric and policies characterizing Trump’s presidency that elicited the support of many White Christians.<sup>45</sup> Pew Research Center surveyed White evangelical laypeople regarding which issues were “very important” to them in deciding how to vote in 2016. Contrary to many presumptions that typical “culture war” issues (antiabortion, most conspicuously) drove their voting, threats of terrorism (89%) and the economy (87%) far outpaced concern for Supreme Court appointments (70%) and abortion (52%). Moreover, the results for evangelical laypeople diverged starkly from the reasons reported by evangelical religious leaders. For the leadership, Supreme Court appointments and antiabortion topped the list. Most White evangelical Christians (74%) reported sustained support for Trump’s ban on immigration from seven Muslim majority countries (but Iraq was later exempted from the ban). Roughly the same percentage remained concerned about the likelihood of religious extremist acts committed in the name of Islam around the world, and in the United States.<sup>46</sup>

### *Conceptualizing Race*

Why and how to focus on *Whiteness* in recent evangelical political activism, and in regard to Trumpian populism more generally? Indeed, some argue that, although Christian nationalism is profoundly influential in recent

U.S. politics, culture, and society more broadly, “being White,” or “White evangelical”—even the “religiousness” of such nationalism—has very little to do with the deeper, motivating interests and purposes of Christian nationalism. On the one hand, they argue, Christian nationalism frequently underwrites and fuels political support and organizing for specific issues associated with, for example, pro “law and order” policies, against gun control, and anti-same-sex marriage policies, among others. Yet, they argue, what *really* motivates and fuels their activism is the desire for power. On this account, “Christian nationalism” is the means by which conservative Americans of whatever race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic class desire to “institutionalize conservative Christian cultural preferences in America’s policies and self-identity.”<sup>47</sup> This account reduces Christian nationalism to a multipurpose tool by which conservative-minded Americans pursue power and political and cultural influence. They do so by baptizing their political aims in religious language and moral signifiers. Race is not entirely irrelevant on this account, of course. At bottom, however, this is about the pursuit of power by the already privileged to “defend against shifts in the culture toward equality for groups that have historically lacked the access to levers of power—women and sexual, racial, ethnic, and religious minorities.”<sup>48</sup>

Rather than enhancing the precision with which we might understand and treat the nature, character, and influence of “Christian nationalism” in contemporary public discussion and debate, this account actually dulls it. It occludes the ways that, in the United States, pursuit and protection of political power and cultural influence continue to be a discourse intrinsically inscribed by racial and ethnic valences, identities, and differences.<sup>49</sup>

Of course, thinkers and social critics charge that scholars, academics, and social commentators of all sorts are eager to uncover and impute charges of racism to conservative and religious members of U.S. society where (they claim) racism does not really exist. However, such objections deploy exceedingly narrow concepts of “race” and “racism.” “Racism” easily becomes a sanitized term that obscures more than it illuminates. It is sanitized insofar as it purports to name intentional and explicit attitudes associated with discrimination and bigotry that an individual holds toward a person or group based upon their racial identity or characteristics the person shares with a racialized group. Without important qualifications, such a conception elides structural causes and conditions of (structural

forms) of racism. It obscures the ways that cultural practices, conceptions, implicit and unrecognized biases camouflage participation in structural forms of racism or make them feel and appear “not wrong.”<sup>50</sup>

So understood, race has always inscribed religious practices and religious discourse in the United States. These intersect and inextricably interweave with ethnicity, gender, and class. By diminishing the racial dimensions of this history, and its effect upon the present—by treating it as, at most, secondary and dependent in significance—this account detaches the power and longtime prevalence of Christian ethnonationalism from historical specificity. It erases the specific, radical changes to which White evangelical and Catholic Christians are reacting in their embrace of Trumpism. It thus leaves the concept of religious nationalism to hover in the realm of the generic and abstract, as an instrument of generically “conservative Americans.” Similarly, it uproots the structural and cultural nature and character of “race” and “racism,” a dynamic that reflects White American Christians broad refusal to recognize racism as a structural and cultural phenomenon (rather than a matter of personal attitude and explicit belief, from which most White people easily excuse themselves).<sup>51</sup>

As we will see in the next section, it is the withering away and feared loss of phenomena such as racially inflected advantage (however tacit) and protection of what Weber identifies as a central driver of ethnonationalism, that is, “cultural prestige” and influence, that currently mobilize White evangelical Christians in mass patterns of behavior and voting trends that reveal a degree of uniformity (and amplification of previous logics and behaviors) not seen heretofore. At the same time, these also reflect patterns and logics of in-group protection, survival, and political reassertion than have been evident before.

Beyond reduction to a group’s “pursuit of power,” how do racial, ethnic, and religious identities intersect to influence the distinctly oppositional and conflictual appeals to nationalism in the context of the Trump presidency? What is at stake? Again, Weber’s account of elective affinities between ethnicity, religion, and nationalism permits a more fluid and nonreductionistic, multifocal conceptualization—one in which ethnicity and race interweave with and infuse a conception of religious identities and practices—making that identity, in part, distinctly what it is. To put it in terms from Gorski’s chapter, what results is a compound. These two interact synergistically,

further, with all the religious and ethnic/racialized features that constitute U.S. nationalism (Christian and Jewish myths, symbols, origin stories, and exceptionalist claims for the nation's special favor, duties, and world-historical significance in relation to the Judeo-Christian God). The result, again, is the more flexible analytical category of ethnoreligious nationalism. Redefined philosophically, the animating process bears striking resemblance to the nihilistic innovation that occurs by way of spiritual defensiveness and retaliation described by Nietzsche in *The Genealogy of Morals*.

“EVIL BE THOU MY GOOD”:

WHITE EVANGELICAL RESENTMENT AS ETHNORELIGIOUS  
NATIONALISM

Diversification by non-European immigrant people groups has been occurring at an increasingly rapid pace in the United States over the past half century. This has occurred especially in the wake of amplified Asian and Latin American immigration since passage of the Hart–Celler Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965.<sup>52</sup> Numerous studies indicate that increasingly rapid societal diversification—accompanied by experience and/or fear that one's majority status is diminishing, and that such reorientation is a necessary part of the increasing justness of a society—triggers identity defensiveness.<sup>53</sup> Not surprisingly, then, White people in the United States now widely report that they perceive discrimination against White people to be as significant a problem as discrimination against Blacks and other minorities.<sup>54</sup> Such surveys correlate with the upsurge of White entitlement, White fragility, and increasingly reactionary and virulent forms of White supremacy in recent decades, and especially in the 2016 and 2020 elections.<sup>55</sup> These are circumstances ripe for exploitation by appeals to White identity and grievance politics, which characterize much of the conflict and divisiveness in contemporary U.S. society.

White evangelical Christian perceptions of discrimination track closely with the reported grievance trends of White Americans generally. Eighty percent of White evangelicals report “perceived in-group embattlement,” alleging that “discrimination against Christians is as big a problem as discrimination against other groups in America.”<sup>56</sup> A majority of White evangelical Christians claim that “American culture and way of life” have worsened

since the 1950s.<sup>57</sup> Hence White evangelicals' widespread attunement to the invitation to "make America great again." White evangelical Christianity interweaves with conservative politics in the United States. Indeed, White evangelical Christians demonstrate marked uniformity in their political affiliations—predominantly Republican.<sup>58</sup>

Evangelical Christian members of minority racial and ethnic groups diverge greatly from White evangelicals in their political views and voting practices.<sup>59</sup> Non-White evangelicals are less politically conservative on numerous social and political issues, and generally less aligned with Republican Party affiliation, than White evangelicals. They diverge on issues such as immigration policy and militant enforcement of national borders, the realities of climate change, progressive taxation of the rich, the government's role in providing health care, support for the Black Lives Matter movement, and the present-day effect of the legacy of slavery in the United States.<sup>60</sup> Janelle Wong makes the case that, on the one hand, these divergences are owing to non-White evangelicals' experiences as members of racial or ethnic minority groups—their experiences of varying degrees and forms of nonmajority standing, and often, struggles against forms of marginalization related to immigration and immigrant status—in the United States. On the other hand, even more importantly, Wong's work indicates a difference in minority and immigrant evangelicals in virtue of what they lack. Namely, they do not harbor a similar sense of "grievance" and perception that they have "lost" a culture and society that once was (putatively) rightfully theirs. White evangelicals, by contrast, perceive themselves becoming an increasingly embattled, politically less influential, culturally marginal, discriminated against, and soon to be minority group.<sup>61</sup> The temptation is for White evangelical politics to become—insofar as it is not already—inspired and driven by a perception of its own endangerment, and a spirit of victimhood, turned inward upon itself, exemplifying what Nietzsche called *ressentiment*.<sup>62</sup>

As Nietzsche had it, *ressentiment* is a process by which a person or group responds to its own perceived endangerment, victimhood, and/or suffering by internalizing its angst and frustrating and festering desire for revenge, then projecting it outward as means by which to assert itself. It wields its alleged victimization as a covert means of conjuring and asserting power—even dominance—in the form of retribution against what

it perceives (and claims) to be the source of its precarity. *Ressentiment* is self-deceiving in that the source of the group's power—its amplification of its own alleged victimization—produces an inability to accurately perceive the true cause of its perception of self-suffering.<sup>63</sup> *Ressentiment* transvalues (revalues) values in order to locate meaningfulness in the group's perception of its marginalization and suffering. They claim that this is their pursuit of true justice, not revenge. The group then repurposes that putative suffering and alleged endangerment as a weapon. The transvaluation of values becomes a means of a form of spiritualized self-protection and reprisal.<sup>64</sup>

For example, a group might reposition the diminishment (or relativization) of its own prior cultural power and significance as its having become, allegedly, a culture perennially under attack. The group may do this, for example, by construing some emergent, newly established recognition and equality for a previously unrecognized and marginalized group that it opposes as discrimination against its sacred beliefs, and an infringement upon its rights of belief and practice to continue treating that previously “deviant” group as inferior. In such a case it reacts by transvaluing values and concepts. For example, political and legal recognition, and just treatment, of the previously excluded group now constitutes the formerly hegemonic group's victimization and infringement upon its rights. It does this rather than recognizing and adjusting, adapting, and transforming itself in the face of new realities, and a more precise and encompassing account of justice.<sup>65</sup> What they claim to be “justice” for them (in this case protection of their right to religious freedom) is, in fact, their transvaluation of values of justice and equality in a defensive and retaliatory reaction born of *ressentiment*.

In its general contours, *ressentiment* becomes a source of power because it is creative. It invents by transposing the meaning of values, and the orientation of actions that ensue therefrom, in virtue of the group's self-deceived conviction that its members are the people who are *truly* endangered, and in pursuit of true justice. In this way, even “the highest values devalue themselves,” despite the stated intentions of those who might promulgate those values as absolute or nonnegotiable.<sup>66</sup> This value transvaluation—and thereby, in the process, group self-invention and assertion—reveals how the treasured beliefs and alleged inviolable truths of the group are, in fact, symptomatic of a western mythos (a dynamic Nietzsche

described as indicative of nihilism).<sup>67</sup> In the present case, the mythos manifests in the outworking of a particular form of ethnoreligious nationalism. This process of transvaluation and self-invention fits Nietzsche's description of nihilism (even if tacitly so and/or unintended by the group in question).

Held up to the recent history of White evangelical Christians, *ressentiment* describes an animating dynamic for the ways that ethnoreligious nationalist logics exemplify recurrent patterns of self-preservation through transformation, reanimation, and resurgence that constitute the zombie nationalism at the heart of White evangelical, culture war Christianity. This pattern of *ressentiment* among White Christians occurs nowhere more dramatically than in White evangelical and White Catholic Christians' present-day, and previous, discourses on sexual politics.

#### THE SEXUAL POLITICS OF ETHNORELIGIOUS NATIONALISM

One example of sexual politics that triggers the *ressentiment* of White U.S. evangelicals is marriage equality for LGBTQ people. Indeed, until very recently, homosexuality in U.S. society was treated as exemplifying a kind of monstrosity, or moral abomination. Same-sex attraction was alleged to be perverse behavior originating from an internal deviant impetus. It was with the advent of behavioral psychology in the mid-twentieth century that this deviance was believed to be alterable by "scientific" means. Psychologists thought they could behaviorally restructure the homosexual person's desires. This rendered obsolete the traditional methods of treating homosexual tendencies through bodily and psychiatric incapacitation (e.g., chemical castration and ice pick lobotomy). The cutting edges of mid-twentieth-century behavioral psychology claimed to restructure the deviant channels of homosexual desires through "behavior modification" and "operant conditioning." Throughout the 1950s and 60s, homosexuality was treated increasingly with "aversion therapy"—in the case of gay men, electrical shocks to the genitals and vomit-inducing drugs coupled with forced viewing of images of naked men. Subjects would then be sent on romantic outings with women. Such "behavior modification" treatments failed spectacularly. They left their subjects traumatized, scarred, and suicidal. Homosexuality entered the DSM-II (1968) as a mental disorder and reclassified as a "sexual orientation disorder" because of the emergence of

a discipline-wide consensus in 1973. It was dropped from the DSM in 1988, and from the World Health Organization (ICD-10) in 1992.

U.S. culture and law now recognize same-sex marriage and include it with respect to equality before the law. These historically invisible, marginalized, persecuted, and stigmatized people are recognized as fully human—recognized legally and socially in their full humanity—rather than as people beholden to the monstrous miscreation or medicalized sicknesses of mental illnesses, such as “sexual orientation disturbance”<sup>68</sup> or spiritual perversion and depravity. Gays and lesbians thus became recognized as bearers of the rights of full citizenship as such (e.g., marital rights, parental rights of child adoption, and so forth). Yet these developments transgress the evangelical conviction that same-sex and family relationships are abominations in that they transgress putatively natural and divinely sanctioned norms (i.e., contravene their, putatively, biblical understanding of marriage between one man and one woman).

*Ressentiment* takes forms of spiritual and psychological retaliation in response to one’s self-diagnosed oppression and victimhood. The legalization of marriage equality makes same-sex marriage something that evangelical Christians must live with, accommodate, even stand alongside in equality before the law. In principle, they must serve same-sex couples as customers in their businesses that serve the public. They must extend marital benefits to same-sex spouses in institutions that receive tax-exempt status from the state. And yet, same-sex marriage remains, to many evangelical Christians, a moral abomination.<sup>69</sup>

Many White evangelical Christians respond by claiming that forcing them to recognize same-sex marriage as marriage, and to treat it equally with heterosexual marriage, renders them victims of the latest phase in the sexual revolution initiated a few decades ago as the most recent sexual fad or latest “sexual orthodoxy.” Marriage equality encroaches upon their “sincerely held belief” that same-sex relations are abominations, and, as a matter of (putative) ontological fact, cannot be marriages at all. They thus invoke their right to religious freedom. This is their right to freely adhere to their sincerely held belief, and to live in accord with that belief, namely, that they must never act in ways that either facilitate or endorse even tacitly these abominations (same-sex marriage, adoption by same-sex couples, and so forth).<sup>70</sup> Indeed, those evangelical Christians who hold out the prospect for treating spiritually—even “curing”—the conditions of same-sex desire and

love claim the mantle of rights for their cause. Though the most famous interdenominational Christian (predominantly evangelical Protestant) “gay conversion” organization, Exodus International, renounced conversion therapy, closed its doors, and issued an apology for the suffering it caused, many of its network members continue to operate. Other evangelical organizations persist in variations of “conversion therapy,” or psycho-social and spiritual treatment for “homosexual urges.”<sup>71</sup>

Here again we see this group’s creative innovation with—transvaluation of—legal norms for religious purposes that are both defensive (motivated by their putative victimhood), but also obliquely retaliatory (textbook features of Nietzschean *ressentiment*). Evangelical organizations such as James Dobson’s Focus on the Family now justify their persistence in “gay conversion therapy” as the “right of the patient” to seek the form of therapy that they desire, including “sexual orientation change efforts,” however harmful that “treatment” has proven to be.<sup>72</sup> In fact, “conversion therapy” has been not only discredited as a form of treatment by countless studies among psychologists and medical researchers, but it has also been shown to be damaging to the people to whom it is applied (in clear contravention of the Hippocratic Oath). It has, as a result, been legally banned in many places across the United States. And yet, in 2019 a conservative Christian advocacy organization filed suit against the New York City Council’s ban on conversion therapy. They claimed that such a ban violates the rights to free speech of doctors and patients (i.e., doctors who might counsel patients in favor of “sexual orientation conversion therapy,” or patients who might seek it). The City Council preemptively reversed its ban on conversion therapy as a result. They reasoned that, were the challenge appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court (now with three justices nominated by Trump), the ban might be overturned under the auspices of “free speech” or “religious freedom,” and perhaps result in the compulsory reversal of any such similar ordinances across the United States.<sup>73</sup>

In sum, then, contra the self-perception of themselves as a persecuted group that seeks to merely be legally accommodated in order to faithfully observe their religious beliefs against same-sex marriage, in fact, some White evangelicals continue to seek out and “cure” LGBTQ people. This is not a passive appeal to accommodation. Rather, it is an active deployment of culture war sexual politics. How does it reveal the pivotal role of sexual politics in racialized ethnoreligious nationalism? As I make evident in the

next subsection, this sexual politics drives the recurring logic and dynamics that resurrect White evangelical Christian ethnoreligious nationalism time and again—animating zombie nationalism.

*A New Name for Some Old Forms of Bigotry:  
“Religious Freedom” as Ressentiment*

The 2013 Supreme Court decision *United States v. Windsor* declared unconstitutional the Defense of Marriage Act of 1996, which had defined marriage as a union between one man and one woman in federal law, and which had granted the states the right to deny the marriage of same-sex couples. *Obergefell v. Hodges* (2015) further required the federal government, and all states, to recognize and respect same-sex marriage equality, and to confer all the rights and protections attendant to such recognition. On the night that the Supreme Court handed down its decision in *Obergefell*, President Barack Obama illuminated the White House in rainbow-colored lights—the colors symbolizing Gay Pride since the inception of the gay rights movement (and the constituent colors of the Gay Pride flag). For many evangelical Christian Americans, this action taken by the first African American president was nothing less than a culture war broadside against evangelical Christian identity and marked the rapid dissolution of Christian culture in the United States.

Statistically, approval of same-sex marriage has increased throughout U.S. society in recent decades. It has slightly improved even among some younger, White evangelical Christians. And yet, as evangelical historian John Fea recounts, it is difficult to overestimate the influence that the establishment of same-sex marriage equality exerted in amplifying a sense of grievance and igniting “righteous anger” (and ensuing “passion for justice”—a hallmark of *ressentiment*) among White evangelicals. Such self-righteousness further fueled support for Trump. White evangelicals took *Obergefell* to exemplify the marginalization—indeed, the endangerment—of White, evangelical Christian America. “When LGBT activists claimed that Obama was on ‘the right side of history’ in his support of gay marriage, the message to evangelicals was clear: they were on the wrong side,” Fea writes.<sup>74</sup> “As the presidential election cycle began, evangelicals felt marginalized and even threatened by the social progressivism they witnessed under Obama’s administration. The traditional institutions they

deemed essential to a healthy society—the society that was at the core of their childhood and upbringing—was crumbling around them, and they were terrified.”<sup>75</sup>

Fea is far from alone in attributing White evangelicals’ embrace of Trump as backlash to their self-declared endangerment by the previous president, and to a societal shift toward same-sex marriage equality that occurred “too quickly for many Americans.”<sup>76</sup> And yet, such a focus neglects the deep history and subterranean—yet episodically resurgent—dynamics that made their path to Trump predictable, if not inevitable.

When viewed through the lenses of ethnoreligious nationalism I have discussed, by contrast, the deep history of evangelical sexual politics, and the logic by which it drives a resurrection of ethnoreligious nationalism—zombie nationalism—comes into view. In fact, White evangelicals have been at a juncture of obstinate opposition previously regarding their views of the “sanctity of marriage” as between one man and one woman. The sincerely held belief in 2016 that same-sex marriage (and all homosexual sexual relations) is a moral and spiritual abomination, and thus contradicts the true meaning of “marriage,” claims that it contravenes putatively ontological differences between men and women. Further, this belief appeals to “civilizational normativity,” frequently based on the putative dictates of natural law. And this belief claims, namely, that “for more than two millennia, the belief that marriage is a union between a man and a woman served as a bedrock of Western civilization.”<sup>77</sup> These claims replicate earlier evangelical opposition to interracial sex and marriage. In fact, they resurrect and reanimate identical logics and sexual politics of the earlier case. Both cases spurred upsurges in evangelical Christian ethnoreligious nationalism.

In popular perception, evangelical Christians awakened politically in the 1970s, primarily in response to the Supreme Court ruling that abortion was a constitutional right (*Roe v. Wade*, 1973).<sup>78</sup> This court case purports to mark a point of political awakening and mobilization through moral outrage that quickly consolidated religious activism in the antiabortion movement. In fact, this narrative obscures more than it illuminates, and is based on a highly revisionist account of religious history of the twentieth- and twenty-first-century United States.

In the years immediately following the *Roe v. Wade* ruling in 1973, numerous White Christian evangelical groups supported the legalization

of abortion. In fact, it took several years for abortion to be recruited as a political and cultural wedge that could divide religiously self-identified voters from those they saw as their opposition—feminists, liberal Democrats, and so-called secular activists of all types.<sup>79</sup> The logics and structural features that fueled White Christian political, cultural, and social aggressiveness toward such putative abominations also find stark recurrence in recent examples of culture war activism and political populism.

Long before abortion was recruited as a wedge controversy, other “moral abominations” led White evangelical Christians to engineer protective legal and political formations in defense against the putative onslaught against their religion and culture. “Interracial mixing,” “interracial marriage,” and “interracial procreation” stood out as such antecedent abominations; interracial sexual relations were rejected by conservative Christians as “miscegenation” because they transgressed ontological racial differences. White Americans’ intimacy with African Americans was a religious prohibition—a taboo.<sup>80</sup> Countless documented lynchings were related to (perceived or real) interracial intimacy, sexual relations, or “flirting.” The power of this taboo was exacerbated, and became more aggressively enforced, in virtue of the putative monstrosity that would result in amalgamation of the distinct races.

Many evangelicals argue that the parallel is not valid. Most have long since renounced explicit racism. They argue that “race mixing” and “miscegenation,” though clearly taboo and sincerely believed to be moral abominations at the time, differed, nonetheless, in that the coupling in question fell within the realm of biological complementarity of particular sexual reproductive organs. Transgressing this conception of sexual complementarity, as same-sex coupling does, violates “natural” (putatively ontological) forms of differentiation in ways that “miscegenation” and “amalgamism” of interracial sex and relationships never did.<sup>81</sup>

And yet, this objection is based on revision of the justifications recognized as self-evident and theologically justified at the time. The view that interracial sex, marriage, and procreation were biological, moral, and spiritual abominations, and thus ought to be legally banned, was held by White evangelical Christians in ways similar to their current opposition to same-sex marriage through the latter part of the twentieth century. They deemed the racialized differences just as ontological, and grounded

in natural law, as the differences in personhood and status that existed between Whites and Blacks.<sup>82</sup> For Protestants, this took the form of a theological basis for separate races.<sup>83</sup> Alleged biological complementarity of interracial sexual relations and marriage was considered a violation of ontological conditions, as same-sex sexual relations and marriage are considered by most White evangelicals today.

Similarly, appeals to the logic of putative “ontological difference” between races, and claims that sexual separation of the races was a “civilizational norm,” served as bases for excluding certain people from legal marriage. They also drove Christian evangelical ethnoreligious nationalism in the earlier case of interracial sex and marriage. For example, in prohibiting marriage between any “person of African descent,” and “any person not of African descent,” the terms of Oklahoma’s 1908 antimiscegenation law attempted to make the ontological and civilizational bases of such statutes clear. In a similar way that the putative abomination of same-sex marriage (or any same-sex sexual relations) is for most White evangelicals and White Catholics today, interracial sex and marriage were claimed to be a violation of God’s law and of the essential natures of White and Black manhood and womanhood. They allegedly defied “civilizational norms.”<sup>84</sup> They contravened the sanctity of marriage, *per se*. Moreover, the fact that instances of miscegenation could result in procreation spurred expansive legal innovation—laws that would cover the distinct class of cases in which interracial sex resulted in “mixed-race” offspring.<sup>85</sup>

For example, two years after the Civil War, the Pennsylvania Supreme Court ruled in favor of segregated railway cars, arguing that “the natural law which forbids [interracial marriage] and that social amalgamation which leads to a corruption of races, is as clearly divine as that which imparted to [the races] different natures.”<sup>86</sup> Indiana, Alabama, and Virginia soon followed by citing God’s divinely sanctioned, natural law to uphold the illegality of racial intermarriage, invoking the “theology of separate races” to underwrite human law. And even though no *federal* antimiscegenation law was passed, state antimiscegenation laws were not challenged until 1948. Indeed, Christian theological beliefs and religious invocations of “natural law” have animated twinned aversions and political responses—equally vehement—toward Supreme Court rulings: the ruling that legalized interracial marriage (*Loving v. Virginia* [1967]) and a half century later the ruling that legalized same-sex marriage (*Obergefell*).

There are important differences between the two episodes, of course. Earlier appeals were to racialized sexual ontology (Blacks and Whites as separate races, the intermixing of which contravened their respective racial natures). The latter claim is based in gendered biosexual ontology (the putative complementarity by which to “insert Tab A into Slot B”). Even so, the same logic of ontology as bases for (and ensuing appeal to) “civilizational norms” and “natural law” reanimates the ethnoreligious nationalism of White evangelicals in their embrace of Trump in their repudiation of legalization of same-sex marriage equality. In short, the sexual politics of White, evangelical Christians inspires the latest resurrection of zombie nationalism.

To the purview of the vast majority of White evangelical Christians, the legalization of same-sex marriage cannot be seen as a long occluded, despised, marginalized, and persecuted group finally achieving recognition and equality before the law. From their vantage point, same-sex marriage equality cannot appear as an instance of the arc of the moral universe bending toward justice. Any such claim or description is transvalued into the secular state’s, and secular culture’s, legal vindication of the latest “sexual orthodoxy” in the wake of the revolution for sexual libertinism of the 1960s and 70s, a putative “sexual orthodoxy” appearing roughly “two minutes ago on the clock of history” and now imposed upon them. Of course, by this logic, civil rights for African Americans and suffrage and rights for women fall roughly 2.5 and 3 minutes prior on the clock of civilizational history, respectively.<sup>87</sup> Progressive Christians fought for these earlier changes (and many did so in recent years for same-sex marriage equality), but conservative Christians fought against each of them.<sup>88</sup>

White evangelicals protest that they are the victims of an antireligious, militantly secular state and nihilistic culture. This culture, they allege, marginalizes them by requiring that they legally recognize and provide services in businesses (or in government, universities, or other organizations that serve the public and/or have tax-exempt status), accommodate, and/or provide benefits for same-sex married couples. Such recognition of same-sex marriage is portrayed as compelled endorsement of sin, transgression of natural law, and, as such, as an infringement on persons’ religious freedom to believe and treat same-sex marriage as an abomination in God’s eyes and therefore as inauthentic marriage. This becomes the victimization of “polite persecution,” much like White Christians who were forced to

recognize, first, laws overturning Jim Crow segregation and then gradually interracial marriage, sex, procreation, adoption, and child-rearing.<sup>89</sup>

Deploying religious claims and teachings of a religious tradition in ways that invert the values of equality and freedom effects a “transvaluation of values.”<sup>90</sup> The right to refuse services to same-sex partners seeking to legally marry is resituated as a “freedom” that is essential to witnessing to, and enacting, the love of Jesus. Persisting in this refusal—albeit, preferably in loving tone and style—becomes a (putative) witness of faithfulness to the love and truth of Christ. At least one of the alleged “lies” they resist, presumably, is that same-sex marriage is anything other than perversion.<sup>91</sup>

Again, this illuminates sexual politics as a driver of zombie nationalism. What appears on its face to be merely a backlash over sexual politics at a recent point in time occurs in a context in which the aggrieved opposition (White evangelical Christians), in fact, has a deep history and longtime presence of deploying such a logic of resentment. White Christians in the United States have been politically mobilized for decades. Centuries before that—as early as the first and second Great Awakenings in the United States—White Christians worked to spiritually and culturally evangelize the United States through an integrative vision of the nation as a sacred, chosen nation.<sup>92</sup> White Christians in the United States are a long-established culturally hegemonic group. In this context, what might appear to be an isolated episode in sexual politics (i.e., rearguard defense against newly legalized same-sex marriage) is, when placed in historical context, one surgent moment in a longtime contest over the identity and character of the society. White evangelical Christians resist this change, portraying it as aggressive encroachment by a secular state in a rapidly secularizing culture and society, a society they claim is increasingly hostile to evangelical Christian beliefs and to the free practice of religion more generally.

The claims of their oppression—“soft tyranny” and “polite persecution”—occur not merely in the secular state’s putative infringement upon allegedly sincerely held commitments of a religious worldview. This is the secular state’s supposed violation of one’s basic right to religious freedom. This position construes religious freedom both as a distinctive “first freedom” as inscribed in the First Amendment and a civilizational value that is intrinsic to the Judeo-Christian ethos of the U.S. founding. Allegedly, it is the fact that the nation-state has become aggressively secular that has contorted the original meaning of the basic principles of religious liberty

and civilizational ethos. On this reading, the state was meant to embody this ethos, and should continue to do so in the present. Thus, their own fight for the “soul” (identity and character) of American society is infused by Christian nationalism.

This response reflects the ways that this group is grappling with allegedly sudden, seemingly drastic elements of modernization. These forms of modernization are present in epistemic, cultural, and legal changes that have followed from increasing moral and religious diversification, and from social and cultural transformation. These result from a movement for equal legal standing by marginalized—and genuinely persecuted—minorities and previously excluded communities.<sup>93</sup> The evangelical Christian response is not a retreat into a simple enclave mentality and existence, as some evangelicals did in order to practice their segregationist Christian commitments when the mores and laws prohibiting racial segregation and racial intermarriage changed.<sup>94</sup> The response, rather, reflects an attempt to contest these effects of modernization in U.S. society by using modern moral and legal terms (that is, vindication of rights of religious freedom as those are conceived by and for evangelical Christians, especially in contrast to Muslims and atheists<sup>95</sup>), and by using legal-rational and bureaucratic processes. They deploy these tactics to preserve beliefs they consider to be nonnegotiable but that have become recognized as dehumanizing and damaging to others (e.g., protecting rights to defend and promote “conversion therapy”) and thus have been legally changed. This creativity with modern legal and moral norms and concepts also leads to innovation and creativity with the religious dimensions of national identity, and societal and legal implications that flow therefrom. This creativity is not the innovation of working within the normative constraints of a living and well-ordered tradition. It is the kind of creativity that Nietzsche described as emerging from the nihilism that underpins *ressentiment*. It exemplifies the resourcefulness and self-vindication of the transvaluation of values.

The patterns of ethnoreligious nationalism inscribed in White Christian resistance to interracial sex and marriage, and, later, resistance to same-sex sexual relations and marriage, evince markedly similar logic and dynamics. The key insight this connection illuminates is that, to identify and unlearn these patterns of ethnoreligious nationalism—to escape the cycles of zombie nationalism—White evangelicals (along with White Americans more generally) will have to learn what it means to be, and to have been all along,

White, cis-hetero-normative, and patriarchal (as interwoven identities) in a context that bears the stamp of the distinctive racial history, history of sexual politics, and hegemony of White Christianity, as pertains in the United States. The group will have to reconceptualize its role in a changed and changing context. How might this be possible working from within the Christian tradition itself?

*A Mess of Pottage:*

*The Hermeneutics of White Evangelical Nihilism*

At the outset of this chapter, I posed a question: Can White evangelical Christians in the United States engage intentionally and instructively in the constructive transformation of their tradition in the face of inevitable changes? Or, are they condemned to assume a defensive, rearguard preservationism that camouflages the culture war and political activism that has led them to embrace Trump populism and claim Trump as a messianic figure for them? Some—perhaps many—can answer this question only by an appeal to faithfulness. They can only respond to the changes brought on by an increasingly diverse, expanded account of justice and ensuing changes in society and culture according to what they believe to be the dictates of Christian faith. I have argued that what may appear to them to be the dictates of Christian faith can, in fact, be—and we have very strong reasons to claim that, for many White evangelical Christians, already are—nihilistic *ressentiment* precisely of the kind that Nietzsche diagnosed as a tendency and temptation in certain forms of perceived self-embattlement and alleged experience of suffering.

Some evangelicals will ask, rightly, “Must we simply adjust our religious understandings, beliefs, and practices to accord with the alterations in the culture around us?” The wisest among them will ask, alternatively, “Are there reasons internal to our tradition—scriptural and theological reasons—that motivate and underwrite constructive transformation regarding same-sex marriage, much as they did the eventual (at times, very slow) transformation of White evangelical views toward slavery, women’s rights, and racial segregation?” Such questions might contain the antidote to the recurrent patterns that constitute zombie nationalism.

As laws and culture changed around them, the evangelical opposition to interracial marriage and procreation gradually waned. There have been

holdouts, of course, and racism has a way of preserving itself through transformation in this regard, even after it has become impolitic or impermissible in public, polite company.<sup>96</sup> However, for the most part, White Christians no longer view interracial relations, sex, marriage, and procreation as abominations on biblical grounds, as many once did. Indeed, for some, that position now seems unthinkable. Can a comparable pattern of adaptation occur over the question of same-sex marriage?

Transformation on the question of race relations occurred, in part, in response to—by listening to—the testimonies of African American theologians and activists on these issues. Can the same happen if Christians listen to the voices of Christian theologians and ethicists who speak from within the commitments of the tradition but to and from the experiences of LGBTQ Christians? In the final section, I examine one such example. Specifically, I explore how the hermeneutics (the interpretive practices of their scripture) can either reflect the nihilist *ressentiment* or give rise to the constructive, intentional transformation of the tradition itself through “faith seeking understanding.”

### *Dionysius versus the Crucified*

It may appear natural to attribute White evangelical embrace of Trump populism and politics to cynical utilitarianism oriented by sexual politics. From this perspective, the value of certain political ends believed to follow from an evangelical worldview (e.g., curtailing LGBTQ rights, cementing a conservative supermajority on the Supreme Court, overturning *Roe v. Wade*, among others) overrides the obvious contradictions presented by a political representative who was vocally “pro-choice” until his late switch to Republican Party politics, a serial philanderer (and accused sexual predator by multiple women) who contravenes all the appeals to “character” and “virtue” heralded as nonnegotiable by evangelical Christian “value voters” through the 1990s and 2000s (he is a serial liar, which is only one of his vices<sup>97</sup>). In such a utilitarian calculus, the political end justifies the religiously idolatrous means. Yet such ascription reduces evangelical political attitudes to the mechanics of a calculus. Upon closer inspection, there is far greater religious self-invention on the part of White evangelical Christians than a cynical utilitarian equation could ever admit (paralleling their innovation with rights language and legal norms on the sociopolitical sides).

There are elective affinities that bind White evangelicals to Trump.<sup>98</sup> And yet, rather than fix either evangelicals or Trumpian populism into broad typologies, we must admit that they are already enmeshed in ways that elude the simple disaggregation of them into separate categories.<sup>99</sup>

In 1995, after much lobbying by White evangelical Christians, the U.S. Congress passed the Jerusalem Embassy Act, which recognized Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and a unified city. It also claimed that the U.S. embassy should be moved there. Many White Christian evangelicals (some of them self-ascribed “Christian Zionists”) lobbied for decades for the United States to recognize Jerusalem as wholly in the possession of Israel and as its capital. It expresses powerful symbolism in terms of religious and nationalist politics. To some it also has meaning in terms of evangelical eschatology, according to which recognition of Jerusalem is deemed an indicator of the fulfillment of Christian prophecy, and immanent return the Christian messiah.<sup>100</sup> Others saw it a vindication of U.S. support for a democratic nation and state founded upon the same basic values.<sup>101</sup> Still others saw it as finally honoring and fully recognizing the land “where Jesus walked.”<sup>102</sup>

The controversial nature of the law spurred the U.S. Congress to include an escape clause in the legislation. U.S. policy would default to recognizing Jerusalem unless the president enacts a waiver, requiring renewal every six months. After twenty years of renewals, in December 2017, President Donald Trump formally recognized Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. “I want to tell you that the Jewish people have a long memory,” Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu declared in response, “so we remember the proclamation of the great king, Cyrus the Great, Persian king 2,500 years ago. He proclaimed that the Jewish exiles in Babylon could come back and rebuild our Temple in Jerusalem.”<sup>103</sup>

The reference to Cyrus was a direct appeal to many evangelical Christians throughout the United States. White evangelicals, especially, had been making the comparison between Trump and the Persian ruler as early as the presidential primaries.<sup>104</sup> Just as God used this Persian emperor as an instrument in reversing the Babylonian captivity, and allowed the orthodox Yahwists to return to the promised land and rebuild the Temple, so God, they claimed, was using Trump as a vessel by which to reclaim the place and role of White evangelical Christians—and White Christian evangelicalism—in American society.<sup>105</sup> This interpretive move has

manifest widely among the White evangelical community in the United States.<sup>106</sup> Interpretively, it purports to absorb the present-day world into the world of Christian scripture through a hermeneutic of figural interpretation. However, in fact, this diametrically opposes—indeed, reverses—the interpretive direction that occurred through the long Christian tradition of figural (or typological) interpretation.<sup>107</sup>

As a tradition of Christian scriptural interpretation, figural interpretation oriented the historical world by the scriptural world, rather than situating the Bible and its contents as simple artifacts within human history. It thus required a scripturally oriented heuristic approach. Otherwise, it would become crude historical proof-texting, in which figures and developments of the present day are selectively assigned biblical analogues—and theological, world-historical meaning—but, ultimately, as dictated by the interests and purposes of the interpreter. In the latter case, historical and political events and figures become, in effect, selectively baptized with biblical meaning according to the interpretive preferences of the interpreter. Contemporary sociopolitical events get dressed up in the garb of biblical events and circumstances to imbue them with transcendent and world-historical meaning (another dynamic of zombie nationalism, e.g., putative end-time and messianic significance of the State of Israel). The latter interpretive approach, in which human history determines the interpretive significance of Christian scripture, is symptomatic of distinctly eighteenth- and nineteenth-century developments in practices of scriptural interpretation.<sup>108</sup>

In the long history of Christian figural interpretation, by contrast, interpretation had to be anchored in, and oriented by, the center point of the biblical witness, namely, the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. By this standard of Christian interpretive tradition, the figuring of Trump as a present-day Cyrus flies free of any Christological anchor and orientation. It exemplifies hermeneutical proof-texting driven by transvaluative response to the driving concerns of the day. It is symptomatic of the Nietzschean nihilism (driven by *ressentiment*) as the beating heart of much contemporary White evangelical Christianity.

Ironically, examples of the intratraditional adjustment and transformation through the deep tradition of Christocentric biblical interpretation demonstrates how same-sex marital unions are wholly consistent with a Trinitarian God's election and transfiguration of embodied human personhood. They are, in fact, one particular instance of a long tradition of God

having agapeically transformed human persons and relationships, first and orientationally, in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.<sup>109</sup>

By the Christian tradition's own best lights, overemphasis on the putative iron-clad dictates of human interpretations of natural law risk becoming idolatrous. It "hog ties" God with what humans understand to be the dictates of "nature." One ethicist explains:

Natural law is an important Christian idea . . . but an ethics of natural law always runs the risk of treating untransformed nature as normative for Christians, whereas the whole point of the Church, the body of Christ, is to transform the natural. The Christian norm for sexuality is not natural law; it is rather human nature transformed, eros swept up into agape. When Christian ethicists condemn same-sex coupling as unnatural, they are underestimating God's capacity to transfigure it, to make it mean something agapeic, by incorporating it into God's triune life. . . . [I]t is an offense to God's freedom and sovereignty to suggest that God is incapable of transfiguring the fidelity of a same-sex couple into whatever he wants it to mean. . . . [T]he biblical evidence strongly suggests that God is himself prepared to act "contrary to nature" for his own salvific purposes.<sup>110</sup>

In short, to retrieve the biblical grounded-ness they purport to espouse, White Evangelical Christians must begin again to learn how to read their scriptures. Such a Christocentric reorientation is a necessary first step in excising the *ressentiment*-infused sexual politics that have been for so long, and are again today, the beating heart of the zombie nationalism that is resurrecting White evangelical Christianity. Otherwise, far from the "born-again" evangelicalism of Jimmy Carter they long ago rejected, in their undeviating orbit around Trump messianism and Republican Party politics, White evangelicals will increasingly resemble the walking dead.

## NOTES

1. As determined by National Election Pool exit polls, cited in Jason Hussler, "Why Trump Is Reliant on White Evangelicals," April 6, 2020, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/fixgov/2020/04/06/why-trump-is-reliant-on-white-evangelicals/>.

2. Self-identified evangelical Christians constitute 25 percent of the U.S. electorate. Seventy-six percent of self-identified evangelicals are White. See David Masci and Gregory A. Smith, “5 Facts about U.S. Evangelical Protestants,” Fact Tank: News in the Numbers, Pew Research Center, March 1, 2018, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/03/01/5-facts-about-u-s-evangelical-protestants/>.

3. Daniel Cox and Robert P. Jones, “The High Correlation between Percentage of White Christians, Support for Trump in Key States,” Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI), November 17, 2016, <https://www.prii.org/spotlight/trump-triumphed-white-christian-states/>. “Representing more than one in every four voters, and with 81 percent supporting the Republican candidate in 2016 (up from a very solid 78 percent in 2012 and 74 percent in 2008), white evangelicals are undoubtedly among the most powerful voting blocs in U.S. politics today”; see Janelle S. Wong, *Immigrants, Evangelicals, and Politics in an Era of Demographic Change* (New York: Russell Sage, 2018), 2.

4. Philip Gorski, “Why Evangelicals Voted for Trump: A Critical Cultural Sociology,” *American Journal of Cultural Sociology* 5, no. 3 (2017): 338–54.

5. “In a January [2018] Washington Post-ABC poll, 75 percent of white evangelical Christians rated ‘the federal crackdown on undocumented immigrants’ as positive, compared with 46 percent of U.S. adults overall, and 25 percent of nonwhite Christians”; see Michelle Boorstein and Julie Zauzmer, “Why Many White Evangelicals Are Not Protesting Family Separations on the U.S. Border,” *Washington Post*, June 18, 2018, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-faith/wp/2018/06/18/why-many-white-evangelical-christians-are-not-protesting-family-separations-on-the-u-s-border/>; see also Chrissy Stroop, “White Evangelicals Have Turned on Refugees,” *Foreign Policy*, October 29, 2018, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/10/29/white-evangelicals-have-turned-on-refugees/>; and Gregory Smith, “Most White Evangelicals Approve of Trump Travel Prohibition and Express Concerns about Extremism,” *Pew Research Center*, February 27, 2017, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/02/27/most-white-evangelicals-approve-of-trump-travel-prohibition-and-express-concerns-about-extremism/>.

6. McCay Coppins, “Christians Who Loved Trump’s Stunt,” *The Atlantic*, June 2, 2020, [https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2020/06/trumps-biblical-spectacle-outside-st-johns-church/612529/?fbclid=IwAR3tMKaItgMB5iJ\\_ZPlw9\\_c79LITJrGIJv0\\_jWoWDVDqjxY1AFhbHU2K\\_yg](https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2020/06/trumps-biblical-spectacle-outside-st-johns-church/612529/?fbclid=IwAR3tMKaItgMB5iJ_ZPlw9_c79LITJrGIJv0_jWoWDVDqjxY1AFhbHU2K_yg); Andrew Whitehead and Samuel Perry, *Taking America Back for God: Christian Nationalism in the United States* (New York: Oxford, 2020), 110–17.

7. “White evangelicals make up a staunchly and increasingly Republican group that generally backs Trump and his policies. In the January 2019 survey, for instance, nearly three-quarters of white evangelicals expressed support for substantially expanding the wall along the U.S. border with Mexico. White evangelical

Protestants who regularly attend church (that is, once a week or more) approve of Trump at rates matching or exceeding those of white evangelicals who attend church less often. Indeed, in the first few months of Trump's presidency, white evangelicals who attended church at least weekly were significantly more likely than less-frequent churchgoers to approve of Trump's performance (79% vs. 71%). In the most recent period analyzed—from July 2018 to January 2019—70% of white evangelicals who attend church at least once a week approve of Trump, as do 65% of those who attend religious services less often"; see Philip Schwadel and Gregory Smith, "Evangelical Approval of Trump Remains High, but Other Religious Groups Are Less Supportive," Pew Research Center, March 18, 2019, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/03/18/evangelical-approval-of-trump-remains-high-but-other-religious-groups-are-less-supportive/>.

8. Ruth Igielnik, Scott Keeter **and** Hannah Hartig, "Behind Biden's 2020 Victory," Pew Research Center, June 30, 2021, <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2021/06/30/behind-bidens-2020-victory/>. In the early months of 2020 White evangelicals approved of Trump and his policies at levels matching the rates at which they voted for him in the 2016 (81%) and 2020 elections (75%). "When asked if Trump was performing well as president, 77 percent of white evangelicals approved of him in a March 22–25 [2020] Washington Post-ABC national poll, compared with 74 percent in February, and a record high of 81 percent mark in January"; see Sarah Pulliam Bailey, "Prominent Southern Baptist Albert Mohler Opposed Trump in 2016. Now, He Says He Will Vote for the President," *Washington Post*, April 16, 2020, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/religion/2020/04/16/souther-baptist-albert-mohler-to-vote-trump/>.

9. Gorski, "Why Evangelicals Voted for Trump," 338–54.

10. In this way, my chapter differs from Gorski's contribution to this volume (chapter 1).

11. Richard Amesbury develops a similar point in chapter 4 herein.

12. Indeed, Roger Friedland argues powerfully that erotics of religious nationalism are fundamental across context and cases (U.S., Hindu nationalism, among others). See Friedland, "Money, Sex, and God: The Erotic Logic of Religious Nationalism," *Sociological Theory* 20, no. 3 (2002): 381–425, esp. 399–401.

13. See Robert P. Jones, *The End of White Christian America* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2016), chap. 2. "For the first time in our history, the United States ceased to be a majority white Christian country; white Christians were 54 percent of the population in 2008 but only 47 percent in 2014. Since [2016], those trends have continued unabated. According to data from the Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI) . . . only 43 percent of the country identified as white and Christian by the 2016 election, and this number drops again to 41 percent in the most recent 2018 data. Notably, the white evangelical Protestant subgroup, the group that threw 80 percent of its votes behind Trump in 2016, has experienced a similar decline. White evangelical Protestants dropped from 21 percent of the

population in 2008 down to 17 percent in 2016 and further to 15 percent by 2018, according to PRRI studies”; see Robert P. Jones, “The Electoral Time Machine That Could Elect Trump,” PRRI, October 11, 2019, <https://www.prri.org/spotlight/the-electoral-time-machine-that-could-elect-trump/>. For earlier articulations of this demographic decline, see Robert P. Jones, “Southern Evangelicals: Dwindling—and Taking the GOP Edge with Them,” *The Atlantic*, Oct 17, 2014, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2014/10/the-shrieking-evangelical-voter-pool/381560/>.

14. Jones, *The End of White Christian America*, 231.

15. “Shall I respect man when he contemns me? Let him live with me in the interchange of kindness, and instead of injury I would bestow every benefit upon him with tears of gratitude at his acceptance. But that cannot be; the human senses are insurmountable barriers to our union,” the Creature declares in chapter 17 of the novel. On these themes, see Harold Bloom, “Introduction,” in *Mary Shelley’s “Frankenstein”* (New York: Chelsea House, 2007), 1–11.

16. David Gushee is an example of an effort to critically awaken many of his fellow evangelicals (to no avail) to their idolatry and abdication of their witness to Jesus in following Trump. Gushee was compelled to disavow evangelicalism after his persistent efforts to raise critical awareness on these matters was rejected outright by evangelical leaders and—as evidenced in the persistence of broad-based voting, polling, and behavior patterns—of the evangelical laity themselves. See David Gushee, *Still Christian: Following Jesus out of American Evangelicalism* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2017), 146; see also Gushee, *The Future of Faith in American Politics: The Public Witness of the Evangelical Center* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2008), 6; and Gushee, “2018 AAR Presidential Address: In the Ruins of White Evangelicalism: Interpreting a Compromised Christian Tradition through the Witness of African American Literature,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 87, no. 1 (2019): 1–17. A few other evangelical scholars and writers have attempted to raise similar critical reflectiveness, See Ronald Sider, ed., *The Spiritual Danger of Donald Trump: 30 Evangelicals on Justice, Truth, and Moral Integrity* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2020).

17. For example, evidence that U.S. society is not essentially a nation founded upon—and thus to be oriented in perpetuity—by Christian, or “Judeo-Christian,” values. The attempt to challenge this belief (a belief shared broadly by evangelical reading audiences) by one evangelical scholar of American religious history meets with decidedly mixed results. See John Fea, *Was America Founded as a Christian Nation?* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2017); for an example of an evangelical scholar’s attempt to persuade U.S. evangelicals that their embrace of Christian nationalism as a mode of allegiance to early twenty-first-century Republican politics as a Faustian bargain, see Charles Marsh, “Wayward Christian Soldiers,” *New York Times*, January 20, 2006, <https://www.nytimes.com/2006/01/20/opinion/wayward-christian-soldiers.html>; for a more extensive analysis and

critique, see Marsh, *Wayward Christian Soldiers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

18. Andrew L. Whitehead, Joseph O. Baker, and Samuel L. Perry, “Despite Porn Stars and Playboy Models, White Evangelicals Aren’t Rejecting Trump. This Is Why,” *Washington Post*, March 26, 2018, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2018/03/26/despite-porn-stars-and-playboy-models-white-evangelicals-arent-rejecting-trump-this-is-why/>.

19. For a self-identified evangelical scholar who warns U.S. evangelical Christians against embracing a sense of persecution under attack by an allegedly aggressively secular U.S. society, see Alan Noble, “The Evangelical Persecution Complex: The Theological and Cultural Roots of a Damaging Attitude in the Christian Community,” *The Atlantic*, August 4, 2014, <https://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2014/08/the-evangelical-persecution-complex/375506/>.

20. Edward G. Simmons, David C. Ludden, and J. Colin Harris, “Setting Your Own Rules and Cognitive Dissonance: The Case of Donald Trump and Conservative Christian Evangelicals,” in Sider, ed., *The Spiritual Danger of Donald Trump*, 139–50.

21. For an overview of the emergence of QAnon, see Adrienne LaFrance, “The Prophecies of Q,” *The Atlantic*, June 2020, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2020/06/qanon-nothing-can-stop-what-is-coming/610567/>; on the rapid expansion and distinct susceptibility of evangelical Christians to QAnon conspiracy theories, see Katelyn Beaty, “QAnon: The Alternative Religion That’s Coming to Your Church,” *Religion News Service*, August 17, 2020, <https://religionnews.com/2020/08/17/qanon-the-alternative-religion-thats-coming-to-your-church/>; see also Daniel Burke, “How QAnon Uses Religion to Lure Unsuspecting Christians,” CNN, October 15, 2020, <https://www.cnn.com/2020/10/15/us/qanon-religion-churches/index.html>.

22. For evangelical Christian analysis of QAnon’s rapidly expanding influence upon their own churches and membership, see Morgan Lee, “Why Someone You Love Might Join QAnon: For Christians Broaching Conversations with Those Persuaded by an Increasingly Popular Conspiracy Theory,” *Christianity Today*, September 19, 2020, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2020/september-web-only/qanon-evangelicals-global-conspiracy-theory.html>.

23. On the rapid expansion of QAnon’s presence across social media, and its gradual mainstreaming in congressional politics, see Marc-Andre Argentino, “QAnon Conspiracy Theory Followers Step out of the Shadows and May Be Headed to Congress,” *The Conversation*, July 8, 2020, <https://theconversation.com/qanon-conspiracy-theory-followers-step-out-of-the-shadows-and-may-be-headed-to-congress-141581>.

24. For exposition and analysis of the deeper dynamics, and their relation to deep evangelical fixation with “spiritual warfare,” see S. Jonathan O’Donnell, “QAnon, Spiritual Warfare, and the Orthotaxies of America,” *Fordham University*

*Press Blog*, November 25, 2020, <https://www.fordhampress.com/2020/11/25/qanon-spiritual-warfare-and-the-orthotaxies-of-america/>.

25. See LaFrance, “The Prophecies of Q.”

26. “69 percent of evangelical Republicans say the claim that there was widespread fraud in the 2020 election is either mostly or completely accurate. In contrast, Republicans who are not evangelical are far less likely to believe this claim is accurate—40 percent say it is mostly or completely accurate. . . . Only 27 percent of evangelical Republicans say that Joe Biden’s election win was legitimate, compared to more than half (51 percent) of nonevangelical Republicans. Nearly three-quarters (72 percent) of evangelical Christian Republicans say Biden was not legitimately elected. . . . Despite the well-documented evidence showing that Trump supporters broke into the U.S. Capitol, a majority (56 percent) of evangelical Republicans believe the claim that the attack was carried out by antifa. Only about one-third (36 percent) of Republicans who are not evangelical Christian believe it was antifa who attacked the Capitol”; see Daniel A. Cox, “Rise of Conspiracies Reveals an Evangelical Divide in the GOP,” *American Enterprise Institute*, February 12, 2021, [https://www.americansurveycenter.org/rise-of-conspiracies-reveal-an-evangelical-divide-in-the-gop/#\\_edn1](https://www.americansurveycenter.org/rise-of-conspiracies-reveal-an-evangelical-divide-in-the-gop/#_edn1); Reuters Staff, “Fact Check: Men Who Stormed Capitol Identified by Reuters Are Not Undercover Antifa as Posts Claim,” *Reuters*, January 9, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-factcheck-capitol-mob-antifa-undercov/fact-check-men-who-stormed-capitol-identified-by-reuters-are-not-undercover-antifa-as-posts-claim-idUSKBN29E0QO>.

27. A December 2020 poll of a representative sample of 1,115 U.S. adults found that “fewer than half (47%) are able to correctly identify that this statement is false: ‘A group of Satan-worshipping elites who run a child sex ring are trying to control our politics and media.’ Thirty-seven percent are unsure whether this theory backed by QAnon is true or false, and 17% believe it to be true. . . . Thirty-nine percent of Americans agree there is a deep state working to undermine President Trump—another tenet of QAnon. This belief is driven primarily by Republicans and FOX News viewers (a majority of both groups agree with this), though nearly half of white men and rural residents (49% each) agree as well”; see Malory Newall “More Than 1 in 3 Americans Believe a ‘Deep State’ Is Working to Undermine Trump,” *Ipsos*, December 30, 2020, <https://www.ipsos.com/en-us/news-polls/npr-misinformation-123020>. A 2018 poll conducted by the Wheaton College Billy Graham Center Research Institute found that 46 percent of self-identified evangelicals and 52 percent of those whose beliefs tag them as evangelical “strongly believe[s] the mainstream media produces fake news,” another tenet of QAnon. Indeed, the more active respondents were in their church, the more mistrusting of news media they were. This, along with their widespread embrace of Trump, renders them especially susceptible to the central claims of QAnon theories. See Stetzer “Evangelicals Need to Address the QAnoners in Our Midst,” *USA*

Today, September 4, 2020, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2020/09/04/qanon-and-evangelicals-its-time-address-qanoners-column/3446756001/>; see also Robert K. Vischer, “Eric Mataxes and the Losing of the Evangelical Mind,” *Religion News Service*, December 20, 2020, <https://religionnews.com/2020/12/01/eric-metaxas-and-the-losing-of-the-evangelical-mind/>.

28. Lois Beckett, “QAnon: A Timeline of Violence Linked to the Conspiracy Theory,” *The Guardian*, October 16, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/oct/15/qanon-violence-crimes-timeline>.

29. Hence the convergence of large groups of White supremacists and White evangelicals in the January 6, 2021, storming of the U.S. Capitol. See Elizabeth Dias and Ruth Graham, “How White Evangelicals Fused with Trump Extremism,” *New York Times*, January 11, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/11/us/how-white-evangelical-christians-fused-with-trump-extremism.html?action=click&module=Top%20Stories&pgtype=Homepage>.

30. I unpack a specific, and influential, example of this in the penultimate section of this chapter. See, for example, Daniel Block, “Is Trump Our Cyrus? The Old Testament Case for Yes and No,” *Christianity Today*, October 29, 2018, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2018/october-web-only/donald-trump-cyrus-prophecy-old-testament.html>.

31. For the character and influence of Frank Peretti’s best-selling spiritual warfare Christian fiction, *This Present Darkness* (1986) and *Piercing the Darkness* (1988), see Sara Diamond, *Not by Politics Alone: The Enduring Influence of the Christian Right* (New York: Guilford Press, 1998), 213–15; see also Robert Geulich, “Spiritual Warfare: Jesus, Paul and Peretti,” *Pneuma* 13, no. 1 (1991): 33–64.

32. Matthew Avery Sutton, *America Apocalypse: A History of Modern Evangelicalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), chap. 11, esp. 364–66.

33. See Paul Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More: Prophecy Belief in Modern American Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 144, and see esp. 144–51; and Sutton, *America Apocalypse*, chap. 11, esp. 363–66.

34. *Ibid.*

35. Melani McAlister, “Prophecy, Politics, and the Popular: The Left Behind Series and Christian Fundamentalism’s New World Order,” *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 102, no. 4 (2003): 773–98.

36. For the ways these concepts, along with other constituent features of religious nationalism, have served U.S. Christian purposes throughout history, see Omer and Springs, *Religious Nationalism*, chap. 3.

37. Carlton Hayes, *Nationalism: A Religion?* (New York: Routledge, 1960).

38. As Weber had it, nationalism shares an elective affinity with (i.e., a tendency to find close association with, symbiotic inter-relation, and mutual reinforcement between) the concepts of ethnicity, culture, and religion. There are important conceptual connections between the basic elements of nationalism, ethnicity, and religion. The Latin root of the word “nationalism,” the verb *nascor*,

*nasci, natus* (and hence the noun *natio*), means “to be born, to be begotten,” suggesting that a member belongs to one’s people (nation) naturally or by birth. On this view, membership comes innately, perhaps inherited through biological relation—an understanding of nationality that shares many similarities with the concept of ethnicity.

39. Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology* (Berkeley: University of California Press), 1:395. For exhaustive exposition of Weber’s use of “elective affinities,” see Richard Herbert Howe, “Max Weber’s Elective Affinities: Sociology within the Bounds of Pure Reason,” *American Journal of Sociology* 84, no. 2 (1978): 366–85. See also Gorski’s contribution to this volume.

40. For helpful exposition of these terms, and how they reflect elective affinities when conceptualized through a Weberian lens, see David Little, “Religion, Nationalism, and Intolerance,” in *Between Terror and Tolerance: Religious Leaders, Conflict, and Peacemaking*, ed. Timothy D. Sisk (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2011), 9–28, at 11–12.

41. On such a dichotomous account, to take one example, “nationalism” is intrinsically idolatrous by deifying and worshipping the nation, whereas “civil religion” is a modest, nonidolatrous, virtuously cohesive conceptualization and enactment of people- or nationhood (usually portrayed in civic terms) predicated upon however the group in question may conceive itself in relation to “the transcendent,” and often interrelated with its world-historical role (e.g., American exceptionalism). For a nondichotomous account of how the two relate on a conceptual and practical continuum, see Omer and Springs, *Religious Nationalism*.

42. Considering distinctions on a case-by-case basis permits a more fine-grained, context-specific analysis. On this account, even invoking a category of “liberal” or “civic” nationalism (vs. ethnonationalism) is no guarantee that the civic nationalism in question will not behave in ways that reflect ethno- or religious nationalism. Here, political theorist Bernard Yack illustrates such an approach in his skepticism toward an antecedently demarcated, dichotomous civic versus ethnic division between types of nationalism (and also other types of dichotomous opposition—i.e., rational/emotional, voluntary/inherited, western/eastern, good/bad, liberal/illiberal). Yack makes the point as follows: “Designed to protect us from the dangers of ethnocentric politics, the civic/ethnic distinction itself reflects a considerable dose of ethnocentrism, as if the political identities *French* and *American* were not also culturally inherited artifacts, no matter how much they develop and change as they pass from generation to generation. The characterization of political community in the so-called civic nations as a rational and freely chosen allegiance to a set of political principles seems untenable to me, a mixture of self-congratulation and wishful thinking.” See Yack, “The Myth of the Civic Nation,” in *Theorizing Nationalisms*, ed. Ronald Beiner (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 103–18, at 105.

43. See Omer and Springs, *Religious Nationalism*.

44. I draw the account of Protestant nativism and Anglo-Protestant nativism from José Casanova, “Nativism and the Politics of Gender in Catholicism and Islam,” in *Gendering Religion and Politics: Untangling Modernities*, ed. Hanna Herzog and Ann Braude (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 21–50. For a succinct example of how such White, Protestant nativism drove anti-Catholic nativism in the nineteenth-century United States (and that compares to certain moments of anti-Muslim nativism in the early twenty-first-century United States), see Scott Appleby and John T. McGreevy, “Catholics, Muslims, and the Mosque Controversy,” *New York Review of Books*, August 27, 2010, <https://www.nybooks.com/daily/2010/08/27/catholics-muslims-mosque-controversy/>.

45. See Jenna Johnson and Abigail Hauslohner, “‘I Think Islam Hates Us’: A Timeline of Trump’s Comments about Islam and Muslims,” *Washington Post*, May 20, 2017, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-politics/wp/2017/05/20/i-think-islam-hates-us-a-timeline-of-trumps-comments-about-islam-and-muslims/?utm\\_term=.d010e95d11f0](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-politics/wp/2017/05/20/i-think-islam-hates-us-a-timeline-of-trumps-comments-about-islam-and-muslims/?utm_term=.d010e95d11f0).

46. See Gregory A. Smith, “Most White Evangelicals Approve of Trump Travel Prohibition and Express Concerns about Extremism,” Pew Research Center, February 27, 2017, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/02/27/most-white-evangelicals-approve-of-trump-travel-prohibition-and-express-concerns-about-extremism>. See also Gregory A. Smith, “Among White Evangelicals, Regular Churchgoers Are the Most Supportive of Trump,” Pew Research Center, April 26, 2017, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/04/26/among-white-evangelicals-regular-churchgoers-are-the-most-supportive-of-trump>; and Myrian Renaud, “Myths Debunked: Why Did White Evangelical Christians Vote for Trump?,” The Martin Marty Center for the Advanced Study of Religion, January 19, 2017, <https://divinity.uchicago.edu/sightings/myths-debunked-why-did-white-evangelical-christians-vote-trump>.

In 2014, negative attitudes and perceptions of Islam actually reached one of their highest points in recent decades, equal to the years immediately following the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Sixty-two percent of Americans stated they were “very concerned about the rise of Islamic extremism around the world,” 53 percent “very concerned about the possibility of rising Islamic extremism in the U.S.,” and 50 percent affirmed the view that “Islam is more likely [than other religions] to encourage violence among its followers” (while 39 percent say it is not more likely to do so). As of 2016, 57 percent of Americans claimed that the values of Islam stand at odds with American values (while 40 percent disagree). See Robert P. Jones, Daniel Cox, E. J. Dionne Jr., William A. Galston, Betsy Cooper, and Rachel Lienesch, *How Immigration and Concerns about Cultural Changes Are Shaping the 2016 Election: PRRI/Brookings Survey* (Washington, DC: PRRI/Brookings, 2016), 2.

47. Andrew Whitehead and Samuel Perry, *Taking America Back for God: Christian Nationalism in the United States* (New York: Oxford, 2020), 152–53.

48. Ibid., 153–54.

49. For consideration of these themes with reference to science, I point the reader to Yolande Jansen’s contribution to this volume (chapter 6).

50. Cultural violence concerns “those aspects of culture, the symbolic sphere of our existence—exemplified by religion and ideology, language and art, empirical science and formal science (logic, mathematics)—that can be used to justify or legitimize direct or structural violence”; see Johan Galtung, “Cultural Violence,” *Journal of Peace Research* 27, no. 3 (1990): 291–305, at 291. He goes on, “Cultural violence makes direct and structural violence look, even feel, right—or at least not wrong . . . legitimates violence and the use of violence” (ibid.). Galtung offers an example: “Africans are captured, forced across the Atlantic to work as slaves; millions are killed in the process—in Africa, on board, in the Americas. This massive direct violence over centuries seeps down and sediments as massive structural violence, with whites as master topdogs and blacks as the slave underdogs, producing and reproducing massive cultural violence with racist ideas everywhere. After some time, direct violence is forgotten, slavery is forgotten, and only two labels show up, pale enough for college textbooks: ‘discrimination’ for massive structural violence and ‘prejudice’ for massive cultural violence. Sanitation of language: itself cultural violence” (295). For an exposition of the ways that structural and cultural violence are essential to religion, conflict, and peacebuilding, see Jason A. Springs, “‘Violence That Works on the Soul’: Structural and Cultural Violence in Religion and Peacebuilding,” *The Oxford Handbook of Religion, Conflict, and Peacebuilding*, ed. Atalia Omer, R. Scott Appleby, and David Little (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 146–79.

51. Robert P. Jones, *White Too Long: The Legacy of White Supremacy in American Christianity* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2020).

52. The Hart–Celler Act reversed explicitly nativist immigration restrictions established in the 1924 Johnson–Reed Act. John Higham describes the distinctively White supremacist orientation to the xenophobia and nativism that underwrote the earlier Johnson–Reed Act: “Nativists during this period argued that the so-called new immigration from southern and eastern Europe was racially inferior to the ‘old immigration’ from northern and western Europe. It was therefore polluting the nation’s bloodstream”; see Higham, “Cultural Responses to Immigration,” *Diversity and Its Discontents: Cultural Conflict and Common Ground in Contemporary American Society*, ed. Neil J. Smelser and Jeffrey C. Alexander (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 39–62, at 50.

53. John Sides, Michael Tesler, and Lynn Vavreck, *Identity Crisis: The 2016 Presidential Campaign and the Battle for the Meaning of America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018); Wong, *Migrants, Evangelicals, and Politics in an Era of Demographic Change*, chap. 2; see also Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart, *Cultural Backlash: Trump, Brexit, and Authoritarian Populism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), esp. 443–71.

54. “Approximately six in ten (57%) white Americans and roughly two-thirds (66%) of white working-class Americans agree that discrimination against whites is as big a problem today as discrimination against blacks and other minorities, an opinion shared by fewer than four in ten (38%) Hispanic Americans and fewer than three in ten (29%) black Americans”; see Robert P. Jones, Daniel Cox, E. J. Dionne Jr., William A. Galston, Betsy Cooper, and Rachel Lienesch, *How Immigration and Concerns about Cultural Changes Are Shaping the 2016 Election: PRRI/Brookings Survey* (Washington, DC: PRRI/Brookings, 2016), 2., June 23, 2016, <https://www.prrri.org/research/prri-brookings-poll-immigration-economy-trade-terrorism-presidential-race/>.

55. Helpful in this regard is Ezra Klein, “White Threat in a Browning America: How Demographic Change Is Threatening Our Politics,” *Vox*, July 30, 2018, <https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2018/7/30/17505406/trump-obama-race-politics-immigration>. Klein points to a number of studies that suggest, for example, that “even gentle, unconscious exposure to reminders that America is diversifying—and particularly to the idea that America is becoming a majority-minority nation—pushes whites toward more conservative policy opinions and more support of the Republican Party” (ibid.). Klein points out that the 2016 PRRI poll (see note 54, above) correlates with a 2017 GenForward poll of White millennials (48 percent of which agreed with a similar statement), suggesting, Klein argues, that this view is not unique to older whites. He writes, “The experience of losing status—and being told that loss of status is part of society’s march to justice—is itself radicalizing. In 2006, Nyla Branscombe, Michael Schmitt, and Kristin Schiffhauer published a fascinating paper: ‘Racial Attitudes in Response to Thoughts of White Privilege.’ They found that priming White college students to think about the concept of White privilege led them to express more racial resentment in subsequent surveys. The simplest way to activate someone’s identity is to threaten it, to tell them they don’t truly deserve what they have, to make them consider that it might be taken away.”

56. Wong, *Immigrants, Evangelicals, and Politics in an Era of Demographic Change*, 52–53. About 55 percent of White mainline Protestants and White Catholics believe that discrimination against Christians rivals that against other groups (ibid.); see also Michael Lipka, “Evangelicals Increasingly Say It’s Becoming Harder for Them in America,” Pew Research Center, July 14, 2016, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/07/14/evangelicals-increasingly-say-its-becoming-harder-for-them-in-america/>: “Nearly half of white evangelicals (46%) say things are getting tougher for evangelical Christians in America, similar to the share who took this position in the 2014 survey (42%). In addition, 31% of *nonwhite* evangelicals (mostly blacks and Hispanics) now say it has become more difficult to be an evangelical in the U.S., up from 22% two years ago.”

But this is not a recent development. Some trace it to the emergence of evangelicalism in the twentieth century. It did this largely by becoming an identity.

“Over the course of the 20th century, not only were white evangelical leaders by and large intractably blind to their own racism, ‘evangelical’ also became an *identity* that was intrinsically tied to whiteness (of a particularly American sort) as never before. Evangelicalism has never confronted the fact that its 20th century American iteration was built not so much around a theological identity as it was around a *white cultural* identity. Evangelical became, that is, a political identity for aggrieved white conservatives”; as cited in Gushee, “2018 AAR Presidential Address: In the Ruins of White Evangelicalism: Interpreting a Compromised Christian Tradition through the Witness of African American Literature,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 87, no. 1 (2019): 1–17, at 13.

57. Wong, *Immigrants, Evangelicals, and Politics in an Era of Demographic Change*, 53.

58. “77% of white evangelical voters lean toward or identify with the Republican Party, while just 18% have a Democratic orientation. White Catholic voters now are more Republican (54%) than Democratic (40%). While the partisan balance among white Catholic voters is little changed in recent years, this group was more evenly divided in their partisan loyalties about a decade ago”; see “Trends in Party Affiliation among Demographic Groups,” Pew Research Center, March 20, 2018, <https://www.people-press.org/2018/03/20/1-trends-in-party-affiliation-among-demographic-groups/>.

59. Wong, *Immigrants, Evangelicals, and Politics in an Era of Demographic Change*, chaps. 2–3. Among registered voters, 75 percent of White self-identified “born again” Christians voted for Trump in 2016, while Black, Latinx, and Asian “born-again” registered voters voted for Trump at rates of 7 percent, 31 percent, and 37 percent, respectively. In contrast to 69 percent Republican Party identification among White “born-again” self-identifiers, Black, Latinx, and Asian “born-again” self-identifiers reported 8 percent, 26 percent, and 32 percent Republican Party identification, respectively (*ibid.*, 21).

60. *Ibid.*, 22–24.

61. *Ibid.*, 7.

62. Gorski’s contribution to this volume (chapter 1) reinforces the point that self-ascribed “victimhood” by White evangelical Christians does not occur *ex nihilo*. It is, rather, a central feature of the long history of Christian religious nationalism in the United States.

63. Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, ed. Walter Kaufman, trans. Walter Kaufman and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage), Third Essay, sec. 15. The nature and character of *ressentiment* in Nietzsche’s writings is subject to much debate among Nietzsche scholars. My present discussion is aided by the meticulous exposition of *ressentiment* in Nietzsche’s writings and the surrounding scholarship by Guy Elgat, *Nietzsche’s Psychology of Ressentiment* (New York: Routledge, 2017), esp. chap. 2. On a particular group’s self-deception regarding the true source of its experience of suffering, see 50–55.

64. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, Third Essay, secs. 28, 162–63.

65. Mark Warren, *Nietzsche and Political Thought* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991), 27–30. As Nietzsche has it, it is possible for *ressentiment* to “consume and exhaust itself in an immediate reaction,” and thus not become “poisonous.” This is indicative, he says, of a “noble’s” response to the experience of *ressentiment* (39).

66. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, ed. Walter Kaufman, trans. Walter Kaufman and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage, 1968), 9.

67. For a helpful exposition of Nietzsche’s nihilism along these lines, see Tsarina Doyle, *Nietzsche’s Metaphysics of the Will to Power* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 2–4.

68. See Neel Burton, “When Homosexuality Stopped Being a Mental Disorder,” *Psychology Today*, September 18, 2015, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/hidden-and-see/201509/when-homosexuality-stopped-being-mental-disorder>.

69. On the nature and character of moral abomination as a form of monstrosity—and homosexuality in the context of certain Christian responses as distinct of example—see Jeffrey Stout, *Ethics after Babel: The Languages of Morals and Their Discontents* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press), 145–62.

70. One finds examples of this in some White Christian responses to the legalization of same-sex marriage in the United States as of 2015. As Daniel Philpott argues, from the perspective of canon law, when two men or two women declare themselves to be married, they “espouse a falsehood and announce their availability for sexual acts that mimic but distort those intrinsic to marriage.” From this perspective, legal requirements to provide floral arrangements, catering, or any other services for same-sex weddings—even under the auspices of nondiscrimination laws—is actually compulsion to actively and formally cooperate with sin (that is, to facilitate the wrongful actions of other people). On this account, both the formal cooperation (even the appearance of such) and institutional legitimization of sin (e.g., Christian institutions extending medical benefits to same-sex couples) are intolerable. The only option for Christian persons and institutions that are concerned to witness faithfully to the love of Christ is either to plead for a conscientious exception to the law or to conscientiously refuse to cooperate. This amounts to an explicit refusal to cooperate in any way with the sin of “same-sex ‘marriage,’” and to suffer the religious persecution that ensues: “When a Christian organization appears to endorse same-sex unions, even in ways that avoid formal cooperation, the world views it as proclaiming, at least tacitly, that it does not believe that marriage is between man and woman or that sex is reserved for marriage.” On this account, the current constellation of laws on the issue of same-sex marriage constitutes conditions of “soft tyranny” and places Christians under conditions of “polite persecution” in the United States. See Daniel Philpott, “Polite Persecution,” *First*

*Things*, April 2017, <https://www.firstthings.com/article/2017/04/polite-persecution>. See also Gerard Bradley, John Finnis, and Daniel Philpott, “The Implications of Extending Marriage Benefits to Same-Sex Couples,” *Public Discourse*, The Witherspoon Institute, February 22, 2015, <http://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2015/02/14522>.

71. Allan Chambers, *Leaving Homosexuality: A Practical Guide for Men and Women Looking for a Way Out* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publications, 2009); Jonathan Merritt, “The Downfall of the Ex-Gay Movement,” *The Atlantic*, October 6, 2015, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2015/10/the-man-who-dismantled-the-ex-gay-ministry/408970/>.

72. For example, see Jeff Johnston, “The Right to Counseling for Unwanted Same-sex attractions,” Focus on the Family, <https://dailycitizen.focusonthefamily.com/therapy-bans-threaten-religious-freedom-free-speech-and-parental-rights/>.

73. Jeffrey C. Mays, “New York City Is Ending a Ban on Gay Conversion Therapy. Here’s Why,” *New York Times*, September 12, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/12/nyregion/conversion-therapy-ban-nyc.html>. Conservative U.S. Supreme Court justice Samuel Alito argued publicly in his 2020 keynote address to the Federalist Society that requiring legal recognition and equal treatment for same-sex marriage equality (*Obergefell*) is now the basis for attacks upon religious freedom and freedom of speech. In a textbook example of *ressentiment*, Alito argues that people holding conservative views—despite a Supreme Court newly cemented with a 6–3 conservative supermajority (predominantly Catholic)—are now the victims of cultural and political persecution: “Those who cling to old beliefs will be able to whisper their thoughts in the recesses of their homes. But if they repeat those in public, they will risk being labeled as bigots, and treated as such by governments, employers, and schools. That is just what is coming to pass. One of the great challenges for the Supreme Court going forward will be to protect freedom of speech”; see Josh Blackman, “Video and Transcript of Justice Alito’s Keynote Address to the Federalist Society,” *Reason*, November 12, 2020, <https://reason.com/volokh/2020/11/12/video-and-transcript-of-justice-altos-keynote-address-to-the-federalist-society/>.

74. John Fea, *Believe Me: The Evangelical Road to Donald Trump* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2020), 27–28.

75. *Ibid.*

76. *Ibid.*

77. *Ibid.*, 27.

78. Marie Griffith, *Moral Combat: How Sex Divided American Christians and Divided American Politics* (New York: Basic Books, 2017), 201–2.

79. Griffith affirms the veracity of this general description, but then unpacks the ways that it obscures numerous details about abortion politics and activism among religious citizens over the course of the 1970s. What the broad-brush accuracies of the account obscure is that “religious people were divided on abortion,

and . . . many of the pro-choice feminists were part of Christian communities and still committed to them. Both before and after Roe, prominent Christian voices, from men and from women, made a moral case for abortion rights" (ibid.).

80. Ibid., 84.

81. The Ramsey Colloquium, "The Homosexual Movement," *First Things*, March 1994, <https://www.firstthings.com/article/1994/03/the-homosexual-movement>. The Ramsey Colloquium was formed by Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish ethicists, under the leadership of Richard John Neuhaus, and including Robert P. George, Gilbert Meilander, David Novak, among others. Though he does not explicitly use the technical terms of "complementarity" and "ontology," Chief Justice John Roberts relies upon these concepts, in effect, in his searing dissent to the *Obergefell* decision. Roberts invokes the "biologically rooted," male/female sexual binary that (he argues) intrinsically serves procreative purposes in the context of a "lasting bond" as essential to the "meaning of marriage that has persisted in every culture throughout human history." This, according to Roberts, is the nature and basis of a fundamental difference between prohibitions of racial intermarriage, on the one hand, and objections to same-sex marriage, on the other. See Roberts, "Dissent," in *Obergefell et al. v. Hodges*, 576 U.S. 644 (2015), 3–8.

82. Fay Botham, *Almighty God Created the Races: Christianity, Interracial Marriage, and American Law* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009).

83. Mark Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press), 18.

84. White Christian revulsion at miscegenation was never internally undifferentiated, of course. Distinctions of kinds, and degrees, were interspersed throughout. Antimiscegenation laws aimed their most stringent prohibitions at sex and marriage between White women and Black men. These laws exempted White men from repercussions for violating sexual taboos of "race mixing." Black women suffered the worst of the taboo through the taboo's unnamed, nonregulated status in their case: "Enslaved black women habitually suffered the humiliation of rape by their white masters, so much so that rising numbers of mixed-race babies motivated colonial governments to pass laws declaring the children of enslaved women to hold slave status as well. . . . The legal apparatus developed to prohibit all sexual activity between white women and black men was wholly absent for black women, who were, without penalty, subject to forcible sex, whipping, physical restraints, and public nudity" (Griffith, *Moral Combat*, 86).

85. See Martha Hodes, *White Women, Black Men: Illicit Sex in the Nineteenth-Century South* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press 1997), 1; and Botham, *Almighty God Created the Races*, 145, 156. See Griffith, *Moral Combat*, 86–90; see Byron C. Martin, *Racism in the United States: A History of the Anti-*

*Miscegenation Legislation and Litigation* (Los Angeles: University of Southern California Press, 2001), 1026, 1033–34, 1062–63, 1136–37. For similar arguments regarding nonstatus of same-sex marriage based on natural law and canon law (e.g., that “‘same-sex marriages’ are in a Catholic understanding not truly marriages at all”), see Bradley, Finnis, and Philpott, “Implications of Extending Marriage.”

86. *West Chester and Philadelphia Railroad Co. v. Miles*, Pennsylvania Supreme Court (1867), 211.

87. Again, see the Ramsey Colloquium’s treatise, *The Homosexual Movement*, for a variety of arguments in this vein.

88. This point is important to note. Today, many conservative Christians point to the role that Christian progressives played in the suffrage and civil rights movements, and claim that as a historical mantle of their own conservative Christian views. In fact, earlier versions of present-day White Christian conservatism, and White evangelicalism in particular, fought against women’s suffrage and civil rights for African Americans. On the role of “militantly masculine” Christianity against women’s liberation in early twentieth-century conservative evangelicalism (and its continuities with present-day White evangelical Trumpism), see Kristin Kobes Eu Mez, *Jesus and John Wayne: How White Evangelicals Corrupted a Faith and Fractured a Nation* (New York: Norton, 2020), esp. chaps. 1 and 3.

89. Griffith, *Moral Combat*, 118–19.

90. Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*. To some Christians, the evangelical transvaluation of these values entails the inversion of Christian values. For a profound meditation on precisely this point, see Adam Ericksen, “A God Torn to Pieces: Good Friday, Nietzsche, and Sacrifice,” *Sojourners*, April 16, 2014, <https://sojo.net/articles/god-torn-pieces-good-friday-nietzsche-and-sacrifice>. Ericksen asks of his fellow Christians: “When we incarcerate with a vengeance rather than rehabilitate with mercy, are we following Dionysus or the Crucified? When we deny universal healthcare for the sick, the weak, and the poor, are we following Dionysus or the Crucified? When we deport and demean immigrant laborers, mercilessly separating parents from their children, are we following Dionysus or the Crucified? When we return violence for violence, invading and bombing nations in the name of ‘justice,’ are we following Dionysus or the Crucified?”

91. Griffith, *Moral Combat*, 118–19.

92. Sam Haselby, *The Origins of American Religious Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), esp. chaps. 3–4.

93. On this account, “secular” does not refer to an all-encompassing process that happens as a result of the onset of a new epoch and hypercontext called “modernity.” It is, rather, a contextually multiple, history-specific, multifaceted set of processes, one hallmark of which is the diversification of epistemic justification. For the account of “the secular,” and how it accounts for the strengths, and

overcomes the deficiencies, of master narratives that portray “modernity” as a massive, single thing that is, most essentially, a bringer of “the secular,” see Jeffrey Stout, *Democracy and Tradition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004).

94. For example, Bob Jones University, a White evangelical Christian college, sought for its rejection of racial integration to be tolerated for decades after the respective landmark Supreme Court decisions. It refused to admit African American students until 1971, seventeen years after the Supreme Court ruling that declared laws that segregated schools unconstitutional (*Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*, 1954). Further, Bob Jones University banned interracial dating and refused to admit students who were party to an interracial marriage for decades after the *Loving* decision. In 1983, after a long court battle with the IRS to retain its nonprofit status, the university finally relinquished that status (and the tax exemption it entailed) in order to hold that ban in place. It finally rescinded that rule in 2000 under national scrutiny elicited by a visit from then presidential candidate George W. Bush. The battle against same-sex marriage equality has afforded similar efforts by evangelical colleges to retain their eligibility for federal funding and other considerations while refusing to hire homosexuals or provide benefits for same-sex spouses. See Fea, *Believe Me*, 26–27.

95. Pew Research Center, “Americans Express Increasingly Warm Feelings toward Religious Groups,” February 15, 2017, <https://www.pewforum.org/2017/02/15/americans-express-increasingly-warm-feelings-toward-religious-groups/>.

96. White Christians in the United States reject claims that African Americans suffer from structural forms of racism in far greater proportions than U.S. citizens who do not affiliate with Christianity. See Jones, *White Too Long*.

97. Glen Kessler, Salvador Rizzo, and Meg Kelly, “Trump’s False or Misleading Claims Total 30,573 over 4 Years,” *The Washington Post*, January 24, 2021, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2021/01/24/trumps-false-or-misleading-claims-total-30573-over-four-years/>.

98. On this point, I agree with Gorski’s chapter in this volume.

99. I am grateful to Josh Lupo for pointing this implication of the argument out to me.

100. Sutton, *American Apocalypse*, 346–54.

101. Stephen Spector, “This Year in Jerusalem: Prophecy, Politics, and the U.S. Embassy in Israel,” *Journal of Church and State* 61, no. 4 (2019): 551–71.

102. For helpful exposition and complication of the multiple layers of complexity regarding the different evangelical Christian, commitments, and responses, see *Contending Modernities Blog*, Jerusalem series, <https://contendingmodernities.nd.edu/global-currents/jerusalem-unspeaken/>.

103. Daniel Block, “Is Trump Our Cyrus?,” *Christianity Today*, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2018/october-web-only/donald-trump-cyrus-prophecy-old-testament.html>.

104. *ibid.*

105. “According to Ezra 1:1–4, in fulfillment of Jeremiah’s prophecy (Jer. 29:1–14), shortly after Cyrus assumed the rule of Babylon, the Persian king issued a decree authorizing the Judean exiles to return home and to rebuild the Temple of YHWH—with the aid of resources he provided” (*ibid.*).

106. Adam Gabbatt, “‘Unparalleled Privilege’: Why White Evangelicals See Trump as Their Savior,” *The Guardian*, January 11, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/jan/11/donald-trump-evangelical-christians-cyrus-king>.

107. Figural interpretation emerged early in the Christian tradition of biblical interpretation in the efforts of the likes of Tertullian and Augustine to reconcile the Old and New Testaments. In effort to amplify their unity, this interpretative approach reads components of the two testaments as interrelated. Earlier features are understood to be both themselves *and* prophetically prefigure later persons, events, and circumstances in the New Testament. The latter are both themselves, and also the fulfillment of the persons, events, and circumstances that prefigured them. Figural interpretation was perhaps most influentially retrieved in twentieth-century scholarship in Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Thought* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003 [1953]); and Auerbach, “Figura,” in *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press 1984 [1959]), 11–76. It was further developed for Christian theological purposes in Hans Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1974), which recounts how this long tradition of Christian scriptural reading was eroded with the onset of the eighteenth century; see also Jason Springs, *Toward a Generous Orthodoxy: Prospects for Hans Frei’s Postliberal Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

108. Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*.

109. Eugene F. Rogers, *Sexuality and the Christian Body: Their Way into the Triune God* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 1999). For briefer exposition regarding how Rogers’s constructive theology begins from the Triune life of the Christian God and works, by analogy, to the inclusion of same-sex marital unions into the holy sacrament of marriage as a matter of theological necessity, see Jeffrey Stout, “How Charity Transcends the Culture Wars: Rogers and Others on Same-Sex Marriage,” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 31, no. 2 (2003): 169–80.

110. *Ibid.*, 172.