Christian Nationalism as Media

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Christian nationalist strategy hinges on owning media technologies. Responding to the urgent need to understand this strategy, this essay develops a theory of Christian nationalism rooted in media ecology. Through criticism of Christian nationalist platforms, I contend that Christian nationalism aspires to replace the mediating function of the public sphere by rejecting the sensemaking capacity of racialized and gendered outsiders. First, I review Wynterian challenges to media ecology and re-situate Christianity as essential to "Man," whose senses media extend. Second, I show that centering mediation reveals the White male supremacist meaning behind the Christian nationalist "deep story." Third, I compare the media anxieties expressed by televisual and digital Christian nationalist networks. Finally, I apply the theory in an extended reading of the communications policies of "Project 2025." Christian nationalism as media, not just using media, retrieves White supremacist measures of humanity to enhance conservative hegemony.

Keywords: Christianity, media ecology, far right, conservative, Project 2025, United States

Christian nationalism is a potent source of White conservative hegemony in the United States. Communication scholars understand that media are essential to its rise. Mailing lists enabled the birth of the Council for National Policy from the Barry Goldwater campaign, televangelism propelled evangelicalism to international prominence, films like *The Passion of the Christ* (Gibson, 2004) and TV campaigns like Bill O'Reilly's (2004) "War on Merry Christmas" whipped up victimhood fantasies, and Protestant eschatology inspired QAnon to fester on digital platforms (Dreyer, 2023; Lundberg, 2009; Munn, 2022). Given this well-established relationship, this essay theorizes Christian nationalism as media. Specifically, Christian nationalism seeks to supplant the public sphere as a medium of political sensemaking.

Theorizing Christian nationalism as media, rather than merely in the media, resists the impulse to reduce the relationship between Christian conservatism and media to "narrow instrumentalism" (Hoover, 2017, p. 2893; Stolow, 2005, pp. 124–125). Understanding how Christian nationalists "use" media to transmit messages, as the above examples exhibit, is important but does not fully capture the function of mediation. As Christian nationalist sentiment spreads to younger audiences, the pervasiveness of social media shapes its encoding, circulation, decoding, and realization (Tebaldi & Gaddini, 2024, p. 1631). Adherents may first encounter Christian nationalism as an argument, but as they embed themselves within networks, Christian nationalism mediates posting habits, relationships, consumer choices, attitudes toward

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outgroups, and policy preferences. Appreciating the profundity of media contributes to the unfinished task of critical academia in reactionary times: addressing the "deeper epistemic divides that shape how Americans understand the world" (Marwick, 2024, para. 8). After all, the Christian nationalists who descended upon the Capitol from the Internet did so to defend a way of life that they believed was under immediate peril, not just a persuasive idea that they found online (Onishi, 2023).

I develop a media-ecological theory of Christian nationalism through criticism of Christian nationalist platforms. Media ecology reads media as a structural relationship that extends Man. Critical media ecologists characterize the politics of media in terms of descriptive statements of humanity, or the racial and sexual codes that demarcate humans versus non-agents subject to mediation. Accordingly, scholars have examined a wide range of artifacts that extend human sensemaking. Reflecting this approach, this project derives from criticism of 50 Christian conservative platforms between 1975 and 2024. I define "Christian conservative platforms" as both statements of belief that extend senses of the good (written and audiovisual treatises, apologia, and manifestos) and as social spaces grounded in a shared sensibility (broadcast channels and digital platforms). This archive includes classic texts such as Francis Schaeffer's (2005) "Christian Manifesto," recent works like Stephen Wolfe's (2022) *The Case for Christian Nationalism,* and commentaries by influencers like Candace Owens. This essay analyzes several platforms that best exemplify Christian nationalism's media anxiety before presenting an extended reading of the media policies of "Project 2025."

This essay proceeds in four parts. First, I review communication studies' interventions within media ecology, situating Christianity as a medium of contestation and reaction. Second, I contextualize Christian nationalism in light of its historical function, mediating racial contradiction and its current sanitization of White supremacy. Third, I apply these insights to the contemporary digital wave of Christian nationalism, showing how media anxiety shores up White supremacist networks. Fourth, I read the media policies of "Project 2025" to elucidate how Christian nationalist policymaking aspires to overtake the public sphere's media function. I conclude by illuminating how this research informs resistance to Christian nationalism through oppositional media literacy.

Media Ecology and Christian Rhetorics

Media ecology is a critical media theory that interprets channeling technologies as "extensions of Man" (McLuhan, 1994, p. 1).[1] Media, consisting of "language, numbers, images, holograms, and all of the other symbols, techniques, and machinery that make us what we are," constitute the environment in which culture flourishes (Postman, 2000, p. 11). In contrast to dominant approaches like media effects scholarship, which posits an instrumental relationship where media predictably affect communication by transmitting messages (Gauntlett, 1998), media ecology treats media as constitutive of human capacities to imagine, generate, circulate, and revise communication. Media are grounded in historical and cultural notions of humanity's limits. Accordingly, communication and media studies host critiques attendant to the violent prerogatives of "Man," Wynter's (2003) name for an over-determined description of the human that projects

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[1] I maintain Wynter's capitalization of Man and extend it to McLuhan's "Man" of media ecology to indicate that patriarchy is a source of his propriety.

White Christian masculinity as a universal measure of communicability (Litwack, 2021; Sharma & Singh, 2022). Much of this work examines the mediating role of the oppressed, as their exploitation, disruption, and resistance constitute worlds over which White supremacy strives for automatic reproduction. Struggle against mono-humanism mediates Man and complicates one-sided paradigms of domination.

Despite the importance of Christianity to the genealogy of media ecology, critics seldom attend to its Christian valence. Roman Catholicism, the grounds of European Christianity's universalism and the tradition to which many foundational media theorists subscribed, prefigured media ecology. According to McLuhan (2010), his Catholic faith affords the epistemic grounding from which true sense precedes (pp. 14–16). His protégé, Fr. Walter Ong (2000), characterized the goal of his work as helping Man "attend to the word of God" as known to the Church, despite the noise of a "complicated" electronic world (pp. 287, 320). His sensory history reifies an arc of salvation, even superseding rabbinical thought in his analysis of Hebrew oral culture (Sterne, 2011, pp. 216–219). Their theory reifies these presumptions. Media ecology's teleology romanticizes primary orality (the "immediate" medium of the Gospel), skeptically regards symbolic representation (which disrupts "immediacy"), and figures communication as a process by which Man perfects his soul (Gilchrist, 2018; Mitchell, 2022). The flattening of sense manifests media ecology's epistemic conceits: technological determinism, nature/culture dualism, and the exoticizing "global village" (Nolan, 2018).

The residually Christian Man of media ecology shares a form with Wynter's *homo religiosus,* the "True Christian Self," which preceded Man and persists as a discursive remainder. This human, subject to the Church, conceived himself as the only full human because he possessed true sense. Consequently, he exercised authority to convert souls, expanding the Latin-Christian social order through crusades and pogroms. Building on Lewis Gordon (2002), Wynter (2006) holds that the True Christian Self metamorphoses from religious (medieval) to naturalistic (renaissance), and ultimately to biological (modern) justifications for its universality when mediated by the worlds of the Americas. Latter justifications do not efface theodicy, but rather produce race as a sociogenic code to extend the discourses endemic to Latin-Christian Europe. Reading with McLuhan's (1994) media effects, but against his teleological grain, Christian nationalism should not be understood as "retrieval" of an "obsolesced" Christian Man, but rather as "enhancement" of Man's self-description that "reverses" the evolution of racial from religious codes (Kline, 2020; Topolski, 2024). The structural similarity between Man as Christian and Man as White offers reactionaries flexible, potent rhetorical resources. This reading elucidates why, despite secularization, Christian discourses continue to prop up White supremacy.

Yet, the Western Christian flattening of sense is contested from below. In his discussion of the media through which Black people fled slavery, Armond Towns (2022) distinguishes between Black Christian spirituality—by which Black people "saw God as a philosophical articulation of why their lives were no more or less than their white counterparts"—and the literalism attributable to both White Christian rhetoric and secular critiques of religion (pp. 71–73). Encountering the same Biblical media, Black and pro-slavery White Christians derived incommensurable epistemic frames, sensing media differently. This reading lends backbone to studies of Christian rhetoric that corroborate the tension between an increasingly intransigent White church invested in Christian nationalism and a Black Church whose grounding in freedom dreams facilitates more space for contestation and imagination (Hatch, 2020; Sorett, 2017). Black and Indigenous

people's capacity to adopt Christianity was the historical impetus through which race emerged to demarcate Man's others beyond the nexus of heretic, infidel, and pagan (McKittrick, 2015, p. 265). Hence, the Black Church, mediated by buildings, congregations, and people, is a target of violence by White nationalists who claim Christianity for themselves (Houdek, 2018).

A Wynterian media ecology reads Christianity as a medium of contestation wherein Man asserts his claim to universality over those whose lives and worlds rejoin him. This contest is lost when we characterize Christianity as a one-sided discourse of domination. Following the centrality of victimhood to conservative rhetoric (Nadler, 2022), scholars often characterize Christian nationalism as an instrument by which psychologized forms such as the "authoritarian personality" or the "paranoid style" circulate (Apostolidis, 2000; Apple & Messner, 2001; Duerringer, 2013; Mikkelsen & Kornfield, 2021). These ideology-critical approaches assume that Christian nationalism's main function is persuasive, convincing adherents of ideas. This approach risks the vulgar materialism of the secular critique of religion because it brackets the whiteness and masculinity of Christian nationalism as mere historical circumstance. Scholars of affect and ethnography characterize Christian nationalism as a "deep story," constitutive of believers' senses of the good life (Dreyer, 2023; Hochschild, 2016; Martin, 2021). Narratology approaches correct the ideology-critical erasure of race and gender. Yet, the depth of the story is not as uniform as its media function. Islamophobic "Judeo-Christian values" (Hartmann, Zhang, & Wischstadt, 2005), and still vaguer "theist-normative" appeals to the universalizing deity (Lee, 2022), hint that Christian nationalism does not correspond to a universal preference for Christians over non-Christians, but rather a technology mediating Man.

What is Christian Nationalism?

Christian nationalism is defined as Protestant religious nationalism or by the maxim that "America is a Christian nation." However, these definitions reveal little about what "Christian nation" means: one defined by "nativism, white supremacy, patriarchy, and heteronormativity" (Whitehead & Perry, 2020, p. 10). If faith trumps earthly identity, why is the Black Church counted not among Christian nationalism but among its targets?

A history of Christian nationalism highlights its racist overtones. The Puritans conceived religious nationalism to reconcile their identity as a republican "New Israel" with their slaughter of Indigenous people. While civic republicanism was dominant after independence, religious nationalism simmered. Eventually, the fall of slavery deepened splits between literalist, conservative, Southern Protestants and the North's modernist liberals (Gorski, 2017, pp. 54–58, 97–100). Literalists assert that there is one true, obvious interpretation of scripture, consolidating the authority to produce and interpret media among those who possess the right sense. A literal relation to media justified the emergence and revivals of the Klan (Forsell, 2020); the rebranding of the fascist America First Party to the Christian Nationalist Crusade after World War II (Jeansonne & Ribuffo, 1997); and reaction to desegregation in the John Birch Society (Goldberg, 2007, pp. 160–165). Literalist pamphlets, broadcasts, and sermons enabled White Christian conservatives to claim epistemic authority, denying marginalized people's capacity to sense media differently.

The contemporary wave of Christian nationalism mobilizes a "deep story" of America's providence to retrieve Man's supremacy. Extending literalism, a "New Christian Right" emerged through coalition-building between conservative evangelicals and vestiges of the Southern Strategy. It is fundamentalist, obsessed with purifying the national body from alternative senses of the good (Gorski, 2017, pp. 179–183). Policy priorities include opposing reproductive freedoms and LGBTQ rights; defunding public education; establishing obscenity laws against pornography and blasphemy; and blocking measures to redress systemic racism, such as affirmative action (Dahab & Omori, 2019; Davis, 2019; Omer & Lupo, 2023; Perry & Whitehead, 2022). Likewise, this wave aggressively instrumentalizes media, from the Bakkers' PTL Network to the digital ministries of White House Faith Office advisor Paula White. Writing of his own Christian Broadcasting Network, Pat Robertson (1990) explains the stakes of media ownership: Whereas "any type of discrimination on the basis of race or gender or sexual preference will be condemned . . . Christians are becoming fair game for the media" (p. 255). Robertson (1990) expresses typical anxiety against becoming the subject of media scrutiny, the antidote for which is reshaping media in one's own image. Ownership of media conveys authority to interpret content, generating reactionary media literacy premised upon faith in the spokesmen as Man (Tripodi, 2022, pp. 74–100). Put differently, Christian nationalism forwards Man as the measure of right sense that sutures the media's content and form.

Spreading via public channels rather than White enclaves, this Christian nationalism has earned some support among non-evangelical Christians and people of color (McDaniel, Nooruddin, & Shortle, 2022; Public Religion Research Institute Staff, 2024; Riccardi-Swartz, 2023; Whitehead & Perry, 2020). These demographics remain marginal compared with White evangelicals. Still, this trend can be situated within a longer history of Christian revanchism (Braunstein, 2021). For example, the manifesto "Evangelicals and Catholics Together," penned in part by Institute on Religion and Democracy founder Richard John Neuhaus, lays Christian moral virtue as the cornerstone of unity against "relativism, anti-intellectualism, and nihilism that deny the very idea of truth" (Colson et al., 1994, para. 32). The platform disambiguates this statement by advocating for school choice and "Judeo-Christian" education, the criminalization of abortion and pornography, market economics, and "a renewed appreciation of Western culture" (Colson et al., 1994, para. 44). Each item denies the public's capacity to discern truth by claiming that the non-Christian public is disinterested. Demonizing the public extends the common ground of conservative Christianities.

Yet, it is important to qualify the parameters of Christian nationalism's external support, lest we abstract it from monohumanism. Although non-White and non-evangelical support for the "deep story" is growing, this does not always translate to interest convergence. Among Black people who affirm "America is a Christian nation," outcomes differ profoundly from non-Black believers because they do not interpret America's Christian credentials as a past to be reclaimed, but rather as liberation to come (Atencio, Gorski, & Perry, 2022). Indeed, "Black Christian nationalism" exists and circulates similar narrative devices like prophecy and apocalypticism, but it is politically distinct (Fisher, 2024).

Therefore, to understand how Christian nationalism bolsters White hegemony, we must work beyond ideology-critique and narratology by analyzing what "America is a Christian nation" does to situate adherents in/against the public sphere, not just what the statement means. Importantly, to most, the label "Christian nationalism" is an exonym, an accusation from outsiders. When asked by Tucker Carlson whether

he is a Christian nationalist, evangelical publicist and co-founder of the Communion of Reformed Evangelical Churches, Doug Wilson replied:

> I am willing to be called a Christian nationalist because I prefer that phrase to the phrase [sic] I usually get called . . . white supremacist, slave advocate, racist, theo-fascist. The left really does hate Christianity, and with the phrase 'Christian nationalist,' even the part of it that's coming from the left to try to wrap that around our necks, that's something I think I can explain . . . trying to defend other things they call you is like putting lipstick on a pig. (Carlson & Wilson, 2024, 00:01:57–00:03:55).

For Wilson, Christian nationalism is a tactic to deflect accusations. He does not reject, but rather refuses to "try to defend," White supremacy (Carlson & Wilson, 2024, 00:02:00). Wilson's word-mincing is reminiscent of the Trump campaign's disavowal of Project 2025. By disowning the platform only to implement it, Trump reverses the typical function of belief within deep stories, which usually evokes a shared identity. Backing away from the right way of feeling connotes cowardice. Instead, Trump's and Wilson's disavowal confirms their identity with other White Christians who are tired of being slandered as the indefensible.

One may use the medium of Christian nationalism through identification with, deflection of, and even rejection of the symbol. Christian nationalists deny their interpellation to communicate that the accusing outsider does not possess the sensorial capacity to comprehend the Christian truth that the accused possesses. For example, Jack Hibbs (2024), pastor with over 700,000 YouTube subscribers, characterizes Christian nationalism as mainstream media slander: "CNN can never understand" the Christian worldview "because these are spiritual truths that they cannot discern because they are lost" (00:32:30). Discernment refers to spiritual perception, an extension of Man's soul. Lacking discernment, mainstream news media represented by CNN not only fail to correctly understand Christian politics (which they misapprehend as "White supremacy," rejected by Hibbs (2024) by citing his half-Portuguese ancestry, 00:09:00), but they fail to access truth at all. In these disavowals of epithetical "Christian nationalism," the listener encounters a strong warrant to shift their news consumption to platforms on which broadcasters possess truth, proven by their slandering as Christian nationalists.

Christian nationalism extends Man's anxiety toward the capacity of public auditors to mediate his discernment of the good. As characterized by conservative pundit and Catholic convert Candace Owens (2024), "Christian nationalism" is imposed to shame Christians into silence through "feel[ing] embarrassed about their religion" (para. 9). Slander is the greatest tool in the secular arsenal because it turns Man's right sense against himself. The active agent in suppressing Christian speech becomes Man himself, who possesses divinely ordained individuality that public media may mold or suppress but never overcome. This formulation positions Man over and above accountability within the public whose secularism prevents authentic recognition. The remedy offered by Christian nationalism is to embrace the Christian identity encoded within the slander, chosen/Man as opposed to lost/Other, to disarm self-censorship.

In qualifying their adherence to the term, Christian nationalists deny the public's capacity to label and critique their political commitments. By claiming unidirectional understanding of the other, Christian nationalism claims true authority over the public sphere, the social mediator between personal and collective

understandings of the good. This sense of Christian nationalism functions similarly to Mark Ward's (2020) "Christian worldview," a trope endemic to evangelical news media that serves a dual function (pp. 23–25). First, it cues the believer to resolve epistemological crises by defaulting to a "common sense" interpretation of the faith whose commonality is proven by being literal or apparent to Man. Truth is presented as evident and possessable, excluding indeterminate practices of contestability, imagination, and progress intrinsic to democratic publicity and non-nationalist Christianities. Second, between producers and consumers, it signals a shared investment vital for salvation. More than a brand, the Christian nationalist worldview is a mandate equivocating content consumption with spiritual action. The difference between the Christian worldview and Christian nationalism is that the latter functions through disavowal and endorsement alike, reflecting the latter's radical ambition to replace the medium of the public sphere. I characterize this radicalization as a media function by analyzing 21st-century digital networks in continuity with their predecessors.

Christian Nationalist New Media

In recent years, Christian nationalist identification has skyrocketed through uptake by reactionary digital networks. Once ambivalent toward religion, droves of Alt-Right influencers, neo-Nazis, and even pick-up artists have adopted Christian conservatism. This does not mean that Christian nationalism is new to the Internet or that White supremacy is new to Christian nationalism. Rather, in continuity with its history, a specific Christian nationalist discourse emerges as a "visible partnership" to link the sensibilities of White nationalist networks with the rhetorical cover of the Christian Right (Onishi, 2023, p. 127).

Unpacking this visible partnership requires a sidebar to understand why the media is constitutive of White nationalism. White nationalism is a fascist ideology that advocates transforming European and Western settler nations into ethno-states to avoid the "Great Replacement" of White people by immigrants, orchestrated by Jews. A White nationalist says, "America is a white nation," and means the same form as the nation of Christian nationalism: a state in which political, social, and cultural meaning is posited as the immediate possession of Man rather than mediated through public contestation. As computers afforded faster and broader circulation, White nationalism developed as a conciliatory rhetoric to repackage White supremacist messaging. To this end, White nationalists were early adopters of the Internet, churning out blogs, forums, and online journals. In the mid-2010s, the "Alt-Right" encoded White nationalist messages into memes to bridge popular with obscure platforms while avoiding content moderation, which they demonize as censorial (Hartzell, 2018). Fear of public replacement, a fear of being mediated, is the exigency behind White nationalist ideology and its largest platforms.

Christian nationalism exploded in popularity as a substitution for "Alt-Right" identity among White nationalist digital networks because Christian nationalist discourse reflects the same anxiety toward mediation that animates White supremacist visions of public life (Berry, 2021, pp. 65–67). The Alt-Right inspired content moderation targeting avowed White supremacists (Posner, 2020, pp. 98, 216–218). To retain their audiences, provocateurs reintroduced themselves as Christian nationalists or publicized religious conversions: Milo Yiannopoulos, RooshV, Andrew Torba, Baked Alaska, Andrew Wilson, and Augustus Sol Invictus, to name a few. Others, such as Stephen Bannon, Nicholas Fuentes, and "Dissident Mama," have made their Christian faith more central to their brand. More still, like Richard Spencer and Brad Griffin, have encouraged followers to attend church even without belief because they read Christianity as an empty

channel for White kinship (Grubaugh, 2018). After warming up the printing presses (a Protestant tradition), manifestos proliferated: *Christian Nationalism* (Torba & Isker, 2022), *The Case for Christian Nationalism* (Wolfe, 2022), *The Boniface Option* (Isker, 2023), *Integralism: A Manual of Political Philosophy* (Crean & Fimister, 2020), and the "Statement on Christian Nationalism and the Gospel" (Silberman & Deevers, 2023) were all published between 2020 and 2024 by authors with significant social media followings, mobilizing Christianity as a medium to launder racism.

To this end, Christian nationalism extends the Christian Right's and White nationalism's fears of censure. So it goes, acting with bureaucratic power akin to an unelected "fourth branch of government" (Schaeffer, 2005, p. 60), godless entertainment and news media disrupt the silent majority's authority through censorship. The threat of secular programming is illustrated by Figure 1 from Council for National Policy founder Tim LaHaye's (1984) *The Hidden Censors* (pp. 14–19). Two hundred and twenty-seven million souls superimposed over the continental United States, the collective soul of the nation, face corrupting influences through media, defined as "the conduits used to convey information to the minds of people" (LaHaye, 1984, p. 14). Television, whose corrupting channels occupy the center, exacerbated paranoia at the time because of its constant, electric proximity. This anxiety undergirds Christian nationalist support for obscenity codes criminalizing anything deemed blasphemous or pornographic. It also undergirds Christian investment in broadcast media. LaHaye (1984) goes on to celebrate the "valiant efforts" of the Christian Broadcasting Network, PTL Network, Trinity Broadcasting Network, and TV personalities like Jerry Falwell. By expanding Christian conservative media, the Christian Right feared and hoped that "The thinking of the media does not reflect the thinking of America—it molds it!" (LaHaye, 1984, p. 19).
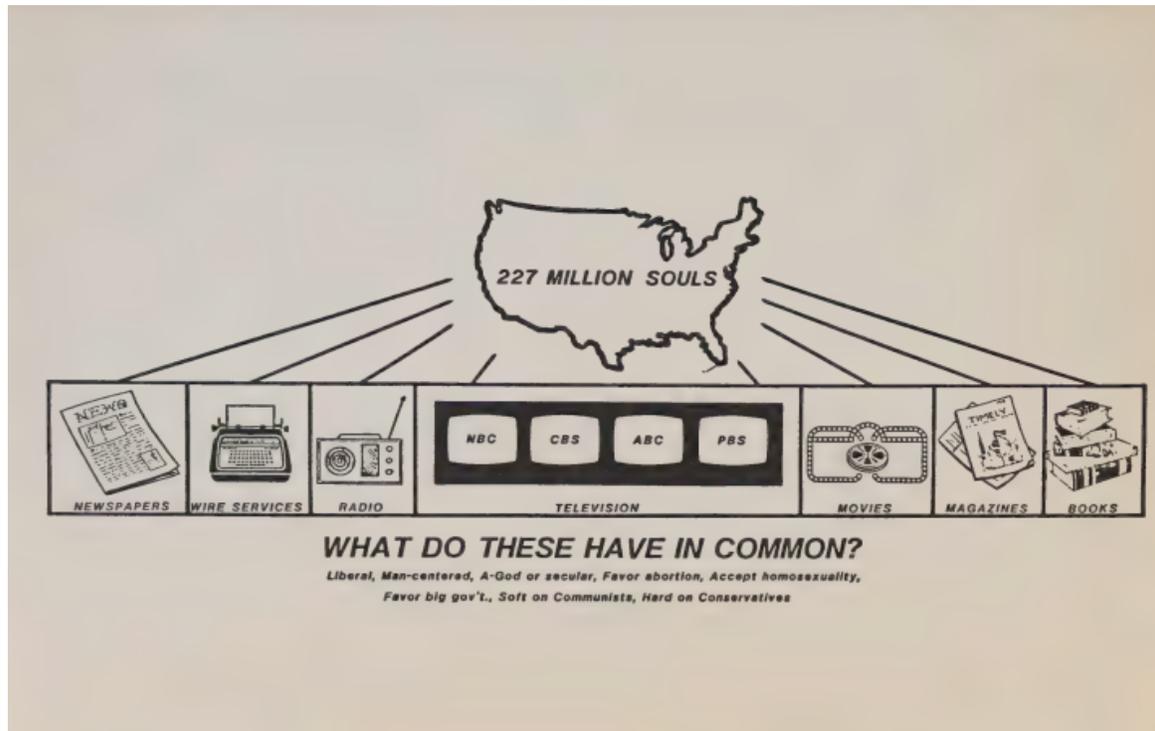
Figure 1. The continental United States, labeled "227 MILLION SOULS," is dwarfed by media including newspapers, movies, and television. Captioned: "WHAT DO THESE HAVE IN COMMON? Liberal, Man-centered, A-God or secular, Favor abortion, Accept homosexuality, Favor big gov't., Soft on Communists, Hard on Conservatives" (LaHaye, 1984, p. 15).

By characterizing public media—particularly news, entertainment, and education—as corrupting forces, Christian nationalists justify their own platforms as substitutions. More recently, *Daily Wire* contributor Matt Walsh (2020) wrote that godless media "absorb into our minds and souls" and that "The Internet is . . . our brain. It does our thinking for us" (p. 131). The image of media collapsing the difference between individual thought and public communication exacerbates paranoid feelings of immediate, imposed, corrupting intimacy (Peters, 2010). Unlike broadcast media, which afford the capacity to change the channel, digital platforms are inextricably connected, leaving no room for Christians to opt out. The Internet does not "mold" our brain; it "is . . . our brain" (Walsh, 2020, p. 131). Hence, digital Christian nationalists resolve their media anxiety by aspiring to supplant the public rather than through complementary channels.

Nowhere is this difference between broadcast and digital Christian nationalist media anxieties more obvious than on Gab. Gab is a far-right social network founded in 2016 as a safe haven for White nationalists deplatformed from mainstream social media. It marks its debt to the Alt-Right by using a frog as its company logo, referencing the Pepe meme, and its debt to Christian nationalism by signing all corporate communications with "Christ is King." CEO Andrew Torba wrote his manifesto with pastor Andrew Isker as

a platform against censure (Torba & Isker, 2022, p. 3). In an advertisement for Gab that takes up the first page of the volume, they write:

> Our mission is to protect free speech online for all people by pioneering, building, and funding a parallel Christian Society in order to take dominion and disciple all nations for the glory of God. Regardless of whether Gab's administrators, outside activist pressure groups, "cancel culture" Internet mobs, the mainstream media, foreign governments, or any other persons agree with any Gabber's viewpoints: **political speech that is protected by the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution will be allowed on the platform.** (Torba & Isker, 2022, p. 3; emphasis in original)

The ad appeals to a radicalized version of Ward's "Christian worldview," rendered here as "Parallel Christian Society" (Torba & Isker, 2022, p. 3). The Christian worldview promotes consumer choice as assurance against the corruptive qualities of media. In contrast, on Gab, media anxiety is quelled by way of replacement. Central to Gab's business model is ownership of smaller platforms, including a payment processor, an ad market, and a video conferencing platform. These apps empower Gab users to disconnect from public media while generating content that deteriorates public life. Media become vessels to "take dominion and disciple all nations" by creating space governed by Man's possession of freedom and the other's lack (Torba & Isker, 2022, p. 3). By offering to economically, socially, and culturally replace the other, Gab posits itself as a platform for an ecology of enterprises across all social spheres whose end is White Christian dominion.

The "parallel" in this configuration is euphemistic, like how White nationalists advertise peaceful ethnic cleansing rather than genocide. Just like how the U.S. "pioneering" society related to the Indigenous worlds it attempted to eradicate, the Christian nationalist aspires to exorcise the "lost" from public sight. The language used by the authors of the *Seven Mountain Mandate* manifesto, a televangelistic Charismatic tendency, is elucidating: "Invasion is the responsibility of light" (Wallnau & Johnson, 2013, p. 37). Referencing the automatic banishment of darkness by photons of light, the authors characterize Christian media as an autopoetic crusade substituting itself for the irredeemable occupation of space by the godless.

The same supersessionist logic extends to how Christian nationalists conceive of the public sphere as media, not just media in public, exemplifying the epistemological extension that "Christian nationalism as media" offers to scholars of media communication. In *The Case for Christian Nationalism* (blurbed by Yoram Hazony as "a pioneering work"), Stephen Wolfe (2022) defines his ideal national figure, "the Christian prince," as "the mediator of the nation's will for itself" (p. 279). Akin to a "theocratic Caesarism," the Christian prince mediates through "personal eminence in relation to the people" (Wolfe, 2022, p. 279). The signifier "prince" connotes the Roman empire, Latin-European monarchy, and patriarchalism, cuing the reader to imagine Man as the exclusive channel for "eminence." As "a sort of national god" (in the pagan sense), the prince is "the mediator of divine rule for this nation . . . with divinely granted power to direct them in their national completeness" (Wolfe, 2022, p. 286). "Completeness" should be read as a homogenizing unity, eliminating public bodies that cause friction between Man and his immediate gratification. Evidencing this read, in his interview with Wilson, Wolfe suggests that a nation must "match" by sharing one language, culture, and "natural affections" (Canon Press, 2022, 00:19:30). Agreeing with

him, Wilson cites Puerto Rico as an example, "like an IQ test" (a racist "Fanonian slip," see Athanasopoulos, 2024), of a polity that does not "match" America (Canon Press, 2022, 00:24:50).

This interaction exemplifies the media function of Christian nationalism, which eclipses media ownership and mediatization. The Christian prince embodies the measure of exclusion from public life. He reflects the Christian nationalist ambition to seize the mediating role of the democratic public sphere, which we now read in "Project 2025."

Mediating Project 2025

Racist mask-slips notwithstanding, Christian nationalism has earned its reputation for euphemism and dissimulation. Project 2025, or *Mandate for Leadership: The Conservative Promise*, is the best case study thereof as the playbook for the second Trump administration (The Heritage Foundation, 2023). Researchers signal Project 2025's use of Christian rhetoric to mask anti-gay and anti-trans backlash, White revanchism, disempowerment of women, and collapse of the technical sphere (Montgomery, 2024; Watkins, 2024; Wong, 2024). This supplementary reading demonstrates that the media woes animating Project 2025 offer a unique window into the Christian nationalist goal to extend Man over and as the public.

Project 2025 is a Christian nationalist platform, even though the document does not identify itself as such. Disavowals notwithstanding, it has directed the first acts of the second Trump administration. At over 900 pages, the *Mandate for Leadership* represents a cross-section of the Christian Right, written by over 50 special interest groups and 300 contributors led by the Heritage Foundation, a conservative think tank that distinguished itself in the early 1980s by helming the Christian New Right (Stahl, 2016). Its "four broad fronts" are to:

1. Restore the family as the centerpiece of American life and protect our children.
2. Dismantle the administrative state and return self-governance to the American people.
3. Defend our nation's sovereignty, borders, and bounty against global threats.
4. Secure our God-given individual rights to live freely—what our Constitution calls "the Blessings of Liberty" (The Heritage Foundation, 2023, p. 3).

The preface orders fronts in relation to spheres of influence emanating from the personal to the divine: private/domestic (1), public (2), inter/national (3), and metaphysical (4). This arrangement invites readers to slip between two distinct understandings of "the American people"—the nation and the self—over-representing the self as the whole country.

First, the authors invoke family talk to weave together issues as diverse as transgender visibility, social welfare, and public education into a "morality tale" in which children demand protection from public mediation (Cloud, 1998, p. 284). This first front corresponds to Project 2025's social and economic policies, including its calls to dismantle DEI, ban pornography, abolish the Department of Education, and prosecute social media platforms, termed "industrial-scale child abuse" (The Heritage Foundation, 2023, pp. 5–6). Christian conservatism posits the family as the ideal form of government or, in Neuhaus's (1988) telling terms, "mediating structures" in which God's power proceeds through husband over wife and children (p.

28). Public education, secular media, and social progress resonate as areas where the family's sacred governance is hijacked by the public, a cheap secular imitation. Figural "children" augment aggrieved Christian moral sensibility by veiling the patriarchal mandate. The mediation of child-rearing reflects the disempowerment and emasculation of the father as ruler, more palpably recast as a threat to kids.

The first front greenlights media policy premised upon denying public life to those outside of White Christian social reproduction. The first front explicitly conflates transgender visibility with pornography: "Pornography, manifested today in the omnipresent propagation of transgender ideology and sexualization of children . . . has no claim to First Amendment protection" (The Heritage Foundation, 2023, p. 4). In this context, pornography does not reference adult content, but rather sexualized media whose encoding as pornography draws the line between bodies acceptable and unacceptable for public sight (Stadler, 2018). Invoking First Amendment protection asserts that trans social life as porn stakes the same kind of claim to publicity as political discourse, defining the good life. To protect Christians from such a life, Project 2025 recommends the imprisonment of educators and shuttering of "telecommunications and technology firms" who "facilitate its spread" (The Heritage Foundation, 2023, p. 5). How does this call square with "individual rights to live freely" (p. 3)? This reflects Christian nationalist Michael Knowles' (2023) infamous provocation at the Conservative Political Action Conference: "For the good of society . . . transgenderism must be eradicated from public life entirely" (para. 15). This call for genocide is justified in terms of freedom because trans people appear as impositions upon the one true public when positioned outside the Christian family. "Family" is the media by which bodies are judged worthy of publicity, and those who rebut its universality are eliminated.

Second, the American people's "self-governance" demands dismantling that "fourth branch of government" against which Christian conservatives militate. The administrative state refers to expert bureaucrats who parse policy details, cutting across departments and private sector collaborators, including digital platform watchdogs. The phrasing posits the administrative state as unjust media interrupting the flow of power from the American people to their elected representatives: "Ruling elites . . . centralize power up and away from the American people" through "left-wing 'experts'" and "unelected career bureaucrats" (The Heritage Foundation, 2023, p. 8). The denigration of expertism-as-career reflects producerism, a populist rhetoric that defines masculinity through labor identified with Protestant morality—domestic reproduction, manual labor, and small property—over feminized spheres of intellectual and emotional labor (Burlein, 2002). Project 2025 recommends the mass-firing of administrators and the re-classification of their posts as political appointments such that Trump can install loyalists, and the government may once again embody productive Man without the weakening of expert opinion. This "mandate" extends the figure of the Christian prince whose embodied eminence can only be softened by public mediation.

In Project 2025's plans for the Federal Communications Commission, penned by Trump-appointed commissioner Brendan Carr, Man's eminence literally dictates the terms of mediation (The Heritage Foundation, 2023, pp. 845–857). Citing Catholic conservative Justice Clarence Thomas, Project 2025 calls to "clarify" Section 230's "Good Samaritan" blocking protections so as to "limit the number of cases in which a platform can censor" (The Heritage Foundation, 2023, p. 848). Section 230, the last vestige of the Communications Decency Act of 1996, which sought to regulate cyberporn, protects digital platforms from legal liability for exercising content moderation in good faith, even against constitutionally protected speech.

From its pornographic exigency to its biblical rhetoric, Section 230 already extends Christian nationalism. Carr's proposed modifications amplify that framing by invoking "antidiscrimination provisions" to halt platforms' ability to moderate "core political viewpoints." I read this in the context of the deplatforming of White nationalist networks, the exigency by which parts of the Alt-Right became Christian nationalist. A viewpoint is "core" if it reflects a White Christian figment of American heritage, privileging nationalism and disempowering alternatives. Substantiating this read, Project 2025 floats the idea of "empower[ing] consumers to choose their own content filters and fact checkers, if any" (The Heritage Foundation, 2023, p. 849). This defeats the point of content moderation by atomizing its mediation of a post's publicity, denying the public's capacity to decide whether a racist network ought to consume public resources to spread its message. Like the Christian worldview, the rhetoric of consumer choice mobilizes Man's true sense to abolish fact-checking, adjustments already implemented by Mark Zuckerberg at Meta and the "cultural Christian" Elon Musk at X. Both platforms protect racist, xenophobic, misogynistic, and transphobic content by situating these views as "core." In addition to hamstringing platform governance, the Christian nationalist FCC seeks to remake the Internet in Man's image, accomplishing the Alt-Right's wildest dreams without the tiki-torches.

Third, Project 2025 retrieves the "deep story" of America as chosen yet imperiled by outsiders to justify an offensive posture toward racialized and secularized others. Linking together "sovereignty, borders, and bounty" as wanting for defense, this section ties disdain for "globalization"—immigration, environmental protection, normalizing trade, and international treaties—with defense of Man (The Heritage Foundation, 2023, p. 3). Media anxiety manifests as a struggle for data sovereignty. Big Tech, framed as "a tool of China's government . . . funnel[s] data about Americans to the CCP" (The Heritage Foundation, 2023, p. 12). "Data" refer to vast information aggregated by platforms to deliver content by producing profiles trained to users' social location and use patterns. TikTok, the shortform video app "overwhelmingly popular among teenage girls," is targeted for outlawing as a "tool of Chinese espionage" (The Heritage Foundation, 2023, p. 12). TikTok is popular among all young demographics in the United States and is just one of many popular Chinese-owned platforms. Singling out TikTok (as opposed to commerce platforms like Temu or SHEIN) and naming its users "teenage girls" conjures the female child as a vulnerability reached by racialized, communist Chinese spies through a platform alien to her surveillant father. Data, the invisible and omnipresent currency of platform capitalism, reify the pervasiveness of secular new media, corrupting the national brain from within. Pairing the TikTok ban with reactionary screeds against open borders, Project 2025 situates the digital as terrain that must be exorcised of foreign, secularized, and racialized invasion (Bernot, Cooney-O'Donoghue, & Mann, 2024).

The Christian nationalist manipulation of TikTok reflects the impulse to maximize Man's control over public media. As the data economy introduces U.S. users to foreign management, social media challenges the Christian nationalist vision of America as sealed by providence. Hence, this third front pairs TikTok with other international mediations of U.S. sovereignty, such as climate accords. Anxiously apprehending this reality, the FCC section clarifies the motive of the TikTok ban as a competition for political capital: "TikTok . . . provides Beijing with an opportunity to run a foreign influence campaign by determining the news and information that the app feeds to millions of Americans" (The Heritage Foundation, 2023, p. 826). Whereas Project 2025 previously vested inordinate faith in the American people's self-determination that it suggested by making content moderation optional, it now frames American girls as feckless conduits for communism. This registers to the Christian nationalist as both a threat and an opportunity. Desiring the

influential power of TikTok for Christian Man, Project 2025's ultimate goal is not to ban TikTok, but rather for a Trump-aligned U.S. company to purchase it (Hirsch & Maheshwari, 2025). To combat the secularizing forces of Chinese communism and Californian liberalism, Christian nationalism demands nothing less than universal leverage over digital communication.

The full meaning of the fourth, final, and most platitudinous front comes into view by teasing out the media implications of these first three, which militate against the public mediation of America as a people/nation. "Our God-given individual rights to live freely" are elaborated as a *kampf* in which the American people "take back their right to pursue the good life" (The Heritage Foundation, 2023, p. 15). More accurately put: Man, cast in the racial/creedal terms of Christian nationalism, must take back his right to *determine* the good life by superseding the public sphere whose purpose is mediating deliberation between communities with distinct senses of the good. Concretely, Project 2025's media politics extend Man's capacity to proliferate socially harmful content (Section 230, optional fact-checking, anti-expertism) while reversing access to content deemed corrupting to his domestic wards (porn ban, anti-trans prosecution, TikTok ban). By banishing any bodies who challenge the Christian family's authority over the public sphere, supplanting technical mediation with patriarchialism endowing platform oligarchs with the duty to amplify anti-public content, and bordering the data economy as synecdoche for the expulsion of racialized invaders, Project 2025 hinges upon the Christian nation as media that augments the Christian Right's White male supremacy. Media no longer represents one terrain among many inviting conversion, but the environment in which to crusade over/against the public.

Conclusion: Toward Oppositional Media Literacy

Christian nationalism hinges upon an aspiration to mediate public life or to make all apparatuses of collective sensemaking referential to White male supremacy. In doing so, they seek to cement White conservative hegemony by making public life not only unlivable but also unimaginable for those of us outside the Christian nation. To equip scholars with a fuller understanding of Christian nationalist strategy on and of media, this essay has developed a media-ecological approach to Christian nationalism. It built upon Wynterian innovations within media studies to demonstrate that racist descriptions of "Man" have always animated U.S. religious nationalism, including the story that animates the Christian Right: "America is a Christian nation." Bridging the movement's past and present, it compared televisual and digital Christian nationalist media networks in the context of White nationalist online cloaking strategies. Finally, it presented a media-ecological reading of Project 2025, which shows that Christian nationalist media anxiety knots together the movement's anti-trans crusade, disdain toward bureaucracy, obsession with online "free speech," and social media mercantilism. Affirming but expanding the field's instrumentalist read on Christian media, "Christian nationalism as media" elucidates the political strategy and epistemological weight behind the Christian nationalist obsession with owning channels, propagating content, and shuttering public apparatuses, such as education, entertainment, and administration.

I hope that this essay's theoretical advancements demystify the presumed transparency of Christian nationalist media and Man, which it empowers. Critical academia has fatally underestimated, to reprise Marwick's (2024) words, "the deeper epistemic divides" that shape this conjuncture (para. 8). This misapprehension begets interventions that fail to contest White conservative hegemony. For

example, the call for "media literacy" emphasizes fact-checking skills to disarm propaganda. The idea that facticity undermines Christian nationalism assumes that its content is addressed to a generic public "I" who can be trained with little regard for whose senses the medium does (not) extend. Instead, this essay reveals that Christian nationalists are profoundly literate in their own universalist, literalist, and racist media anxieties. The bias of Christian nationalist media is Man threatened by a multivalent public. Minding this, further research might develop an oppositional media literacy attuned to indeterminacy rather than certainty. To insist upon the contestability of Christian nationalism's idols, that there is no final say in the meaning of America or Christianity, is to burst open Christian nationalism's closure and undermine its epistemological authority.

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