



# RELIGION AND POLITICS IN THE CONTEXT OF THE 6 JANUARY 2021 ASSAULT ON THE US CONGRESS

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*On January 6, 2021, an angry mob attacked security forces and stormed the United States Congress, a significant portion of which carried placards containing Christian symbols and manifested ultra-religious conduct. The crowd chanted religious slogans and songs mixed with extremist ideological-political landmarks, QAnon conspiracy theories and racist attitudes. The protesters also followed a ritual found in the Bible, in the Old Testament, in the book of Joshua Navi, an Israelite leader to whom God indicated how he would conquer the City of Jericho, full of corrupt and fornicating people if he obeyed the divine command. The participants in the assault followed the same ritual to “conquer” the fortress of the Capitol a month before and repeated it starting with January 5, 2021.*

*Since religion is the belief in God and represents the relationship between the faithful man and divinity, the acquisition of elements of political ideology by ultra-religious people was considered natural and mandatory in shaping a society to develop on Christian principles in the form of a “Christian city”.*

*In this article, by analyzing the attitude of the Christian community in two distinct phases, before and during and after the assault on the US Congress, the result of the manifestation of the phenomenon of ultra-religiosity combined with an extremist political ideology will be revealed.*

**Keywords:** *QAnon movement; ultra-religion; the assault on the US Congress; extremist politics; religious symbols; political ideology; conspiracy theories.*

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## Introduction

On various occasions throughout history, religious faith has been used as a justification for committing violence, initiated by its practitioners in the name of divinity. Thus, the most violent actions were justified by religious beliefs; for ultra-religious followers, their faith is the only thing that matters, and for those who practice it, religious extremism is considered legitimate from their own perspective.

The same happened in the case of the assault on the Congress of the United States of America (USA) in which many ultra-religious people participated, some of them being exponents of far-right or religious groups and organizations. They were convinced that they had no choice but to storm the US legislature and prevent it from certifying the election of President-elect Joseph Robinette Biden.

Sociologist Mark Juergensmeyer argues that “many of them were white heterosexual Christians, disturbed by the increasing multiculturalism of American society and the attempts to expand governmental power to provide welfare benefits to all. For a variety of reasons they felt alienated and humiliated in a new world order that seems to leave them behind”.<sup>1</sup>

Moreover, the assault on the US Congress involved ultra-religious people who were firmly convinced that they were “participants in a kind of holy war”.<sup>2</sup> In fact, some of them admitted that they traveled significant distances, thousands of miles, to participate in the protest because they received a “sign from God” and were encouraged by the pastors of the congregations they were part of to “stop the steal”.<sup>3</sup> The opinion of some of them was that the fight is between good and evil, darkness against light,<sup>4</sup> thus justifying their participation in this action. In fact, Tom Gjelten, a researcher of the phenomenon, states that Nationalist Christians and militants are “a strong force” in society, and against the background of deep political convictions they reject the surrounding “reality” and, like any fanatic, become violent.<sup>5</sup> Other

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<sup>1</sup> Mark Juergensmeyer, “The three qualities marking the Capitol assault as terrorism”, in *Religion Dispatches*, January 8, 2021, URL: <https://religiondispatches.org/the-three-qualities-marking-the-capitol-assault-as-terrorism/>, accessed on 08.03.2021.

<sup>2</sup> Elizabeth Dias, Ruth Graham, “How White Evangelical Christians Fused With Trump Extremism – A potent mix of grievance and religious fervor has turbocharged the support among Trump loyalists, many of whom describe themselves as participants in a kind of holy war”, in *The New York Times*, January 19, 2021, URL: <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/11/us/how-white-evangelical-christians-fused-with-trump-extremism.html>, accessed on 12.03.2021.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>5</sup> Tom Gjelten, “Militant Christian Nationalists Remain a Potent Force, Even after the Capitol Riot”, in *NPR*, January 19, 2021, URL: <https://www.npr.org/2021/01/19/958159202/militant-christian-nationalists-remain-a-potent-force>, accessed on 06.03.2021.



authors believe that such a phenomenon is not new and did not appear untimely, but has developed in recent years amid a “potent mix of grievance and religious fervor”.<sup>6</sup>

Against such a background of widespread dissatisfaction not clearly located, by presenting seemingly solid arguments to support their accusations, with the combination of QAnon conspiracy theories (election fraud, the existence of the parallel child abuser and corrupt state, etc.) The Bible and political ideology, in all this acquiring not only nationalist Christians, but also far-right groups and organizations, it was inevitable that the exponents of the phenomenon would trigger violence and come into conflict with the authorities. More serious and with short and medium term repercussions is the full conviction of the exponents of such a phenomenon that it is their divine right to create a society as they see it from their own perspective without taking into account the wishes of others.

### **1. The Attitude of Members of Christian Congregations Before the Assault on the United States Congress**

Just days before the inauguration of the new US President Joseph Robinette Biden on January 20, 2021, Darryl Knappen, pastor of the Cornerstone Church Christian Congregation in Alexandria, Minnesota, refused to accept his democratic election and “even declaring himself willing to take up arms” to support incumbent President Donald Trump. In a Facebook post, the cleric likened the current situation in the United States to that of the American Revolution which took place over two hundred years ago. “It was pastors who led the way in colonial times to encourage our country to shake off the totalitarian regime of the king of England”, said the cleric, referring to the “Black Robed Regiment”, the name given to pastors who supported and became actively involved in the War of Independence of the United States of America against the United Kingdom.<sup>7</sup>

Franklin Graham, one of the leaders of a major religious congregation, predicted four months before the assault on the US Congress what would happen. Thus, on August 28, 2020, he declared “I think God brought him here for this season, for these four years”,<sup>8</sup> referring to Donald Trump, the incumbent president at the time. Graham also stated, “I believe the storm is coming. You’re going to see

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<sup>6</sup> Elizabeth Dias, Ruth Graham, *op. cit.*

<sup>7</sup> Tom Gjelten, “Militant Christian Nationalists Remain A Potent Force, Even After The Capitol Riot”, *op. cit.*

<sup>8</sup> David Brody, “Exclusive: Franklin Graham Tells CBN News He Thinks Democratic Party is ‘Opposed to Faith’”, in *CBN News*, 08-28-2020, URL: <https://www1.cbn.com/cbnnews/2020/august/exclusive-franklin-graham-tells-news-he-thinks-democrats-are-opposed-to-faith>, accessed on 06.03.2021.



Christians attacked; you're going to see churches close; you're going to see a real hatred expressed toward people of faith. That's coming."<sup>9</sup> Religious participants in the assault on the Capitol were convinced that "God anointed" Donald Trump to lead the United States and that his appointments to key positions in the state were part of the objectives of the restoration of "the United States as a Christian nation." Following the presidential election and their winning by Joe Biden, they showed their loyalty "to their divine leader"<sup>10</sup>

Regarding the accumulation of tension in Christian communities, Jerushah Duford, the granddaughter of the late American preacher Billy Graham, said that what happened on January 6, 2021 was the result of tension accumulated among religious people before the event.<sup>11</sup> In fact, in the weeks leading up to the event, there were organizations that "worked to foment a bellicose Christian narrative in defence of Trump's coup attempt and justify a holy war against an illegitimate state."<sup>12</sup> Among them is the Christian group Jericho March, formed in late November 2020 by two employees of Christian organizations, Arina Grossu and Rob Weaver, with the aim to "prayerfully protest and call on government officials to cast light on voter fraud, corruption, and suppression of the will of the American people in this election."<sup>13</sup> The group's involvement in the assault on the Capitol highlighted the opposite of their statements, as well as the organization in the preamble of a march on December 12, 2020 in Washington, that degenerated into violence. Also, during the protest, the participants amalgamated conspiracy theories and "battle cries with appeals to Christianity."<sup>14</sup>

In the same vein, Christian publicist and journalist Eric Metaxas stated on December 9, 2020 on a radio show, "We need to do absolutely everything we can. What's going to happen is going to happen. But we need to fight to the death, to the last drop of blood, because it's worth it."<sup>15</sup> Later, on December 12, 2020, Metaxas led a religious gathering called The Jericho March in Washington where, along with other participants, they "implored God to keep Trump in office."<sup>16</sup> According to the

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<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>10</sup> Sarah Posner, "How the Christian Right Helped Foment Insurrection – Christian-right activists inside and outside of government promoted the election fraud lie and claimed God told them to "let the church roar", in *Rolling Stone*, January 31, 2021, URL: <https://www.rollingstone.com/culture/culture-features/capitol-christian-right-trump-1121236/>, accessed on 08.03.2021.

<sup>11</sup> Ed Pilkington, "Evangelical leaders condemn role of Christian nationalism in Capitol attack", in *The Guardian*, 24 February 2021, URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/feb/24/evangelical-leaders-christian-nationalism-capitol-riot>, accessed on 09.03.2021.

<sup>12</sup> Sarah Posner, *art. cit.*

<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>15</sup> Tom Gjelten, "Militant Christian Nationalists Remain A Potent Force, Even After The Capitol Riot", *op. cit.*

<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*.



statement of the group Jericho March of January 14, 2021, posted on its website, this is a “peaceful prayer march where people of Judeo-Christian faith pray together, sing songs, and blow *shofars*”<sup>17</sup>.<sup>18</sup>

Robert Weaver, co-founder of Jericho March, present at the march on December 12, 2020, which replicated the biblical ritual that took place over the city of Jericho, told participants that “God had appeared to him in a vision after Biden’s election victory and told him, “It’s not over.”<sup>19</sup> Stewart Rhodes, the founder of the OathKeepers militia, was also present at the march, stating that “he hoped Trump would use the Insurrection Act to “drop the hammer” on his opponents.”<sup>20</sup> Rhodes also said that God “needs to know” from each person that he is with Him and that “if he does not do it now, we’re going to have to do it ourselves later, in a much more desperate, much more bloody war.”<sup>21</sup>

Pastor Greg Locke<sup>22</sup> stated in a book published in September 2020 entitled “This Means War” that “We are one election away”, referring to the US presidential election in November 2020, “from losing everything we hold dear”, and the struggle is “against everything evil and wicked in the world.”<sup>23</sup> This is “a rallying of the troops of God’s holy army. This is our day. This is our time. This means something for the Kingdom. As a matter of fact, THIS MEANS WAR.”<sup>24</sup> The day before the assault on the Chapter, Pastor Greg Locke wrote a message on the social networking platform Twitter calling on believers in the American capital: “May the fire of the Holy Spirit fall upon Washington DC today and tomorrow. May the Lamb of God be exalted. Let God arise and His enemies be brought low”<sup>25</sup>; the post is no longer

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<sup>17</sup> Horns of rams used by ancient Jews in religious ceremonies as well as a signal of struggle.

<sup>18</sup> \*\*\*, “Statement from Jericho March”, *Jericho March website*, January 14, 2021. URL: <https://jerichomarch.org/>, accessed on 11.03.2021.

<sup>19</sup> Tom Gjelten, “Militant Christian Nationalists Remain A Potent Force, Even After The Capitol Riot”, *op. cit.*.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>22</sup> Founder of *Global Vision Bible Church* based in Mount Juliet, Tennessee.

<sup>23</sup> Thomas B. Edsall, “The Capitol Insurrection Was as Christian Nationalist as It Gets.’ Religious resentment has become a potent recruiting tool for the hard right”, in *The New York Times*, January 28, 2021, URL: <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/28/opinion/christian-nationalists-capitol-attack.html>, accessed on 09.03.2021.

<sup>24</sup> Greg Locke, *This Means War: We Will Not Surrender through Silence*, Locke Media Publishing, 2020, *apud* Thomas B. Edsall, “The Capitol Insurrection Was as Christian Nationalist as It Gets’. Religious resentment has become a potent recruiting tool for the hard right”, in *The New York Times*, January 28, 2021, URL: <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/28/opinion/christian-nationalists-capitol-attack.html>, accessed on 09.03.2021.

<sup>25</sup> Greg Locke, *Twitter account “Pastor Locke”*, URL: <https://twitter.com/pastorlocke/status/1346476581904994309>, accessed on 12.03.2021, *apud* Thomas B. Edsall, “The Capitol Insurrection Was as Christian Nationalist as It Gets’ Religious resentment has become a potent recruiting tool for the hard right”, in *The New York Times*, January 28, 2021, URL: <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/28/opinion/christian-nationalists-capitol-attack.html>, accessed on 09.03.2021.



available from March 12, 2021.<sup>26</sup>

On January 5, 2021, a religious procession took place in Washington organized by “fervent religious supporters of President Trump”, whom they named Jericho March, similar to the Christian organization of the same name. They waved Christian crosses and sang religious songs as they circled the US Congress, asking God to help them conquer the building, replicating the biblical account of the siege of Jericho by the Israelites.<sup>27</sup> The parallelism made with the biblical Jericho is determined by the conception of the followers of the Jericho March movement regarding the US Congress, namely that it is identical with Jericho, “a city of false gods and corruption.”<sup>28</sup> This statement posted on its own website by Jericho March was deleted on March 11, 2021.<sup>29</sup>

Proponents of the far-right QAnon movement were also involved in the assault on the US Congress. Long before this moment, QAnon’s conspiracy theories about the existence of “a satanic, child-sex-trafficking deep state”, shaped the faith of religious people and prepared “the shock troops” for intervention against those who stole the election, a belief that became “article of faith”.<sup>30</sup> Also, among the far-right groups that demonstrated on January 6, 2021 in the assault on the US Congress was “Proud Boys” – an organization that supports the supremacy of the white race and previously, on December 12, 2020, members of the group had participated armed in a protest in Washington organized by Jericho March – and “The Three Percenters” – a far-right militant movement.<sup>31</sup>

Therefore, the attitude of some followers of Christianity was frustrating, tense and full of hatred, even before the assault on the US Congress on January 6, 2021, they resorted to the springs of religious faith to achieve their goals including changing the social order. The protesters chose the American Congress because they represent the state and, according to their own conception, they no longer represent them, in the sense that they considered that the people must re-enter natural rights and take control of that institution, which is fundamental for any democracy.

[nytimes.com/2021/01/28/opinion/christian-nationalists-capitol-attack.html](https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/28/opinion/christian-nationalists-capitol-attack.html), accessed on 09.03.2021.

<sup>26</sup> Greg Locke, *Twitter account “Pastor Locke”*, URL: <https://twitter.com/pastorlocke/status/1346476581904994309>, accessed on 12.03.2021.

<sup>27</sup> Harry Farley, “Trump’s Christian supporters and the march on the Capitol”, in *BBC News*, 15 January 2021, URL: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-55578096>, accessed on 10.03.2021.

<sup>28</sup> Jericho March, *Statement on the Jericho March website*, December 2020, URL: <https://jerichomarch.org/2020/12/elementor-2213/>, accessed on 11.03.2021, *apud* Emma Green, “A Christian Insurrection – Many of those who mobbed the Capitol on Wednesday claimed to be enacting God’s will”, in *The Atlantic*, January 8, 2021, URL: <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2021/01/evangelicals-catholics-jericho-march-capitol/617591/>, accessed on 11.03.2021.

<sup>29</sup> Jericho March, *Statement on the Jericho March website*, December 2020, URL: <https://jerichomarch.org/2020/12/elementor-2213/>, accessed on 11.03.2021.

<sup>30</sup> Sarah Posner, *art. cit.*

<sup>31</sup> *Ibidem.*



## 2. Attitudes of Members of Christian Congregations *During and After the Assault on the United States Congress*

The attitude of some of the religious participants in the assault on the US Congress was an aggressive one as they were firmly convinced of the correctness of their efforts. Even Paula White, Trump’s presidential spiritual adviser, spread information about “demonic plans and networks working on Joe Biden’s behalf”,<sup>32</sup> so that during the “Save America” march on January 6, 2021, he invoked “God to give holy boldness in this hour and... to let every adversary against democracy, against freedom, against life, against liberty, against justice, against peace, against righteousness be overturned right now in the name of Jesus”.<sup>33</sup> And Pastor Darryl Knappen said he was tempted to wear the black coat that day and cover his automatic weapon (AR-15) under it,<sup>34</sup> such militant rhetoric not being isolated but part of that of Christian leaders.

Members of the far-right organization Proud Boys, before going to the US Congress, “stopped to kneel in the street and prayed in the name of Jesus”. They also asked God for “reformation and revival” and the “restoration of their value systems”, but also for sacred protection in future actions.<sup>35</sup> In fact, the participants in the assault on the US Congress appropriated these religious precepts so amalgamated with political ideology that they “literally tore down the walls of government, some believing that they were marching under the banner of Jesus to carry out God’s will to keep Trump in the White House.<sup>36</sup> They carried flags with symbolism related to Jesus, recited biblical quotations and gave sermons in loudspeakers, the assault taking place in the name of faith, according to the participants’ own statements.<sup>37</sup> Some of them ritually knelt and prayed to God, some carrying a large solid wood cross, others singing shofars, and others holding banners with Donald Trump or containing the red-and-white stripes and white stars of the US flag.<sup>38</sup> Christian flags with a red cross on a blue and white background were also waved, symbolizing the

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<sup>32</sup> Peter Manseau, “Some Capitol rioters believed they answered God’s call, not just Trump’s - A relentless religious framing of the election led many Christians to Washington on Jan. 6”, in *Washington Post*, 11 February 2021, URL: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2021/02/11/christian-religion-insurrection-capitol-trump/>, accessed on 06.03.2021.

<sup>33</sup> Sarah Posner, *art. cit.*

<sup>34</sup> Tom Gjelten, *art. cit.*

<sup>35</sup> Elizabeth Dias, Ruth Graham, *art. cit.*

<sup>36</sup> Emma Green, “A Christian Insurrection – Many of those who mobbed the Capitol on Wednesday claimed to be enacting God’s will”, in *The Atlantic*, January 8, 2021, URL: <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2021/01/evangelicals-catholics-jericho-march-capitol/617591/>, accessed on 11.03.2021.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>38</sup> Harry Farley, *art. cit.*



unity of all Christians in the world,<sup>39</sup> a flag promoted since 1897 by the Methodist movement in the USA, “the colors on the flag, not surprisingly, match those on the American flag. White represents purity and peace, blue indicates fidelity, and red stands for Christ’s blood sacrifice”<sup>40</sup>.

Some of the participants in the assault on the US Congress carried banners with religious messages or religious symbols such as the fundamental symbol of Christianity, the cross. Messages such as “Jesus saves” or “In God We Trust” could be seen on them.<sup>41</sup> Other messages were “JESUS 2020”, as if Jesus Christ were running in the US presidential election,<sup>42</sup> “God Bless America”,<sup>43</sup> and “Make America Godly Again”<sup>44</sup>. Among the banners displayed during the assault on the US Congress on January 6, 2021 was one that read “JESUS SAVES”, being identical to some previously observed on the occasion of Jericho March on December 12, 2020.<sup>45</sup> Moreover, during the assault, they were waved flags with weapons drawn next to the phrase “GOD, GUNS & GUTS MADE AMERICA, LET’S KEEP ALL THREE”<sup>46</sup> or the phrase “Armor of God”<sup>47</sup>. Protesters also used other Christian symbols on flags, one such flag being brought to the US Senate, and another bearing the inscription “Proud American Christian” along with the symbol of the beginnings of Christianity (IHTIS<sup>48</sup>), inside which was the US flag, being worn by another protester.<sup>49</sup> In fact, IHTIS represented for the Christians of the first centuries of our

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<sup>39</sup> Samuel Perry, “The Capitol siege recalls past acts of Christian nationalist violence”, in *The Conversation*, January 15, 2021, URL: <https://theconversation.com/the-capitol-siege-recalls-past-acts-of-christian-nationalist-violence-153059>, accessed on 11.03.2021.

<sup>40</sup> Elesha Coffman, “Do You Know the History of the Christian Flag? White represents purity and peace, blue indicates fidelity, and red stands for Christ’s blood sacrifice”, in *Christianity Today - Christian History*, August 2008, URL: <https://www.christianitytoday.com/history/2008/august/do-you-know-history-of-christian-flag.html>, accessed on 12.03.2021.

<sup>41</sup> Ed Pilkington, *art. cit.*

<sup>42</sup> Tom Gjelten, “Faith Leaders Nearly Unanimous in Condemning Assault on Capitol”, in *NPR*, January 7, 2021, URL: <https://www.npr.org/2021/01/07/954581163/faith-leaders-nearly-unanimous-in-condemning-assault-on-capitol>, accessed on 09.03.2021.

<sup>43</sup> Jon Ward, “Assault on Capitol was also an attack on Christian faith, Baptist leader Russell Moore says”, in *Yahoo!news*, January 15, 2021, URL: <https://news.yahoo.com/assault-on-capitol-was-also-an-attack-on-christian-faith-baptist-leader-russell-moore-says-182410188.html>, accessed on 09.03.2021.

<sup>44</sup> Sarah Stankorb, “What Place Did Jesus Have at the Capitol Hill Riot? – Pastors who preached Christian nationalism and Trump’s promise from God are complicit in this violence”, *Gen*, January 9, 2021, URL: <https://gen.medium.com/jesus-at-the-capitol-attack-5db3601d4ee5>, accessed on 12.03.2021.

<sup>45</sup> Tom Gjelten, “Faith Leaders Nearly Unanimous in Condemning Assault on Capitol”, *op. cit.*

<sup>46</sup> Emma Green, *art. cit.*

<sup>47</sup> Elizabeth Dias, Ruth Graham, *art. cit.*

<sup>48</sup> Which means “fish” in Greek translation.

<sup>49</sup> Jim Denison, “Was the Capitol riot a “Christian insurrection”? Why we must “live as though the





era the symbol of divinity because it was the Christological acrostic of the Greek phrase “Jesus Christ the Son of God, the Savior”.<sup>50</sup>

But in addition to flags and banners with religious messages, the protesters also had on them Bibles, crosses, and resumed in their procession the biblical theme of the conquest of Jericho.<sup>51</sup> There were also exhortations such as: “shout if you love Jesus” as people entered the US Congress building.<sup>52</sup> In fact, prayer was also used as a propaganda tool by Jacob Chansley, one of the so-called leaders of the assault on the US Congress, who asked the participants in the assault to stop for a moment and pray to God, the protesters agreeing with the idea and shouting *amen* at the end.<sup>53</sup> Other participants mixed Christian ideals with political ones, for example, one of them commented that “Jesus is my Savior. Trump is my president”<sup>54</sup>, a phrase also found on the flags, being claimed that “The blood of Jesus covering this place”<sup>55</sup>. Some people wore t-shirts with the Maltese cross or the cross worn by the Knights Templar,<sup>56</sup> which have gone down in history as defenders of Christians and for this reason are still invoked today.

*Social networks have been an important element in spreading information and mobilizing Christians in the assault on the US Congress.* For example, when Franklin Graham said on the morning of January 6, 2021 that “The votes are in, but is the election over? I have no clue”, it was watched by over 9.7 million people. The same religious leader also said on the same occasion: “I guess we just have to

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truth were true””, in *Denison Forum – News Discerned Differently*, January 11, 2021, URL <https://www.denisonforum.org/columns/daily-article/was-the-capitol-riot-a-christian-insurrection-why-we-must-live-as-though-the-truth-were-true/>, accessed on 09.03.2021.

<sup>50</sup> Ene Braniște, Ecaterina Braniște, *Dicționar Enciclopedic de Cunoștințe Religioase*, Diocesan Publishing House Caransebeș, Caransebeș, 2001, pp. 211-212.

<sup>51</sup> Gregory E. Sterling, “Capitol rioters made a mockery of Christian values”, in *CNN*, January 14, 2021, URL: <https://edition.cnn.com/2021/01/14/opinions/capitol-rioters-made-mockery-of-christianity-sterling/index.html>, accessed on 09.03.2021.

<sup>52</sup> Samuel Perry, *art. cit.*

<sup>53</sup> Tom Gjelten, *art. cit.*

<sup>54</sup> Jim Denison, *art. cit.*

<sup>55</sup> Matthew Avery Sutton, “The Capitol Riot Revealed the Darkest Nightmares of White Evangelical America - How 150 years of apocalyptic agitation culminated in an insurrection”, in *The New Republic*, January 14, 2021, URL: <https://newrepublic.com/article/160922/capitol-riot-revealed-darkest-nightmares-white-evangelical-america>, accessed on 12.03.2021.

<sup>56</sup> Morgan Lee, “Christian Nationalism Is Worse Than You Think – Millions of Americans believe in this political ideology. What church leaders need to know – and how they can help those under its influence”, *Christianity Today*, January 13, 2021, URL: <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/podcasts/quick-to-listen/christian-nationalism-capitol-riots-trump-podcast.html><https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/podcasts/quick-to-listen/christian-nationalism-capitol-riots-trump-podcast.html>, accessed on 13.03.2021.



wait and see. But I do know that we need to pray for our nation. We are in trouble. I believe God’s judgment is coming, for the sins of our nation are great and they are a stench in the nostrils of our Creator”. The post had on March 6, 2021 over 62 thousand comments, over 322 thousand people had reacted and had been distributed over 59 thousand times.<sup>57</sup> Also, one of the first to enter the US Congress illegally declared on Facebook “Trump will be your president four more years in Jesus name”.<sup>58</sup> In a post on Facebook on January 9, 2021, Darryl Knappen called on his own church for American patriots to be ready to arm themselves and join a civilian militia to protect their freedoms.<sup>59</sup>

*Another phenomenon that was appropriated by some of the Christians participating in the assault was that of QAnon, an extreme right-wing movement whose ideology consists of conspiracy theories. Christian followers of the QAnon movement were present at the assault on the US Congress on January 6, 2021, blaming unfounded allegations of US presidential election fraud. “Shaman QAnon”, Jacob Chansley, known for his horned hat he wears in protest, “said a prayer” after the Christian ritual, thanking God: “thank you for allowing the United States to be reborn”, an approach that other outraged people agreed to.<sup>60</sup> During the prayer, all those present adopted pious behavior, a sign that they had acquired religious conduct.<sup>61</sup> Raising the arms of the protesters during the prayer is related to the invocation of the divinity, but also as a thank you “for allowing the United States of America to be reborn”.<sup>62</sup> In the same context, Air Force veteran Ashli Babbitt, who was shot dead during the congressional assault, was declared a “martyr” by the religious participants in the assault.<sup>63</sup>*

The religious contexts and motives of the attack on the US Congress were an important element in the reaction of the protesters who took part in the assault.<sup>64</sup> Christian nationalism ideologically substantiated the assault by creating a false belief among the participants that “their actions were blessed by God”.<sup>65</sup> Russell Moore, leader of the Southern Baptist Convention in the United States, said he was deeply

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<sup>57</sup> Franklin Graham, *Post on Facebook account “Franklin Graham”*, January 6, 2021, URL: <https://www.facebook.com/FranklinGraham/posts/4023059261083558>, accessed on 06.03.2021.

<sup>58</sup> Peter Manseau, *art. cit.*

<sup>59</sup> Tom Gjelten, “Militant Christian Nationalists Remain A Potent Force, Even After The Capitol Riot”, *op. cit.*

<sup>60</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>61</sup> Luke Mogelson, “A Reporter’s Video from Inside the Capitol Siege”, in *The New Yorker*, 01/17/2021, URL: <https://www.newyorker.com/video/watch/a-reporters-footage-from-inside-the-capitol-siege>, accessed on 09.03.2021.

<sup>62</sup> Sarah Posner, *art. cit.*

<sup>63</sup> Jim Denison, *art. cit.*

<sup>64</sup> Peter Manseau, *art. cit.*

<sup>65</sup> Ed Pilkington, *art. cit.*



affected by the display on January 6, 2021 of placards reading “Jesus Saves” along with an ad-hoc “gallows” near the US Congress. The same cleric stated that such manifestations are dangerous because they affect the faith and society.<sup>66</sup> Moreover, according to interviews conducted by the New York Times, the event of January 6, 2021, which was the culmination of fake news about fraudulent presidential elections by occult and evil forces, “only fueled a deeper sense of victimhood and being misunderstood”.<sup>67</sup>

Peter Manseau concludes that although the Christian participants in the assault on the Capitol do not represent the Christian religion as a whole, Christians immediately and firmly condemned what happened on January 6, 2021, however, due to the spread in the public space of political ideas with strong religious values to some leaders of important Christian congregations, it came to pass that during the assault, Christians formed “the core of the mob”, their actions being the natural consequence of such rhetoric.<sup>68</sup> Also, the director of the Washington Public Religion Research Institute, Robert P. Jones, said that what happened in the US Congress was generated by “an unholy amalgamation of white supremacy and Christianity”.<sup>69</sup> Therefore, religion determined the behavior of a part of the crowd that assaulted the US Congress, performing a religious act in their opinion, meaning that they displayed Christian symbols as assault flags, invoked God in the belief that they were fulfilling the divine will and replicated biblical rituals regarding the fall of Jericho.

### Conclusions

Ultra-religious participants in the assault on the US Congress believed they had been called by God to conquer the federal building in which the US legislature operates. They behaved in this way because they believed that there was no other way to fight against a “deep state” whose representatives considered to be in that building. The political approach of the assault aimed at blocking the certification as president of Joseph Robinette Biden, so that Donald Trump will remain President of the United States after January 6, 2021.

Both before the US presidential election and during the assault on the Capitol, false information was spread through social networks about the election fraud

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<sup>66</sup> Elana Schor, “Christianity on display at Capitol riot sparks new debate”, in *APnews*, January 28, 2021, URL: <https://apnews.com/article/christianity-capitol-riot-6f13ef0030ad7b5a6f37a1e3b7b4c898>, accessed on 06.03.2021.

<sup>67</sup> Elizabeth Dias, Ruth Graham, *art. cit.*

<sup>68</sup> Peter Manseau, *art. cit.*

<sup>69</sup> Robert P. Jones, “Comment on Twitter Account “Religion Media Centre (@RelMedCentre)”, January 7, 2021, URL: <https://twitter.com/RelMedCentre/status/1347187954079444997>, accessed on 09.03.2021.



that was lost by President Donald Trump. Such information has been spread by important religious leaders who are followed online by millions of people and whose congregations have a very large membership.

The amalgamation of the religious faith with political ideology generated a special conduct among those who appropriated them. Religious behavior was directed towards shaping society according to their own visions as they were projected by their own beliefs, such people becoming violent in pursuit of their goals. Nothing has censored them in pursuing their goal of supporting Donald Trump to remain in the United States for another four-year term.

The religious dominance over some participants in the assault on the US Congress is undoubted, being highlighted by the presence and display of symbols specific to Christianity, the performance of religious rituals, the attitude and conduct adopted during the utterance of prayers, and slogans, statements, language and religious songs during the event. Some of the ultra-religious people were also followers of QAnon conspiracy theories (such as the fraud of the 2020 presidential election), a fact highlighted in the mixing of Christian symbols with those specific to the QAnon movement and those of the American far right.

Congress is the expression of US democracy, and its attack on ultra-religious people denotes the importance of religious beliefs in the manifestations they have in certain situations or against the background of certain events that they consider an attack on themselves, which causes them frustration and anxiousness. The desire to create administrative institutions under the obedience of divinity, without those who share their vision have the power to oppose, is not new in the expression of ultra-religiosity, which is found in the history of Christianity, the end of this desire being violent and bloody every time.

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