



MOTIVATION OF QANON CONSPIRACY THEORIES APPROPRIATION BY CHRISTIANS AND THE EXPANSION OF THE PHENOMENON IN 2022

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Although the QAnon movement is regarded as an extreme right-wing movement whose members have exposed conspiracy theories apparently unrelated to the Christian religion, scientific research and journalistic investigations of the phenomenon have revealed that some of the movement's adherents are religious people, members of Christian parishes or congregations in the United States of America or in other countries where the phenomenon has spread.

This article will highlight the appropriation of QAnon conspiracy theories by members of some Christian churches or congregations, beliefs viewed with concern by the pastors of the respective religious communities, who are sounding the alarm regarding the development of religious feelings based on biblical precepts combined with QAnon conspiracy theories.

The use of scientific tools, such as conducting opinion polls in highlighting the trend of the phenomenon, has revealed that the number of those who adopt the QAnon conspiracy theories is increasing, in just four months, from February to June 2022, the number of Americans who believe in these theories has increased by over three million.

Keywords: *QAnon; right-wing extremism; conspiracies; Christianity; churches; faith; religion.*

Introduction

In recent years, some followers of Christianity have embraced QAnon conspiracy theories, interpreting them through the religious precepts

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recorded in the Bible, respectively connecting the biblical precepts to QAnon conspiracy theories to establish an apocalyptic causal relationship.

QAnon theories began to be present in Christian churches in the United States of America (U.S.), with conspiracy ideas being amalgamated with elements of Christian doctrine. As a result, members of such religious congregations have interpreted these theories with the help of biblical precepts, but also conversely, they have found and highlighted many biblical ideas that they consider to be a justification or divine revelation of things found in QAnon theories.

Ari Shapiro, a journalist with National Public Radio, and investigative journalist Katelyn Beaty¹, in an appearance on that station, examined “the spread of the QAnon conspiracy theory in Christian communities in the United States” (Shapiro 2020).

In an article published in Religion News Service about QAnon, Katelyn Beaty stated that the ideas promoted by this group are taking hold in some Christian churches because some people who attend them are prone to adopt conspiracy theories, as “these Christians thrive on a narrative of media cover-up” (Beaty 2020b).

Another expert on the phenomenon is Marc-André Argentino, a researcher at Concordia University who, in an article called “The Church of QAnon: Will conspiracy theories form the basis of a new religious movement?”, says that followers of QAnon movement are moving towards a Christian religious transformation. Argentino stated that a group of QAnon followers began to interpret the movement’s own ideology in relation to Christian doctrine, interpreting the Bible through QAnon conspiracy theories (Argentino 2020). For the purpose of his scientific approach to establish the degree of religiosity of followers of the QAnon movement, for a period of three months beginning on February 23, 2020, Argentino participated online in the public religious services of a QAnon church affiliated with a Christian-evangelical congregation called Omega Kingdom Ministry (OKM). The conclusion reached by the respective researcher of the phenomenon was that in the said church, QAnon conspiracy theories are on the one hand “reinterpreted through the Bible” and on the other hand “serve as a lens to interpret the Bible itself” (Argentino 2020).

Likewise, Adrienne LaFrance describes the QAnon movement in an article in *The Atlantic*, entitled “The Prophecies of Q - American conspiracy theories enter a dangerous new phase”, as one “united in a mass rejection of reason, objectivity, and other Enlightenment values”. She also stated in June 2020 that the expansion of the movement is only just beginning and places a strong emphasis on “a deep sense of belonging”, meaning that the emergence of the QAnon movement represents “the birth of a new religion” and “not just a conspiracy theory” (LaFrance 2020).

In this context, it should be noted that the trigger factor for the emergence of QAnon movement is considered to be “Edgar Maddison Welch, a deeply religious individual and father of two”, who, armed with several assault rifles loaded with

¹ Ex-managing editor of Christianity Today.



lethal ammunition, entered the Comet Ping Pong pizzeria in Washington, D.C., on December 4, 2016, where he suspected satanic child sacrifice rituals were taken place (LaFrance 2020). That pizzeria was mentioned in several emails of former White House Chief of Staff John Podesta, made public by WikiLeaks in October 2016. Thus, Edgar Maddison Welch considered the information about Pizzagate to be true and legitimized his violent approach to people he suspected of meeting that food-establishment legitimate (LaFrance 2020).

So, members of some Christian congregations in the U.S. have appropriated QAnon conspiracy theories as they have interpreted them from the perspective of Christian teachings as divine revelations on the one hand and used them to supplement biblical precepts on the other. The development of such distorted religiosity in relation to the official dogmas of the Christian churches determines a behavior prone to violence.

1. QAnon, Christian Churches, and the Internet

The connection between Christianity and QAnon conspiracy theories is highlighted even by Christian clergy, leaders of some congregations in the U.S., who identify the problems generated by this phenomenon within their own religious communities.

Thus, Pastor Mark Fugitt of Round Grove Baptist Church in Miller, Missouri, has released an analysis of conspiracy theories appropriated by followers of his own congregation. Among them, the pastor listed: mind control via fifth generation telecommunications technology known as 5G; the death of people wearing Covid-19 masks, as it is false that they save their lives; Bill Gates – the owner of Microsoft is related to Satan; the germ theory is false, but the Pizzagate theory is true; the existence of a location where a cabal of the world’s elite ritually sacrifices children; the death of African-American George Floyd was just a simple strategy to achieve hidden goals (Beaty 2020b).

Similarly, Pastor Jeb Barr of the First Baptist Church of Elm Mott Waco in Texas stated about the appropriation of QAnon’s theories by Christians that the phenomenon is “extremely widespread” because it is transmitted through its “online church networks”. The pastor also said of his parishioners that they believe “communists are taking over America and operating a pedophile ring out of a pizza parlor” (Beaty 2020b). The theories that QAnon followers expound and propagate are amalgamated with doctrinal precepts about Jesus Christ, thus becoming very attractive to co-religionists: “QAnon has features akin to syncretism — the practice of blending traditional Christian beliefs with other spiritual systems, such as Santeria². Q explicitly uses Bible verses to urge adherents to stand firm

² “Santería - or “the worship of saints” - is gaining ground as a popular religious practice in Cuba. Developed in the African slave communities of the island’s 18th-century sugar plantations, it’s a syncretic religion adopting elements of Spanish-imposed Catholicism while maintaining the central beliefs of Africa’s kidnapped natives, primarily Nigeria’s Yoruba tribe.” (Phil Clarke Hill, n.d.).



against evil elites. One charismatic church based in Indiana hosts two-hour Sunday services that show how Bible prophecies confirm Q’s messages. Its leaders tell the congregation to stop watching mainstream media (even conservative media) in favor of QAnon YouTube channels and the Qmap website.” (Beaty 2020b).

Thus, it is worth noting that QAnon has the features of a syncretistic movement as it amalgamates elements of Christian doctrine and rituals, i.e. “explicitly uses Bible verses to urge adherents to stand firm against evil elites” (Beaty 2020b) and “proliferates in white evangelical circles”, although many of the Christians who pass them on do not know what the QAnon movement stands for (Posner 2020).

Many messages posted online by QAnon followers invoke biblical precepts. One of these found in the Old Testament, in the Second Book of Chronicles, chapter 7, says: “If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land” (Holy Bible, 2 Chronicles 7:14). This Bible verse is interpreted by QAnon religious followers in the U.S. as a promise of divine intervention to reform American society: “God will free America of the satanic denizens of the ‘deep state’³ who run a global child sex trafficking network” (Posner 2020).

The transformation of the QAnon movement is made possible by branches of Protestant Christianity, also emerging in the U.S., that emphasize a charismatic leader. “The neo-charismatic movement is a branch of evangelical Protestant Christianity,” says Marc-André Argentino, which includes “thousands of independent organizations” (Argentino 2020).

Leaders of the QAnon movement, such as David Hayes, post a number of materials on media platforms such as YouTube, watched by hundreds of thousands of people. David Hayes describes himself as a convert from atheism, becoming a person of faith. He started posting messages on December 12, 2017, about his calling by divinity: “God wants me to keep my attention focused on politics and current events. After a few prayers, I decided to do a regular presentation of news and current events on Periscope. I try to do one broadcast a day” (LaFrance 2020).

David Hayes has been followed on social media by a large number of people. He had on 391,000 followers on his YouTube channel “prayingmedic” as of 15 October 2020, whose motto was: “A virtual classroom about the kingdom of God” and on which there were links to other Twitter and Facebook accounts (Youtube channel “prayingmedic” n.d.) as well as to a website called Mobile Intensive Prayer Unit - The personal blog of Praying Medic (Blog Mobile Intensive Prayer Unit n.d.). David Hayes was also followed by 411,246 people on his Twitter account Praying Medic (@prayingmedic) on 15 October 2020 (Praying Medic (@prayingmedic) - Twitter account, n.d.).

³ According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, the “deep state” is “an alleged secret network of especially nonelected government officials and sometimes private entities (as in the financial services and defense industries) operating extralegally to influence and enact government policy” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, n.d.).



Dave Hayes has set out his ideas through several books he has published in recent years, the titles of some of which are instructive in this regard: “The Great Awakening”, “Calm Before the Storm – Q Chronicles”, “Divine Healing Made Simple” (via indicating how exorcisms should be performed), “My Craziest Adventures With God – Volume 1” and “My Craziest Adventures With God – Volume 2” (recounting “miracles he witnessed”) and “Seeing in the Spirit Made Simple” (dedicated to those who wish to learn to see “the realms of angels and demons”), “Operating in the Court of Angels” (dedicated to those who want “to meet and co-labor with angels”), “Hearing God’s Voice Made Simple” (dedicated to “those who want to hear God’s voice more clearly”) (Blog Mobile Intensive Prayer Unit n.d.).

Another example of a promoter of this movement is Omega Kingdom Ministry (OKM), part of a large religious congregation called Home Congregations Worldwide (HCW), which has as its “spiritual adviser” one Mark Taylor (Argentino 2020), an individual convinced that “the same deep state that controls the world has also infiltrated traditional churches”, which is why his organization has a “responsibility” to cleanse the “church” of these intrusive elements (Pandemic spreads conspiracies far and wide among a range of believers n.d.). The website owned by Omega Kingdom Ministry promotes ideas in which “QAnon theories and biblical references” are intertwined. Thus, a series of ten materials posted on the YouTube platform by HCW formed the basis of the “weekly Bible study” at services of the mentioned QAnon church, according to what Marc-André Argentino observed during his attendance at services (Argentino 2020). The services were officiated by Russ Wagner, OKM leader from Indiana, beginning with prayers for the protection of the camera from Satan, followed by an hour of Bible study in which the “Fall Cabal video”⁴ was explained and commented on through “the lens of the Bible and QAnon narratives”, and a prayer and fellowship of followers at the end of the service (Argentino 2020).

OKM propagates the political ideology influenced by Christianity known as the “Seven Mountains of Societal Influence” aimed at “socio-political and economic transformation through the Gospel of Jesus” through seven components of the respective societies, namely: “religion, family, education, government, media, entertainment and business”. Such theology fits perfectly into the ideology propagated by the QAnon movement and “blends QAnon’s apocalyptic desire to destroy society “controlled” by the deep state with the need for the Kingdom of God on Earth” (Argentino 2020).

There are other cases of Christian churches in the U.S. involved in propagation of QAnon conspiracy ideas, such as Rock Urban Church in Grandville, Michigan,

⁴ “Fall Cabal” is actually a 10-part documentary created by a Dutch conspiracy theorist named Janet Ossebaard, a documentary widely used to indoctrinate members of Christian congregations into QAnon followers, being used as material in weekly Bible studies (Argentino 2020).



or religious leaders such as Danny Silk –pastor of Bethel Church⁵ and John MacArthur –an evangelical pastor in California (Burke 2020). These cases are not unique, with Paul Anleitner⁶ warning that there are more and more “conservative Christians” who read from a so-called QAnon Bible, clerics who talk about the “deep state”, QAnon conspiracy theories debated in Bible studies, or Christians being indoctrinated with QAnon theories by influential religious leaders (Burke 2020). Moreover, evangelical Christians in the U.S. “are natural targets for QAnon”, as they are the ones who have been warning for the last 40 years that internal imbalances will be created because of the amplification of doubts towards society and towards the elites. These feelings are generated by the abandonment of the absolute truth found only in the word of God, recorded in the Bible (Beaty 2020b).

The objective of Omega Kingdom Ministry as presented on the organization’s website “is to restore the principles and practice of Christianity from the first century to the 21st century by training, equipping, and releasing Christian leaders” (Omega Kingdom Ministry website n.d.). For this purpose, training of followers is sought, and the Home Congregations Worldwide website has the necessary information resources, the organization having as its motto: “Discipling a Nation by Training and Coaching Leaders to Begin Home Congregations - One Community at a Time” (Website Home Congregations Worldwide n.d.).

Jared Stacy, pastor of Spotswood Baptist Church in Fredericksburg, Virginia, says that QAnon conspiracy theories are especially appropriated by members of his church who share and distribute on Facebook theories about the Coronavirus, the conspiracy involving Jeffrey Epstein or the actions of pedophiles (Beatty 2020b). For his part, John van Sloten, pastor at Marda Loop Church in Calgary, Canada, believes that behind the protests against measures ordered by the authorities to prevent the spread of COVID-19 infections, including those related to the mandatory wearing of masks, is a developed “theology” (Dryden 2020). That’s why the leaders of the QAnon church ask their followers “to stop listening to any media” because they are Satanists, instead pointing them to YouTube channels that propagate QAnon content to watch daily as a dose of therapy. At the same time, the same clerics tell parishioners to follow the Qmap website or influencers of the QAnon movement, who distribute material and post messages on social media (Argentino 2020).

The appropriation of QAnon conspiracy theories by Christians is evidenced by their stance during the January 6, 2021 assault on the U.S. Congress. Thus, Jacob Anthony Angeli Chansley, known as Jake Angeli and the QAnon Shaman, asked his companions to pray together in the U.S. Senate chamber: “Thank you Heavenly Father for gracing us with this opportunity... to send a message to all tyrants, communists and globalists that this is our nation, not theirs. Thank you for filling this chamber with

⁵ A Pentecostal megachurch in Redding, California.

⁶ An evangelical pastor in Minneapolis.



patriots that love you and that love Christ. Thank you for allowing the United States of America to be reborn,” was the prayer uttered by the QAnon Shaman (Joyce 2022b).

“So there is this kind of holy trinity,” Kathryn Joyce says of QAnon believers, “freedom for us, order for everyone else. And when that order is violated, they get violence” (Joyce 2022a). Also, in the context, at a 2022 event in the U.S. called “Patriots Arise”, which began with the presentation of conspiracy theories, a former colonel in the U.S. Armed Forces named Doug Mastriano gave a lecture on the occasion of the event and at the end of it he received a sword inscribed with the phrase: “For God and country” (Dias 2022). Francine Fosdick, an organizer of political and social events through a website that also promoted QAnon slogans, and who promoted that event, told Mastriano that she got the sword because “you’ve been cutting a lot of heads off”, also conveying to them that “You fight for our religious rights in the name of Christ Jesus, and so we wanted to bless you with that sword of David.” (Dias 2022).

What is striking is that QAnon is not considered a mere political ideology, but is viewed by Katelyn Beaty as “a spiritual worldview that co-opts many Christian-sounding ideas to promote false claims about actual human beings.” (Beatty 2020b).

The language used by the QAnon movement is a spiritual-Christian one, and the constant focus on the Manichean dichotomy⁷ creates the real premises of a great awakening of Christians through prophecies that come more recently from the Q messenger. As a result, “it is easy for many white evangelicals to read their Bibles and connect the dots between what they read there and what they hear from QAnon sources” (Beatty 2020a).

Thus, QAnon conspiracy theories have spread and continue to spread through religious congregations, including through the virtual environment, with clergy sermons adapted to these theories and promoted as absolute truth as they have been mixed with religious and biblical precepts to point to the divine character of the message transmitted. The propagation of the message of conspiracy theories and Christian teachings has generated a strong religiosity that has led some followers to become violent, as is the case of the people who stormed the U.S. Congress on January 6, 2022.

2. Trends in the Evolution of the QAnon Phenomenon

Following studies conducted in 2021 by the Public Religion Research Institute in Washington DC, the U.S., through several opinion polls whose results were published on February 24, 2022, it was concluded that approximately 41 million Americans, i.e. 16 % of the U.S. adult population, were “QAnon believers” (Jenkins 2022). Of the total survey participants, respondents strongly agreed with three fundamental statements of the QAnon movement in the following percentages:

⁷ Manichaeism dichotomy is a religious doctrine developed in the third century AD. de Mani, a Persian philosopher and theologian, “its fundamental principle was the existence of, and eternal conflict between, absolute good and absolute evil” (Petsko 2008, 1).



“1. The U.S. government, media and financial world are controlled by a group of Satan-worshipping pedophiles who run a global child sex-trafficking operation – 16%;

2. There is a storm coming soon that will sweep away the elites in power and restore the rightful leaders–22%;

3. Because things have gotten so far off track, true American patriots may have to resort to violence in order to save our country – 18%.” (PRRI Staff 2022b).

Natalie Jackson, director of research at the institute, stated based on poll results, that “QAnon conspiracy theories are not losing popularity over time, despite their championed leader being no longer in power” (n.a. former President Donald Trump). It also states that despite the fact that “these believers are racially, religiously, and politically diverse, the unifying beliefs are that their way of life is under attack and that they might be willing to resort to violence to defend their vision of the country.” (PRRI Staff 2022a).

Polling found that 22% of the American adult population “mostly or completely agree that there an upheaval in American politics is coming”, 18% of the surveyed public believe that “violence might be necessary to save our country”, and 16% of Americans believe that “the government, the media, and the financial world are controlled by Satan-worshipping pedophiles” (PRRI Staff 2022b).

The same polls also revealed that 59% of Americans surveyed believe that the perpetrators of the January 6, 2021 attack on the U.S. Congress are members and sympathizers of far-right groups and organizations. Also, 56% of those interviewed believe Donald Trump, former U.S. president, is to blame for the attack, but also “conservative media platforms that spread conspiracy theories and misinformation” (PRRI Staff 2022b).

At the same time, polls have shown that 9% of Americans agree to commit violence, believing that this way the country will be saved. Juxtaposing this percentage with that of QAnon believers who believe that “God has granted America a special role in human history”, a fairly high percentage of 68% of QAnon adherents hold this belief (PRRI Staff 2022b), reveals a skewed attitude to their extreme violence.

Ian Huff published an article on June 24, 2022, on the Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI) website, called “QAnon Beliefs Have Increased Since 2021 as Americans Are Less Likely to Reject Conspiracies”, in which he also highlighted the results of other surveys, following the same three questions as in the one whose results were published on February 24, 2022 (Huff 2022). Thus, the results revealed that “27% of Americans agree that a storm is coming that will sweep away elites in power, 19% agree that violence may be necessary to save the country, and 18% agree that the government, media, and financial world are controlled by Satan-worshipping pedophiles” (Huff 2022). It can thus be observed that in the four months between the publication dates of the two results, February



24, 2022 and June 24, 2022, the percentage of those who believe in QAnon conspiracy theories increased slightly. More precisely, in four months, the number of Americans who believe in QAnon conspiracy theories increased by approximately 3.35 million, which is 1% of the U.S. population (United States Population n.d.).

If in February 2022, 22% of Americans believed that “a storm is coming that will sweep away elites in power”, in June 2022, 27% of Americans held this belief. Similarly, if in February 2022, 18% of Americans believed that “violence may be necessary to save the country”, in June 2022, 19% held the same belief. If in February 2022, 16% of Americans believed that “the government, the media, and the financial world are controlled by Satan-worshipping pedophiles”, by June 2022, 18% held the same belief (Jenkins 2022; PRRI Staff 2022b). The 18% of the U.S. population represents 60 million Americans (United States Population n.d.).

At the end of June 2022, the mysterious leader of the QAnon movement, namely Q, posted via the 8Kun platform a message to Americans in the context of the hearings of the U.S. Congress regarding the assault of January 6, 2021 on the headquarters of the U.S. legislative building. This message was a simple one, but with strong reverberations on the belief and values system of QAnon followers (Murphy 2022). After more than a year of not posting, Q relayed the following: “Shall we play a game once more?” and “Are you ready to serve your country again? Remember your oath.” (Thompson 2022).

Joseph E. Uscinski, a University of Miami political science associate professor and researcher who has studied the QAnon movement, stated that “most QAnon believers were not there on January 6,” in the sense that they did not participate in the assault on the U.S. Congress. According to the same researcher, this fact discloses that the phenomenon reveals major problems in society and not a cause, “Q is a symptom of a larger issue, not the cause” (Murphy 2022).

Regardless of whether the foundation of QAnon conspiracy theories is focused on the person behind the pseudonym Q, or other such theories, “Americans should be worried about the prevalence of conspiracy theories in modern life” (Murphy 2022).

Therefore, by applying in 2021 and between February and June 2022 some sets of questionnaires subsumed by opinion polls, it was highlighted that QAnon Movement is growing in scope, the number of conspiracy theorists increased in four months by several million followers in the U.S. alone.

Conclusions

To this day, the QAnon movement is manifesting itself primarily in the space where American Christian culture and spirituality manifests itself. This conclusion is based on the fact that QAnon conspiracy theories have been appropriated by a number of Christian churches and congregations in the U.S., which have amalgamated Christian precepts, especially Bible verses, with conspiracy theories.



QAnon theories have come to be justified by biblical precepts, being described as extensions of biblical prophecies, but conversely, conspiracy theories have led to the highlighting the contemporary reality of ideas or teachings recorded in the Bible.

These religious preaching of QAnon theories, including treating them as sacred writings and studying them during religious services held on feast days, highlight the deeply religious nature of the direction in which the beliefs or faiths of the believers who form the QAnon movement are directed, namely towards the emergence of new rites or religious confessions, or even new religions of Christian origin.

Members of some Christian congregations have appropriated QAnon conspiracy theories on the basis of beliefs related to the idea of a global cover-up of the existence of a satanic cabal, as well as interpreting these theories from the perspective of implementing biblical precepts and the divine right to protect humanity against Satan. In such a context, violence committed in the name of religious beliefs becomes not only acceptable, but appears as mandatory for the defence of the holy precepts, as they are developed and viewed by believers. Although Q has not posted a single message in the past year, the QAnon movement has not contracted, it has not disappeared, but has remained in a dormant state following the attack on the U.S. Congress, and its followers are likely to spring into action at the next click.

The extent of the phenomenon is highlighted by a method of scientific research, the interview, a tool that ensures the application of opinion polls and which indicates the increasing trend of appropriating QAnon conspiracy theories.

Combining QAnon conspiracy theories with biblical precepts and Christian teachings has led to the emergence of a movement with strong convictions against a section of the population consisting of people they consider to be the messengers of Satan and whom they must fight, including with weapons, on behalf of Christian communities, a creed in the name of which they are willing to kill, not only to be very violent. So if only 0.01% of the American followers of the QAnon movement, 6,000 people to be precise, adopt violence-prone behavior in the name of religious beliefs and conspiracy theories, there will be more violence in the next period or the next years in the U.S.

The amalgamation of Christian precepts with those of QAnon conspiracy theories has been done by followers in Europe as well, not only in the U.S., and these beliefs will influence ideas in society, choices and actions of some social groups. On an individual level, some people will become violent and even willing to kill their fellow man to send a message to the rest of the population.

Since it has a religious foundation, the adoption of QAnon conspiracy theories will generate social dichotomy and the rejection of the arguments of others, and the occurrence of violence generated by QAnon followers is not subject to the condition of “if it will take place”, but only refers to the moment “when it will take place”.



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