POLITICS

A Christian Insurrection

Many of those who mobbed the Capitol on Wednesday claimed to be enacting God's will.

EMMA GREEN **JANUARY 8, 2021**

WIN MCNAMEE / GETTY

Updated 1:36 p.m. Eastern on January 8, 2020.

T he name of God was everywhere during Wednesday's insurrection against the American government. The mob carried signs and flag declaring JESUS SAVES! and GOD, GUNS & GUTS MADE AMERICA, LET'S KEEP ALL THREE. Some were participants in the Jericho March, a gathering of Christians to "pray, march, fast, and rally for election integrity." After calling on God to "save the republic" during rallies at state capitols and in D.C. over the past two months, the marchers returned to Washington with flourish. On the National Mall, one man waved the flag of Israel above a sign begging passersby to SAY YES TO JESUS. "Shout if you love Jesus!" someone yelled, and the crowd cheered. "Shout if you love Trump!" The crowd cheered louder. The group's name is drawn from the biblical story of Jericho, "a city of false gods and corruption," the march's website says. Just as God instructed Joshua to march around Jericho seven times with priests blowing trumpets, Christians gathered in D.C., blowing shofars, the ram's horn typically

2 more articles this month

Thank you for reading The Atlantic.

believing they were marching under Jesus's banner to implement God's will to keep Trump in the White House. The group's co-founders are essentially unknown in the organized Christian world. Robert Weaver, an evangelical Oklahoma insurance salesman, was nominated by Trump to lead the Indian Health Service but underlined withdrew after *The Wall Street Journal* reported that he misrepresented his qualifications. Arina Grossu, who is Catholic, recently worked as a contract communications adviser at the Department of Health and Human Services. (Weaver and Grossu declined to comment. "Jericho March denounces any and all acts of violence and destruction, including any that took place at the U.S. Capitol on January 6th, 2021," a PR spokesperson for the March wrote to me in an email after the publication of this article.) Still, they will have far more influence in shaping the reputation of Christianity for the outside world than many denominational giants: They helped stage a stunning effort to circumvent the 2020 election, all in the name of their faith. White evangelicals, in particular, overwhelmingly supported Trump in 2016 and 2020. Some of these supporters participated in the attack on the Capitol on Wednesday. But many in the country hold all Trump voters responsible—especially those who lent him the moral authority of their faith.

Scenes from the protests in Washington on Wednesday (Elaine Godfrey)

This realization has shaken Christian leaders. "I certainly did not believe, or have any anticipation, that [Trump] would take matters to the extent that have become clear over the last few weeks," Albert Mohler, the head of an influential evangelical seminary in Kentucky who hopes to be the next president of the Southern Baptist Convention, told me. Mohler opposed Trump in 2016, citing what he saw as the candidate's poor character. But last spring, he publicly declared that he would support Trump in 2020 and vote for Republican presidential candidates for the rest of his life. "We are undoubtedly in an agonizing moment, in which evangelical Christians who supported Donald Trump now find ourselves in the position of being tremendously embarrassed by this most recent behavior," he told me.

2 more articles this month

Thank you for reading The Atlantic.

Subscribe Now

Already a subscriber? Sign in

Evangelicalism's Silent Majority

EMMA GREEN

Mass Delusion in America

JEFFREY GOLDBERG

[Read: The evangelical reckoning begins]

Mohler said he was shocked by the triumph of the mob on Wednesday. He could not believe that the president had explicitly encouraged this attack on the constitutional process. "Conservatives do not believe there is any excuse, whatsoever, for unleashing what amounts to a destructive rage on the nation," he said. I asked him whether evangelicals who supported Trump have an obligation to grapple with their role in enabling Trump's behavior. "I honestly don't know the extent to which history will record the evangelicals—I'm trying to think of the word you just used for supporting the president. What was the word you just used? *Enabling* the president," he said. "I've been very clear in my criticism of the president's bad behavior." Surely he didn't vote for *this*. He couldn't have known that this is how Trump would end things. But he sees that evangelicals are due for a reckoning in their own house. "Where we find ourselves in the wrong, repentance is always called for."

[Read: Evangelicalism's silent majority]

Other evangelical leaders who have mostly stayed silent during Trump's time in office finally spoke out on Wednesday. "Armed breaching of capitol security behind a confederate flag is anarchy, unAmerican, criminal treason and domestic terrorism. President Trump must clearly tell his supporters 'We lost. Go home now,'" tweeted Rick Warren, an influential California megachurch pastor.

But it was too late. Someone else had already grabbed the megaphone.

"This is bigger than one election," Grossu says on the Jericho March website. "This is about protecting free and fair elections for the future and saving America from tyranny." Paranoid thinking abounded among the protesters in D.C.; the QAnon conspiracy has circulated within some evangelical circles. On Wednesday, the Jericho March account tweeted a screenshot of Trump condemning Vice President Mike Pence for not stopping the certification of the Electoral College votes. "A sad day in America," it said, along with prayer-hands emojis. The march organizers were not mourning the attack on the Capitol. They were mourning the vice president's refusal to help the president overturn the election.

2 more articles this month

Thank you for reading The Atlantic.

Subscribe Now

Already a subscriber? Sign in