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Warnke to Wayfair: Evangelical Eschatology and the Christian Connection

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“Some of the names in this book have been changed to protect the individuals involved. The events are absolutely as described.”

-Flyleaf to the 1972 edition of Mike Warnke's *The Satan Seller*

Abstract:

The Qanon conspiracy theory has run rampant within the American Evangelical community since its inception in early 2017. Proponents of the theory believe that a shadowy cabal of pedophile Democrats are secretly running the world, trafficking children so they may drink oxidized adrenaline from their blood. The only person able to stop them, so the story goes, is former US President Donald Trump. To the average person this may seem like ridiculous nonsense, but it's ridiculous nonsense that has carved out a considerable niche within the political movements of one of the most active voting blocs in America. Consequences are real, and far reaching, but what is it that drives evangelicals to Qanon, or vice versa? Within I propose a more useful model for what a "conspiracy theory" is, and use it to explore the idea that those behind the Qanon conspiracy theory movement have tailored it uniquely to be compatible with Evangelical theology.

Would it surprise you to learn that your elected officials are active participants in a globe-spanning underground cabal of Satan-worshipping, child-murdering pedophiles? On the other side of the aisle, would it surprise you to learn that your elected officials were the ones on the frontlines fighting against that very same cabal? Ridiculous as either of those questions may sound, their content makes up the core of the Qanon conspiracy that has captivated the most active bloc of the American religio-political sphere: Evangelical Protestant Christians. Taking advantage of the unique dimensions of Evangelical thought, the Qanon mythos has become closely tied to Evangelical political reality over the past decade through careful manipulation, and has led to the widespread dissemination of some incredibly dangerous theories and ideas among a politically active majority within the American Evangelical population.

Descended from the pizzagate conspiracy theories that came to prevalence during the 2016 elections, the Qanon conspiracy theory envelops innumerable smaller theories within an overarching mythos that posits former president Donald Trump to be a target of, and a fighter against a global network of Satanist pedophiles. Eventually, so the theories go, a “storm” will come; heralded by Donald Trump and those loyal to his cause, during which every last member of the Satanist pedophile cabal will be arrested and summarily executed by the Trump administration. Information about the cabal’s movements, and the eventual coming of the Storm are handed down to believers through anonymous and often right-leaning message boards by an

anonymous individual or individuals known only as Q. Q claims to be a government whistleblower, one with US Department of Energy (DOE) Q-level clearance, from whence their insider information comes. The goals of this cabal tend to vary from theory to theory depending on the person(s) preaching, but the general consensus across what are considered to be the “canonical” Q drops is that the Satanist pedophile cabal henceforth called the “Shadow Government” is trafficking children with the intent of harvesting adrenochrome from their blood through physical and sexual abuse, all the while manipulating American democracy with the hopes of keeping Donald Trump and his administration at bay. Adrenochrome is a chemical produced naturally as adrenaline oxidizes, and despite loose experimentation between the 1950s and early 70s, no medicinal or recreational use for the substance has been discovered. All evidence available as of present says that adrenochrome is a byproduct of the human body with next to no legitimate medical use. However science has done little to stop conspiratorial imaginations from running wild. Core to the Qanon mythos, and the pizzagate conspiracy that preceded it is the theory that adrenochrome, when ingested, produces an intoxicating and incomparable high. Allegedly, theorists claim, the substance is produced in its most potent form by children, whose greater proclivity to fear responses concentrates the adrenaline in their bloodstream. Though myths surrounding the narcotic properties of adrenochrome have their origins in mid-20th century fiction, most notably Hunter S. Thompson’s *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*^[1], they’ve become a central component of the reality proposed by believers in the Qanon mythos, and a call to action for countless within the broader American Evangelical movement. Though a cursory explanation of the core Qanon mythology may not make it clear how Qanon has come to prevalence among evangelicals, a deeper examination of the rhetoric and content of the mythos reveals that beyond any reasonable assumption of coincidence, Qanon

as a movement has been tailored by the persons responsible for it to uniquely play into and exploit American Evangelical thought. Likely drawing inspiration from stories popularized during the Satanic panic of the 70s and 80s, the Qanon conspiracy has found the level of acceptance it has among evangelicals because at every available opportunity, its ringleaders have taken care to cater specifically to the sensibilities of that movement.

Farfetched as it may seem to claim such an absurd set of theories to be so popular among such a large community, establishing the prevalence of Qanon among American evangelicals is a simple matter of examining demographics. First and foremost, it is important to reiterate the centrality of Donald Trump in the Qanon mythos: he is the one leading the fight against the Shadow Government, he is the herald of the Storm and the one responsible for carrying it out, and he is the biggest victim of the Shadow Government's tampering in elections. It is far from hyperbole to claim without Donald Trump there is no Qanon. That having been established, we can logically extrapolate that there is no genuine believer in Qanon that is not at least to some degree a Trump supporter. When taking into account the fact that Trump won a reported 80% of the white Evangelical vote in 2020^[2], it stands to reason that among a movement composed entirely of politically active Trump supporters, a majority of believers would be Evangelical Christians. More explicitly, surveys conducted as recently as 2022 by the Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI) identified that 71% of surveyed, self-described believers in the existence of the Shadow Government agreed with the statement that God has ordained a special role for the United States in history, a very distinct suggestion that anybody familiar with American Evangelicalism has doubtless heard countless times^[3]. Though it is hardly defensible to say that all the evangelicals among the Qanon movement are staunch believers in either side, it can be said for certain that there is a substantial amount of overlap between those that describe

themselves as Evangelical or born-again Christians, and those that profess to belief in some or all of the theories that make up Qanon. With these demographics in mind, it becomes clear that there is something about Qanon which has the unique capability to attract American Evangelical Christian conspiracy theorists.

When speaking of a group as multifaceted and widespread as American evangelicals, it's important to clear the air regarding what images are likely conjured by the mention of "conspiracy theory" or a "conspiracy theorist." As scholar of religion Chad Bogosian^[4] points out; for the average person, the claim that there exists a benevolent tripersonal God at work in the world is just as conspiratorial and farfetched as the claim that Satanist pedophile Democrats are coming to take your children away. To a certain degree every member of a given society is prone to conspiratorial thinking; that is, an assumptive or predictive mode of thought not strictly based in empirical reality that is often predicated on a willing suspension of disbelief. In practice this can range from something as minor as anxious overanalysis of a social interaction to something as major as organized belief in a certain deity. The specific dimensions of how this thought manifests on an individual level are largely dependent on the context from which they emerge: culturally, historically, economically, or even theologically. One would struggle to find a Jewish individual as concerned with predestination as a Calvinist Christian, for instance. This does, however, beg the question of where we draw the line between conspiratorial thinking and conspiracy theory. Bogosian's definition of a conspiracy theory is far too steeped in secular positivism to be appropriate within a religio-political context, but his deconstruction of the ironclad mainstream notion of a "conspiracy theory" is nevertheless valuable for establishing the fact that really any belief or theory can be considered a conspiracy theory when founded in conspiratorial thinking. Regardless of severity and scale the causes and effects of conspiracy

theories are always the same; theories or beliefs develop as a product of observations and assumptions not based wholly in empirical evidence, and eventually develop into something larger as they come to affect the way a person or persons act and how they view the world around them. Though this deconstructed definition is all well and good in the vacuum of theory, one cannot in good faith ignore the fact that while both are conspiracy theories insofar as they are assumptions about the world at large predicated on conspiratorial thinking, there is a marked difference between the conspiracy theory that claims a friend or coworker may be upset with you and the conspiracy theory that claims Barack Obama is coming to drink the blood of your children. For the purpose of speaking on the Qanon phenomenon without falling back into the biases of older models for conspiracy, an attempt at synthesis with the public sphere is necessary. To this end, let us analyze the most widespread and accepted examples of a “conspiracy theory” that exist in the public sphere of the United States. This is, of course, not to say that the phenomenon of conspiracy theory or conspiratorial thinking are isolated to the United States, only that Qanon and Evangelical belief in Qanon are both phenomena descended from and catering to the specific dimensions of the conspiratorial thinking of American evangelicals. As Kathryn Olmstead observed in 2018^[5], the most widely disseminated set of conspiracy theories in the United States have their foundation in government neglect or mistreatment of the general populace; the 9/11 attacks, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the Kennedy assassination, to name a few. These and many other similarly ubiquitous theories outline a clear pattern of necessary properties for a conspiracy theory to be accepted as such by the American public, specifically the consistent focus on an exploitation of the powerless by the powerful through economic exploitation, concealment of information, and often physical violence. The motivations of the exploiter may vary slightly from theory to theory, but generally those responsible are claimed to

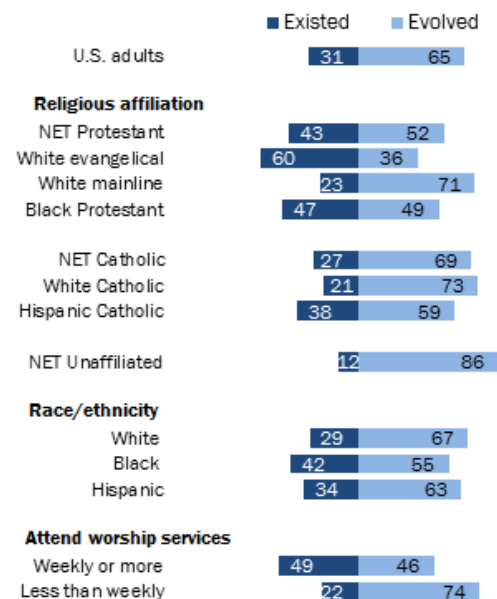
be some variety of profiteer, political or otherwise. The Kennedy assassination was conceived to support the political aspirations of CIA agents^[6], 9/11 was staged to support the growth of globalist socio-economic policy^[7], and the COVID-19 pandemic was orchestrated to more effectively consolidate control over the American people^[8]. American history has repeatedly demonstrated that in the eyes of the general public, for a belief descended from conspiratorial thinking to be deserving of the label of conspiracy theory, it must be massive in scope, and motivated by a profiteering exploitation of the unaware or undeserving. What these theories and their proponents into something worthy of scorn for most Americans is a perceived untruthfulness: there is a good reason why most Americans would call Qanon a conspiracy theory and not the Watergate scandal. One was unearthed and investigated, and then proven publicly to be true in a court of law with the aid of confessions from several key conspirators. For the average secular American, this is proof enough that something is true. However, when religion becomes involved, as it so often does when it comes to conspiracy theory, it is insufficient to rely on a model undergirded by positivist presuppositions about the existence of objective truth, and irrefutable evidence. Attempting to expand the popular definition into one more acceptable for discussion of religio-political life necessitates a synthesis that does away with a positivist idea of truth, and instead introduces a framework more conscious of the differences in how various cultures may define what is true, and how that definition plays into their conspiratorial thinking. Honing in on the American Evangelical movement's relationship to the sciences demonstrates the severity and importance of these differences best. Perhaps most emblematic of the movement at large is a hardline stance on creationism, and more generally, God's immanent guidance of the sciences. Recent studies by the Pew Research Center^{[9][10][11]} demonstrate that for the majority of the American Evangelical movement, aversion to secularity

in science is still alive and well, with a majority of Evangelical Americans professing to believe that humans have existed in their current form since the beginning of time (see right⁽¹¹⁾) in spite of the litanies of fossil records that would imply otherwise. I mention this not to cast judgment, but to illustrate that what the American Evangelical movement at large considers acceptable to call “truth” differs greatly from that of the average secular American. What is true to the average Evangelical American is not necessarily something that can be empirically proven. For many, the word of God as dispensed by a Pastor is proof enough of an idea’s status as true or untrue. The incompatibility of this belief with the secular mainstream idea that a conspiracy theory is always provably false makes it so that any attempt at synthesis

must take care to reckon with the Evangelical idea of truth as something that does not need to be proven with empirical evidence. Taking all of this into account, the definition of conspiracy theory most suitable for use in analysis of American Evangelical religio-politics is that which defines it as any set of beliefs predicated on a profiteering exploitation of a certain person or group’s particular manner of conspiratorial thinking. This established, I would posit that Qanon’s attraction of so many Christian believers, whom I’ve dubbed “Qhristians”, can be explained by Qanon’s explicit use of rhetoric meant to mimic the theological dimensions of Evangelical conspiratorial thought. In other words, Evangelical Qhristians exist because the Qanon

Wide Differences Among Religious Group in Views on Evolution

% of U.S. adults who say humans have evolved/existed in their present form since the beginning of time



Source: Survey conducted Aug. 15-25, 2014, Q16. Those saying don't know are not shown. Whites and blacks include only non-Hispanics; Hispanics are of any race.

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conspiracy theory movement knowingly mimics their unique manner of conspiratorial thinking: particularly their reactionary understanding of Eschatology, the Bible, and the role of Christianity in the world at large.

Before delving too deep into the specifics of Evangelical theology, it is essential to first establish a historical precedent for that which colors it so completely: reactionary conservatism. For this purpose, we must go back to the roots and examine exactly is meant when we refer to “evangelicals.” The terms “Evangelical” or “American Evangelical” can be used to refer to an interdenominational Christian social movement that emerged in its earliest forms in the 1730s, or to any of its followers in an individual and/or collective capacity. The Evangelicalism we know in the United States today, and the one that I and many others mean when we speak of Evangelicalism, is an intermingling of a few different theologies proposed by a small handful of historical Christian movements starting with the first Great Awakening in the 1730s. Emerging in response to the rapid secularization of the enlightenment and increasing disillusionment with religion^[12], the first Great Awakening in England and its American colonies was laden with a rhetoric of “saving” Christianity that would become essential to the Evangelicalism we know today. As historian Thomas S. Kidd observes, “to expect revival, one had to experience despair^[12]”. The first Great Awakening began at a time when Puritans in the colonies had already begun lamenting the decline of the Protestant experiment, and calling for moral reformation. Though the first Awakening’s massive outdoor revivals were a radically new means of delivering sermons, the contents of those sermons were hardly new; far more revolutionary in their implicit affirmation of the rights of individual believers than their theology. Theologically speaking, even at the time there was nothing particularly new about the principles that made up the theology of the first Great Awakening: a theologically moderate meshing of Pietist, Puritan, and Calvinist

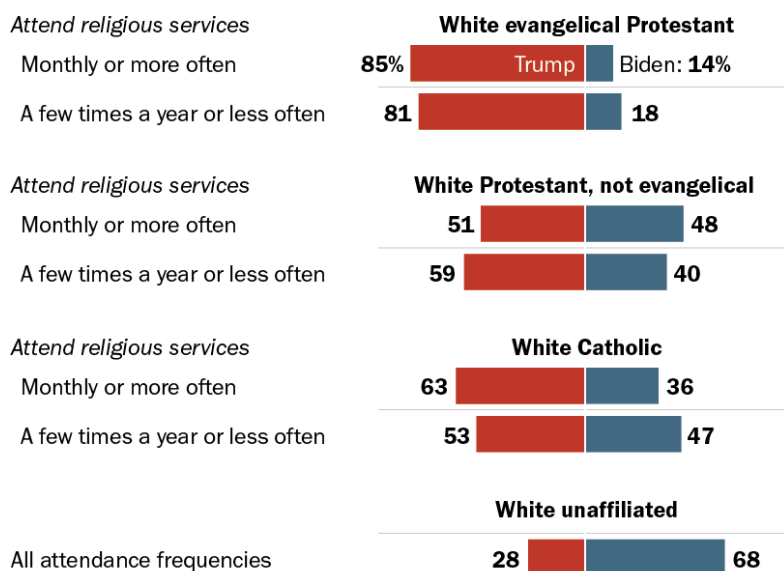
ideas^[13]. Though it may have been novel to see interdenominational thought meshed together, the implicit suggestion of calls for “revival” and “renewal” is the idea that there is some manner of ideal past state to return to: a revival is a return of something already dead, not the creation of something new. Though the more explicitly conservative politics that would come to be associated with the meeting of reaction and religion had yet to fully manifest at the time of the first Great Awakening, the reactionary character of the era’s theological fight against modernity is undeniable, and its influence can still be seen in Evangelical theology centuries later.

The reactionary character of early American Evangelicalism would persist through the later years of the 18th century, and well into the 19th as early Evangelicalism went mainstream in the American colonies through the introduction of Evangelical institutes of higher education^[14]. As the western world moved into the later years of the enlightenment, and Evangelicalism began to go mainstream in the wake of the first Great Awakening, it became increasingly difficult for the itinerant Pastors of the late-18th century to preach the fight against a moral degradation that was fading further and further into the past. The idea of a Christian moral reformation is not nearly as moving when preached in colonies that, as of the mid 1750s, were home to at least two well-established and explicitly Evangelical universities that would go on to be known as Yale and Princeton. Dartmouth would join the group in 1769^[14]. A new angle was needed for Revivalists, a new reason for the necessity of a reformation and revival. This reason would emerge in the decades following the American Revolution as theological liberalism began coming to prevalence. For American evangelicals, theological liberalism and its interaction with Darwinian theories of evolution was almost immediately contentious, and it would remain as such through the second Great Awakening (early 1790s-early 1840s) and the end of the American Civil War. In the later half of the 19th century, we would additionally see the

development of a theological perspective that, although divisive at the time, would come to become inextricably linked to mainstream American Evangelicalism over the decades following its inception: Christian Fundamentalism. Though initially controversial within the movement at large, leading directly to the fundamentalist/methodist split of the early 20th century, Christian Fundamentalism is a uniquely Evangelical construct descended from the very same reactionary fight against modernity that undergirded the theology of the first Great Awakening just over a century prior. Though Christian Fundamentalism is a tradition that draws on a number of sources across England and the United States, the origin of its most recognizable form can be traced back to an 1878 gathering of Evangelical Pastors and their proposed list of 14 fundamental Christian beliefs. Responding to the ongoing proliferation of theological liberalism, early Fundamentalists took staunchly to a number of controversial reactionary beliefs that should sound familiar to anyone familiar with contemporary Evangelicalism. Arguably the most controversial among these is the belief that the recently-proposed Darwinian model for the evolution of humanity is incorrect, and that humans have always existed in their current form since the beginning of time. Looking back to the Pew Research Center's survey of the contemporary Evangelical movement^[11], it's evident that among the majority of mainstream American evangelicals, these

Among White non-evangelical Protestants, infrequent church attenders were more likely to vote for Trump

% of 2020 validated voters who voted for ...



Note: Based on 9,668 validated general election voters. Validated voters are those found to have voted in commercial voter files. Vote choice is from a post-election survey. White adults include only those who report being only one race and are not Hispanic. Those who voted for other candidates or did not answer the question are not shown.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Nov. 12-17, 2020.

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beliefs are still alive and well today. Creationist denial of evolution is not an isolated theory, however. Rather, Creationism is but one part of a broader theology of Biblical inerrancy. Biblical inerrancy, as the name would suggest, is a principle that suggests the Bible as written to contain nothing contrary to empirical, observable fact. Biblical inerrancy is an essential component of Christian Fundamentalism that has developed over time to be nearly as synonymous as its parent philosophy with American Evangelicalism. As suggested by a vocal majority of the American Evangelical movement, the Evangelicalism seen in the United States today is one most profoundly influenced by the reactionism and later reactionary conservatism of certain sects of early Evangelical Christians. From all the multifaceted movements that have emerged as part of the broader Evangelical movement over the course of the last several centuries, contemporary data suggests that what ideas have had the most influence and staying power are those descended from reactionary conservatism. Is it any surprise, then, that a reported +80% of evangelicals found themselves hooked on the idea of making America great *again*_{[2][15]}?

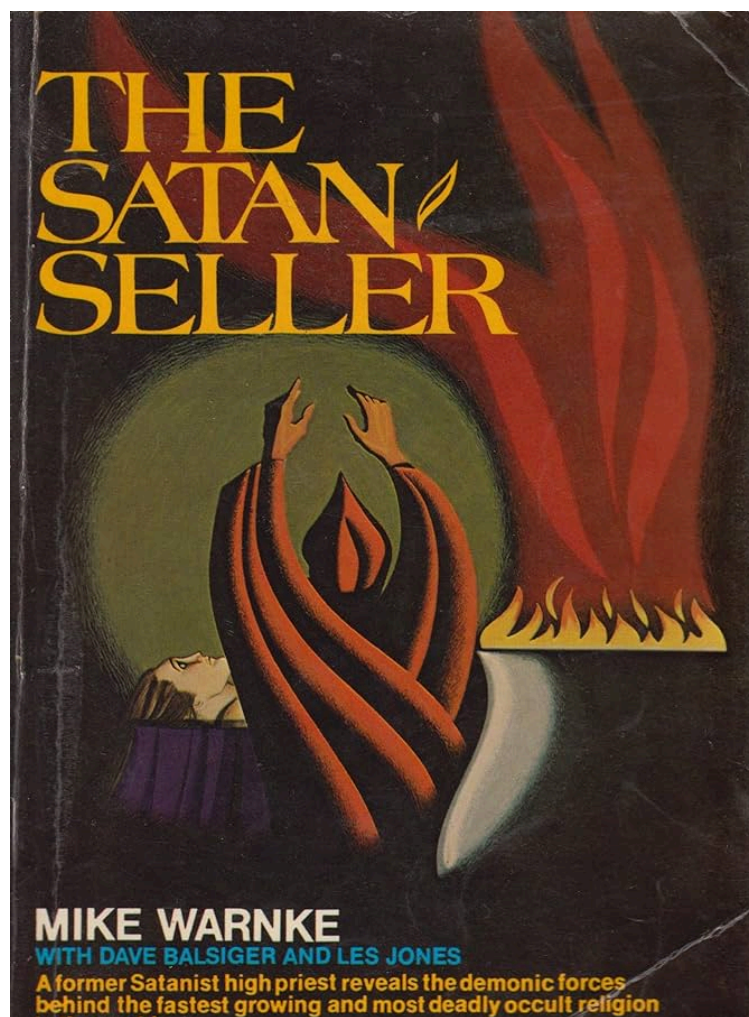
To find further of this reactionary character's persistence through to the modern day, one need only examine the increasing influence and activity of the primarily Evangelical Christian right as a socio-political movement throughout the whole of the 20th century. Most notably, in its support of anticommunist sentiment between the 1940s and 60s_[16], and their later embracing of the Nixon Administration's attempts at consolidating evangelicals under the banner of the Republican party_[16]. Helped along in their efforts by the recruitment of controversial televangelist Jerry Falwell Sr., the Nixon Administration regularly went to great lengths to appeal both aesthetically and morally to the sensibilities of growing Evangelical Christian right. With White House church services, and regular moralizing about a lack of implicitly Christian public morality among his most vocal opposition: leftists against the Vietnam war. At a time when

anti-war activism was commonly associated with sexual liberalism, race riots, illicit drug use, and campus protests, Nixon was able to position himself as a champion of public morality who would return the nation to its bedrock religious values. In doing so, he and televangelists like Faldwell would further cement the necessity of political action in the minds of evangelicals. In the eyes of conservatives of the time, a person being anti-war made them at best a hippie, or at worst a communist. Both were equally frightening. Nixon knew this, and throughout the late 1960s and early 1970s, he was able to manufacture an almost boogeyman-like role for his opposition as villains lashing out against Christian morality and the American way of life. Former Nixon Administration Assistant to the President for Domestic Affairs John Ehrlichman said it best as a lede for *Harper's Magazine* in 2016. "The Nixon campaign in 1968, and the Nixon White House after that, had two enemies: the antiwar left and black people. You understand what I'm saying? We knew we couldn't make it illegal to be either against the war or black, but by getting the public to associate the hippies with marijuana and blacks with heroin, and then criminalizing both heavily, we could disrupt those communities. We could arrest their leaders, raid their homes, break up their meetings, and vilify them night after night on the evening news. Did we know we were lying about the drugs? Of course we did.^[17]" Though Nixon would fall out of favor with the Christian right in the wake of the Watergate scandal, nothing could undo the damage done by the fear-mongering rhetoric of his administration. Now that an organized enemy had been identified on the homefront, the conspiratorial thinking of American evangelicals was forever changed; the Nixon administration had manufactured an enemy of Christianity, one that was dangerous, one that blended right in with the rest of the country, and one that would long outlast its creators. Claims of an organized "enemy" working to undermine Christian and American ways of life became an increasingly common facet of Evangelical

conspiratorial thought as the 20th century progressed, and fuel for the fire was not solely sourced from the political sphere. Whether it was cartoonist Jack T. Chick teaching Christians to fear communism^[18], televangelist Billy Graham teaching Christians to fear LGBTQ people^[19], or the Nixon administration teaching Christians to fear hippies, it was becoming increasingly clear to American evangelicals that somewhere in the world, somebody was always out to get them. Coupling with the existing tendency towards reactionary politics and conservatism, this phenomenon of manufacturing unseen enemies became an immutable component of Evangelical conspiratorial thought. This phenomenon is demonstrated perhaps nowhere better than in 1972, with the publication of Mike Warnke's *The Satan Seller*.

Satan Seller is a work that can charitably be described as farfetched; a purportedly autobiographical retelling of its author's indoctrination into a Satanic coven he would eventually find himself leading. While a member of this coven, Warnke claims to have conducted or been involved in Satanic ritual kidnapping, drug use, drug dealing, demon summonings, orgies, rape, and sacrificial murder. Rather conveniently for Warnke, he was not really the one pulling the strings behind the curtain of the coven. Rather, he suggests that the illicit activities of his coven and others like it were ordered and bankrolled by a global organization of influential and wealthy people hiding in the shadows. Warnke alleges to have heard this group referred to as the Illuminati. "I had already told him I had been to an occult conference. "There were some weird guys that seemed to be the real backers of the whole thing. . . . I heard the word *Illuminati*.^[20]" So the story goes, he would go on to abandon Satanism and the orders of the Illuminati, finding Jesus after a brief bout of heroism in the Vietnam war. As anyone might expect, Warnke's escape from Satanism takes place just after narrowly surviving an attempt on his life made by one of the complementary sex slaves he was gifted on becoming a High Priest of the coven. Warnke

additionally claimed to have marched with Martin Luther King Jr., and met Charles Manson, with his story of meeting the latter at a “Satanist conference” in 1966 coincidentally overlapping with one of Manson’s incarcerations. Needless to say, *Satan Seller* is almost entirely nonsense, though nonsense it may be, it was nonsense that sold. More than that, it was nonsense that sold for two full decades without any public questioning of its veracity from a major news or media outlet. *Satan Seller*’s popularity was not reserved to popularity among only religious people, either. The book was popular, immensely so; *Satan Seller* was popular to the degree that Warnke was able to appear on shows like ABC News and *the Oprah Winfrey Show*. He even appeared on the former as a consultant on Satanism, a belief system described on the cover of *Satan Seller* as “the fastest growing and most deadly occult religion in the world^[20].” There is little else that can better illustrate how widespread Warnke’s influence was at his peak in the 1980s than him going completely unchallenged when he claimed, on the cover of his bestselling book, that a fabricated cult sponsored by a fabricated network of global elites was one of the fastest growing religions in the world. Mike Warnke was able to leverage the popularity of his book into a position of religio-cultural authority that would last him well into the 1990s. Everything would come crashing down for Warnke in June of 1992, this time courtesy of *Cornerstone Magazine* journalists Jon Trott and Mike Hertenstein, rather than the Illuminati or one of Warnke’s sex slaves.



Cornerstone's authoritative deconstruction of Warnke's tall-tales marked the beginning of an immediate, steep decline in both Warnke's popularity and credibility, and even though he would soon fall out of favor among American evangelicals, the damage had already been done. Imitators were beginning to pop up left and right. Though undoubtedly among the most influential and popular, Warnke's *Satan Seller* is but one of countless other works of a similar style simultaneously reinforcing and profiting off of a reactionary fear of an enemy hidden in the shadows dedicated to the destruction of the Christian way of life. *Michelle Remembers* emerged in 1980 as another influential contributor to this mythos that was similarly debunked after a stint of popularity on the public stage. Claiming to have been a victim of sexual and physical ritual abuse at the hands of a Satanic cult, Michelle Smith and her co-author Lawrence Pazder painted a picture just as outlandish as *Satan Seller*, featuring some familiar rhetoric. At the tail end of the book, Smith details her attendance of the final ritual she was forced into during her time in the custody of Satan. Organized once again by a shadowy organization of global Satanists, Smith alleges this final ritual to have lasted eighty-one days, which she spent the majority of locked in a cage alongside venomous snakes and the corpses of several sacrificed infants^[21]. Fortunately, the ritual's attempt to summon Satan to Earth was thwarted with the help of the Virgin Mary, the Archangel Michael, and Christ himself, who was gracious enough to heal the ritual abuse scars covering Smith's body. Though it spent less time in the spotlight than *Satan Seller*, *Michelle Remembers* still found significant success, and was even featured alongside its author on *the Oprah Winfrey Show*, where it was presented by hosts as completely factual. Even if all of them would eventually be debunked publicly, and even if the authors did fall out of favor with the Evangelical community in the wake of these debunkings, tales of Satanic ritual abuse have had a long-lasting, observable impact on the conspiratorial thinking of evangelicals. Books like *Satan*

Seller (1972), *Michelle Remembers* (1980), and *Satan's Underground* (1988) had plenty of time in the spotlight to establish themselves and their authors as legitimizing evidence of the same fear that had been driving political action in the movement for decades. Having spent much of the 20th century fearing an enemy in the shadows, the intellectual conditioning brought on by twenty years of having these fears confirmed and reinforced even on secular television would not simply fade away after Mike Warnke and Michelle Smith had left the public eye. Even if the authors had been discredited, a few bad Pastors weren't going to ruin the gospel. Much like Nixon after the Watergate scandal, the creator had been disavowed, but their theories persisted.

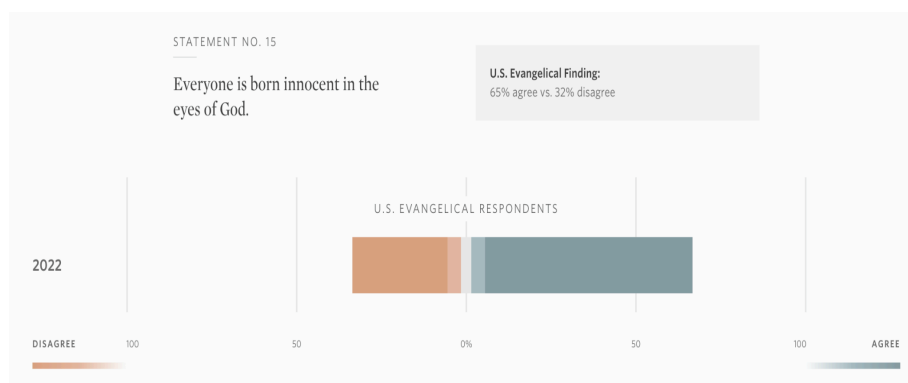
Having established the history undergirding the reactionary conservatism of American evangelicals, and the role it played in fostering a tendency to search for enemies of Christianity hidden in the shadows, there is now sufficient context available for grounding Qanon within an Evangelical context. The context of American Evangelicalism, I would argue, is the one most suitable for speaking on the Qanon conspiracy theory. The Qchristian phenomenon did not emerge from nowhere. The language of Qanon and its constituent theories have been tailored to appeal specifically to the conspiratorial sensibilities of conservative American evangelicals, particularly at the theological level. To demonstrate this, I'll be close-reading both into Qanon, and the traits of Evangelical theology most commonly accepted as those most core to its character. As a jumping off point for establishing these traits, I'll be using my own modifications to David Bebbington's proposed quadrilateral of essential Evangelical characteristics^[22]. Modifications to the core quadrilateral will be made with respect to the criticisms raised by scholars like Gagné and Gonzalez^[23] against the quadrilateral's lack of attention to the significance of Evangelicalism as a social movement. To compensate for this, I'll be using a proposed six pillars of Evangelicalism, rather than Bebbington's four, consisting of conversion/rebirth, Crucicentrism,

Biblical inerrancy, activism, individualization of religious experience, and Dispensational Premillennialism. In that order, I'll be going into greater detail about each of these pillars, outlining their influences over Evangelical conspiratorial thought, and then establishing a link between them and the rhetoric used by Qanon and its constituent theories.

Beginning with conversion and rebirth, we must first and most importantly address the rhetoric behind the idea of rebirth being the experience by which a convert to Christianity's soul is "saved" from past sins and temptation. Rebirth has been a quintessential component of Evangelical Christianity since its earliest days during the first Great Awakening, and it is arguably the principle of Evangelicalism that has changed the least over the centuries. Ultimately all that is different today is that the stories of rebirth may be viewed digitally through mediums like YouTube. The core procedures and subtext of conversion testimonies have gone largely unchanged since they began at the mass revivals of the first Great Awakening. These confessions may only be part of a larger conversion process, but it is almost universally true among American Evangelical converts that at some point during the conversion process, one will occur. Converts begin by lamenting either a downfall into sin, or a life lived completely in the sins of their social sphere, before transitioning into a heartfelt retelling of their experience with the transformative powers of Christ the savior, usually the beginning of the process by which they were saved from their sins. The initial spark of Evangelical conversions has historically been observed to almost always be a product of individual effort and expression, rather than interaction with a faith community or its authority. Ironically enough, this mode of conversion tends to foster in converts a distinctly uncritical acceptance of religious authority. It is important to note the mediating role of social realities in the Evangelical conversion experience, and the impact this has on further cementing the imbalance in power created by born-again conversions.

To be “reborn” or “redeemed” in this context still implicitly suggests a return to a past, idealized state. Even with the transformative bent of the Evangelical conversion experience, what the convert is transforming *into* is not a new version of themselves: a reclamation of innocence, rather than a transition past sin. Though the distinction may seem arbitrary, there is an important difference between the act of wiping the slate clean, and the act of beginning a new slate. The experience of Evangelical converts is nearly always described as a rebirth, a redemption, or a renewal. All of these descriptors characterize the process as being one by which believers are returned back to the state of sin-free purity all humans enter the world in according to the crucicentric beliefs the Lifeway Research State of Theology survey discovered to be held by a reported 65% of American

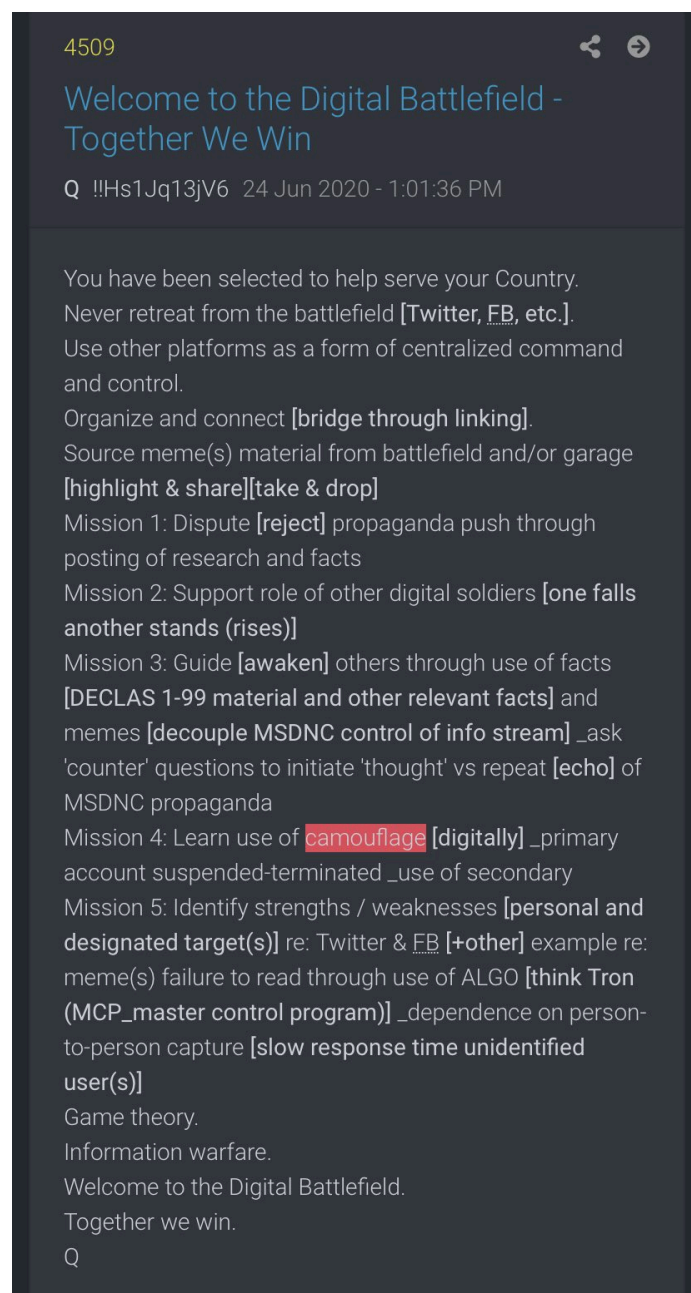
evangelicals^[24]. Through the conversion experience believers are re-born, returned to the spiritual state they existed in at the time of their birth. The Christ imagined



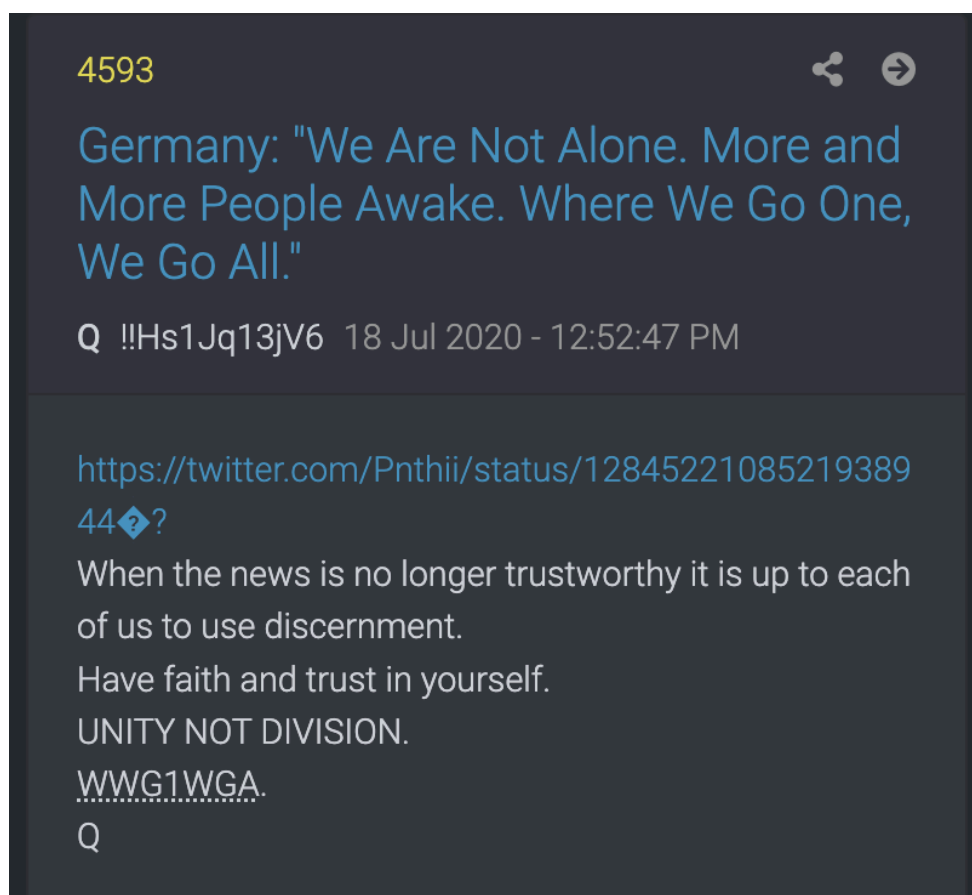
here does not forgive, but instead redeems and rebirths, further demonstrating the reactionary emphasis American Evangelicalism places on the past. This is why the vices and sins presented in most publicized conversion confessionals have most often been presented as stemming from whatever was new and alien in the social reality that a given confessional arose from. Converts during the first Great Awakening usually lamented their fall into the same spiritual despair that was newly sweeping England and the American colonies^[12], just as converts of today usually lament falling in with what is frightening to the American religious reactionaries of today. Most characteristically, this is Muslims, internet pornography, and gay people^{[25][26][27][28][29]}. This implicit

identification of sin originating mostly from things that have become more acceptable in the western world as a product of modernization serves to create a feeling of isolation among believers, who come to see their faith community as one of few communities that are free from the temptations that led their life to ruin; after all, this is the community that was there for them throughout the process of their rebirth. This sense of gratitude to a community and its leaders that helped to guide the convert to rebirth couples with the archetypal Evangelical fear-mongering of the late 20th century to create an insular sort of religio-political echo chamber. Simmons and Carnahan observed^[4] that as a consequence of their isolated religious and social reality, American evangelicals “end up engaging in what we will call *Teflon hermeneutics* whereby no criticism can stick because they have refused the shared social context in which reasonable discourse must occur. Thus, while evangelical conspiracists may not be immediately irrational concerning their ability to draw conclusions, many of them are, quite regrettably, no longer reasonable participants in critical social dialogue.^[4]” evangelicals tend to “refuse” a shared social context with those outside of their sphere precisely because of the process by which an overwhelming majority of them are brought into that sphere in the first place. What value is there in mutually constructive dialogue with a democrat? How about a socialist, or a communist? The answer of mainline American evangelicals is that there is none: why bother attempting at reconciliation with ideologies that have been labeled enemies of the Evangelical movement for over two hundred years? This insular culture and “us versus them” mentality has guided over time the conspiratorial thinking of American evangelicals towards a fearful disdain for modernity and progressivism. This very same sort of reactionary collectivism has also been made central to the rhetoric of Qanon, whose ringleaders have drawn in evangelicals and attempted to capitalize on their conspiratorial disdain for progressivism in the same way Nixon did decades prior. Even

cursory looks over archivals of since-deleted Q-drop repositories like Qmap.pub, Qanon.pub, Qalerts, and OperationQ reveals a remarkably similar rhetoric characterized by an isolationist and reactionary approach to progressivism. The above image, sourced from an archival of the since-deleted Qmap.pub^[30], shows a Q drop posted to an anonymous right-wing message board circa 2020 (MSDNC is a play on the moderately left-leaning news outlet MSNBC, blending it with DNC, the acronym for the Democratic National Convention. Get it?) Most important and most obvious to note on the topic of conversion and isolation is the propagation of an “us versus them” mentality similarly predicated on an understanding of modernity and progressivism as an enemy: “together we win,” “where we go one we go all^[1].” Likening the internet to a “battleground” full of progressive political propaganda pushed by the party that Qanon purports to be full of Satanist pedophiles plays very directly into the ideas of modernity and/or progressivism as a source or breeding ground for sin. Q’s message here is very clearly implying that “digital warfare” is necessary because of the role that social media plays in indoctrinating Americans into a sinful way of life.



Also noteworthy is Q's instructing his followers to "awaken" those that have been made victims of MSDNC propaganda. Coupled with what we have observed already, it would not be hyperbole to describe the above Q drop, one of many like it, as a call to action requesting his believers save others that are being unknowingly exploited against their best interests by progressives and leftists. If this rhetoric sounds familiar, it is because it directly mirrors the way that progressivism and conversion are thought about within the American Evangelical movement. For a more explicit example of the sort of politically-motivated fear-mongering, see the Q



drop above, and its suggestion of consolidating an echo chamber among followers. Harkening back to Simmons and Carnahan^[4], we can observe in Qanon followers the very same rejection of a "shared social context" that they described in the American Evangelical movement. The act of conversion itself is even more explicitly mirrored by Q's encouragement that his followers "take the oath." The oath's contents vary from conversion to conversion, just as any conversion to Evangelicalism might, but generally the formula is as follows. An individual will post a video of themselves to social media under the hashtag TakeTheOath, in which they profess the misery of

WWG1WGA
@QanonWga To follow

TakeTheOath
Qarmy
WWG1WGA
TheGreatAwakening
LightVSdark
Godwins



0:38 207K views

12:01 - Jun 25, 2020

8,406 retweets 23,225 likes

4,066 8,406 23,225

WWG1WGA @QanonWga · 25 Jun.
Wow.. I'm beyond honored to have been Q'd This movement continues to amaze me. We will soon be looked back upon as the greatest movement in the history of mankind, and all done thru love I'm proud to be fighting by your sides. Now let's go take our country back.

Q
WWG1WGA

338 1,544 6,899

4523

Digital Soldier Takes the Oath

Q !!Hs1Jq13jV6 25 Jun 2020 - 3:16:38 PM

<https://twitter.com/QanonWga/status/1276229137603063809>

Praying for a swift recovery to your back [keep fighting! never give up!].
United and Strong.
WWG1WGA!!!
Q

their life before learning of the Qanon movement, which they then swear allegiance to. Believers are then often rewarded by being mentioned in a Q drop. Below is an example of this process archived from Twitter, and the

aforementioned Qmap.pub^{[30][31]}. The similarities between Q's "oath" and the Evangelical conversion process should be apparent. These are more than mere coincidence; the similarities between movements exist because the conspiracy theorists heading the Qanon movement have taken deliberate steps to mirror the language Evangelical leaders have been using to create an isolated social reality for decades. This uncritical faith in religious authority and isolated social realities are cemented even further into the conspiratorial thought of American evangelicals by the centrality of Christ's sacrifice in Evangelical theology, as established by a self-professed belief in Crucicentrism^[32].

Crucicentrism, although a minor part in comparison to Conversionism, is an important part of Evangelical theology that places an emphasis on the crucifixion of Christ as the central event that made possible the redemption of humanity. In affirming this, many evangelicals end up rejecting the Biblical notion that humans are born as sinners. Though we have addressed this notion's significance to Conversionism, it is important to note within the religio-political context of conspiracy theory what ideas a centrally sacrificial Christ creates. In downplaying the greater context that the Bible provides for the original sin and playing up the sacrifice of Christ, evangelicals are able to manufacture a Christ whose image is far more conducive to serving the Evangelical movement's insular community. It should go without saying that for most Christians, Christ is the ideal image of a person that they wish to replicate to whatever degree is possible for them as a human follower. The impact of Crucicentrism on this natural urge to replicate Christ is the emergence of a Christ-image that sanctifies the act of sacrifice among believers. Though this may sound obvious, a deeper examination of the implications behind this image and its connection to reactionary conservatism reveals its troubling characteristics. Downplaying the context of Christ's sacrifice, as one might assume, creates a stagnant monolithian Christ with one overwhelming characteristic that inevitably becomes the central focus of believers trying to follow in Christ's image. This image of Christ as a noble self-sacrificer, though not explicitly against the Bible as written, does create an unhealthy environment when combined with the more conservative teachings of the American Evangelical movement. Aspiring to imitation of an overwhelmingly and primarily self-sacrificing messiah, especially in a conservative religio-political context, often leads more dedicated believers down the path of alt-right extremism. When the figure one most aspires to replicate is characterized the way Christ is in Evangelical theology, it can lead to reckless behavior that one could perceive to line up with the

self-sacrificing of Christ. Take for instance the Pizzagate shooting of December 2016. Though this conspiracy theory and the connected shooting both predate the Qanon mythos by around ten months, Pizzagate's conspiracy theories surrounding a Satanic pedophile cabal would become merged into Qanon almost immediately after it emerged. Edgar Maddison Welch, now better known as the Pizzagate gunman, was sentenced to four years in prison after a lengthy trial which concluded in June of 2017. Amidst the trial hearings, court documents revealed Welch's history with right-wing religious fervor. According to court documents and collected interviews with those that knew Welch, he would regularly take to social media for discussion about his Christian faith. A faith he evidently took quite seriously, according to an ex-girlfriend of Welch's who alleges he took his faith seriously enough to spontaneously grab her hand and begin praying for "the demons to come out of her.^[33]" Another set of court documents would reveal that, using some familiar language, Welch tried and failed to recruit those close to him into his investigation, all the while demonstrating an intent to take either his own life, or the lives of others. As he put it: "sacraficing [sic] the lives of a few for the lives of many.^[34]" At first glance, what we see in Welch's story may seem an isolated incident, but for a proponent of a Crucicentric Christianity steeped in conservatism, this sort of political violence is only the natural conclusion. If modernity and progressivism are enemies of Christian virtue, and Christ's sacrifice on the cross is to be treated as His most important characteristic, then would it not be Christlike for a believer to sacrifice the lives of a few for the lives of many? Albeit subtly, Crucicentrism has conditioned American evangelicals over time into placing self-sacrifice at the highest level of virtue, and this is precisely what Q has capitalized on with his proposition of Donald Trump as a defender of the American people. By presenting him as leading the charge against the Shadow Government's overwhelming resources and influence, Q has managed to emulate the Crucicentric image of


Christ quite closely. Trump, according to Qanon's believers, is making the ultimate sacrifice to protect his apostles, and to redeem a nation corrupted by the two most horrifying things they can imagine: Satan, and Hillary Clinton. Facing the resources and wealth of a globe-spanning Shadow Government, only he is willing to risk life and limb to do what is right. For Qchristians, Trump is made out to be almost akin to a reincarnation of Christ in the extent of his virtues. He is the ultimate protector of God's chosen people (Americans), and the one working to make the redemption of the faithless possible. Q drops have served to cement this narrative on countless occasions, one of which can be seen to the right^[30]. In the right drop, Q further cements Trump as a Christlike self-sacrificer through the implication that his conflict with the Shadow Government was a conscious choice. They aren't after him, he is only in the way. The obvious implication here is that within the context of the greater mythos, had Trump not chosen his current path, the Shadow Government would not have come after him, or rigged the 2020 election against him. The suggestion of choice is what really elevates Trump in this context to a Christlike status. It is what separates him from a mere political activist, and pushes him into the same realm of perception for evangelicals as Christ himself. Though obviously Trump is not held in higher regard than Christ, he is still within the same realm of thought. Perceived

QAnon Posts

Currently displaying post dates/times in Eastern time. To set your timezone or to make this notice go away, use the cogs icon at the upper-right to (re)select your timezone.

4093 May 03, 2020 4:32:28 PM EDT

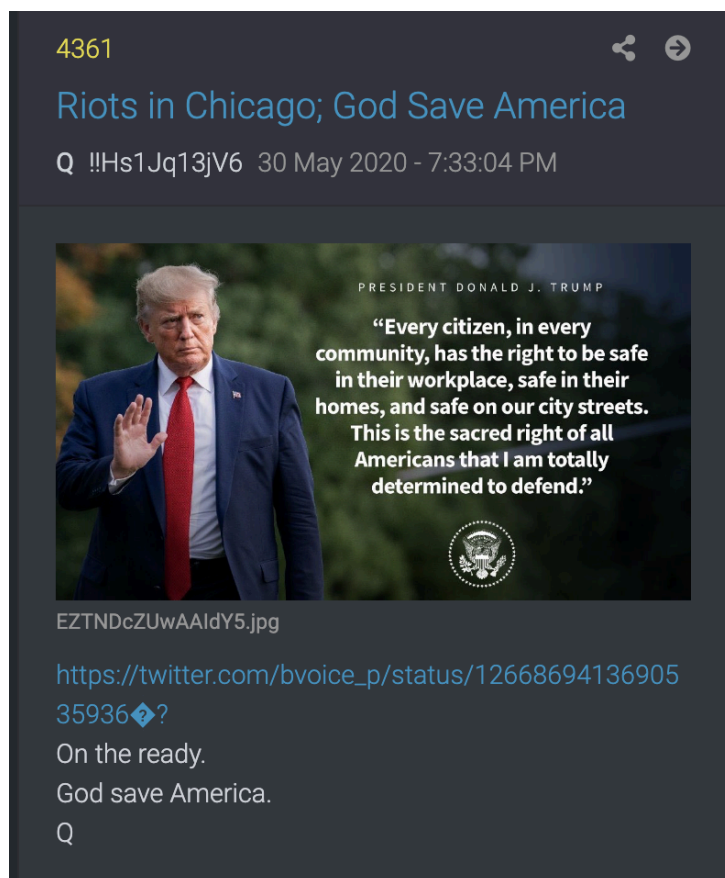
Q !!Hs1Jq13JV6



EXHnCwPXgAl1p6f.jpg

People [an informed free-thinking public] awake is their greatest fear.
United we stand.
Q

as somebody that is from humble beginnings, but with great potential to become holy and uplift the spirit of the people around them should they choose to undergo great personal sacrifice. John 3:17_[35] tells us that “God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.” Especially worth noting from this passage is the interaction between the idea of divinely ordained purpose, and choice. While Christ was sent by God to Earth for a very specific purpose, to save the world, the implication here is that this purpose was not innate. For John to specify that God did not send Christ to destroy the world, he must understand that such a thing is within God’s purview, and that His choice to save the world instead of destroying it is significant to mention. Implicit within this passage is an understanding that God’s choice, thus Christ’s choice to redeem humanity rather than destroy it is made all the more significant by the fact that it is a choice. Particularly, it is the harder of the two choices, and the one that would subject Christ to the most personal suffering: after all, it is easier to destroy than to create, and far easier to withstand no pain at all than to withstand crucifixion. This Biblical emphasis on the willingness of self-sacrifice as what elevates the holiness of the act itself is mirrored by Q drops on a regular basis, done transparently for the purpose of drawing in followers. It is far easier to attract Evangelical followers when you can convince them that the prophet of your conspiracy theory mirrors the

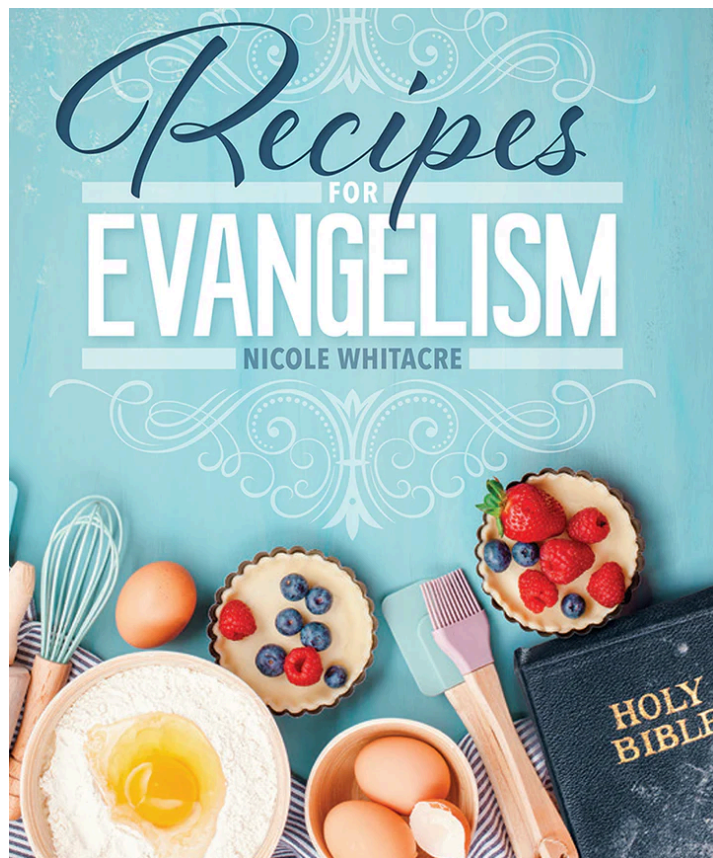


prophet of their religion. For further examples of Q's subtle attempts at encouraging this association, see above^[30]. It is hard to draw a clearer connection between a person and God, than the one Q does by attaching a request for God to save America to a quote from Donald Trump, talking about his plans to defend Americans. If there exists a more blatant example of a person using Christian language to deify a political figure, I was not able to find it myself. Q would of course never go as far as to directly label Trump as God for fear of alienating his Evangelical audience, his exploitation of the Evangelical idolization of self-sacrifice demonstrates quite clearly that he has no qualms about likening him to Christ. Idolatry, as I am sure any practicing Christian is aware, is a sin that is generally viewed quite negatively by most Christians. In spite of this, and in spite of the Christian rhetoric used by Q, his base of QChristian followers do not seem to have been dissuaded. Not even by the Biblical inerrancy that has been made such a central component of their theology.

Having already touched on Biblical inerrancy, I will skip the formality of addressing its meaning and instead move into discussion of its religio-political and social impacts on life within the Evangelical movement. As any scholar of Christianity knows, there are contradictions in the Bible. James 1:13 teaches us to “let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man.^[35]” But at the same time, the King James Version of Genesis 22:1 says that “And it came to pass after these things, that God did tempt Abraham.^[35]” In later translations this was changed to God “testing” Abraham, but it is defensible to claim that regardless of word choice, this act still falls in line with other Biblical examples of temptation. Ezekiel 18:20 tells us that “the son shall not bear the iniquity of the father,^[35]” but then we are told by Exodus 20:5 that “I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation.^[35]” I

must stress that I mention these contradictions not in some attempt to have a “gotcha” moment in which I “debunk” Christian believers. The presence of internal contradictions within the Bible do not disprove Christianity, nor the existence of God. The Bible is a work that is thousands of years old, that has been filtered through the language, politics, and social contexts of cultures and empires that have not existed for centuries. Wycliffe Global Alliance, an organization dedicated to translating the Bible into every living world language reports that the text has been fully translated into over seven hundred languages as of 2023^[36]. It is not explicitly anti-Christian to merely acknowledge the fact that there are contradictions in the Bible, or to assume that they might be owed to somebody somewhere in history making an error with translation. However the most common position among mainline American evangelicals, thus Christians, may disagree as they have been so frequently told to do by figures of religious authority. Disagreeing with the idea that there are contradictions in the scripture does not make the contradictions stop existing, however, and it is inevitable that eventually somebody’s curiosity will get the better of them. Most people are not scholars of Biblical interpretation. Even in Christian communities it is unlikely for the average believer to have the same memory and understanding of the Bible that a trained pastor or priest does. So when questions about the consistency of certain Biblical passages arise, these figures of church authority are often the first people a confused believer would consult. Within the context of Evangelicalism’s isolated social reality and fundamentalist zeal, it is far rarer for a questioning believer to seek out an answer for their questions. On the rare occasion that they do so, it is often looked down upon, ignored, or purported to be a matter of their reading the text wrong. This is a pattern observable in the testimony of numerous individuals that have written on their experiences in the Evangelical movement^[37]. When pastors so regularly preach in their services that there are no contradictions in the Bible across all its

most popular translations and versions, there is little wonder as to why a believer would feel discouraged or fearful about speaking out. It is important to remember that Evangelicalism transcends the boundaries of the average religious community: it is a social movement. With the constant stream of Evangelical books, movies, television, video games, and even food^[38], it is imperative we remember that for many, Evangelicalism encompasses the majority of their social existence; The scorn a believer might face for questioning the legitimacy of the Bible might not stay in church. Fearing this



scorn, many turn back to the word of their religious leaders and try to ignore their questions. This further cements social isolation and uncritical acceptance of Church authority into evangelicals' conspiratorial thinking habits. When believers are told repeatedly that the scripture is without flaw, it is an inevitable consequence of an insular religious movement that eventually those questioning the Bible will begin to internalize the notion that perhaps they are simply wrong, or that they need only listen closer to services for the truth to become apparent. This further cements an uncritical acceptance of doctrine as passed down by a figure of authority, a willingness to accept that has helped to create the base of Q's following. Though he may not explicitly be a priest, or a pastor, or any other figure of Christian authority, the language he uses in addressing followers is the very same as you might hear in a televangelist's broadcast.

Attached below is a collection of Q drops sourced from the same archive from which I have taken the others I have analyzed^[30]. Years could be spent picking apart and analyzing the careful use of religio-political rhetoric in each of these drops. However, I feel that it would be more useful to do away with the myth of the isolated incident, and establish as clearly as possible that Q's use of Evangelical Christian rhetoric is not a coincidence, and not an infrequent occurrence. It is a mode of thought that undergirds the overwhelming majority of his drops. Note his repeated calls to God, repeated references to a "great awakening," demonizing of differing religious groups, and calls to *keep* praying. It is clear that Q is somebody with an understanding of who exactly is following his trail of digital breadcrumbs.

Anonymous 05/15/20 (Fri) 16:16:50 ID: bb4770 No.9185098

>>9184779
>>9184779
Q 4207

The Armor of God

Q

!!Hs1Jq13jV6
11 May 2020 - 12:05:59 PM

The Armor of God

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people.

Q

Disclaimer: this post and the subject matter and contents thereof - text, media, or otherwise - do not necessarily reflect the views of the 8kun administration.

4303



CIA's Use of Journalists and Clergy in Intelligence Operations

Q !!Hs1Jq13jV6 21 May 2020 - 10:53:12 AM

<https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/hearings/ciasuseofjournal00unit.pdf> 🔍?

Logical thinking.

CIA coming back into the news [soon]?

Q

4547



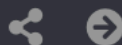
The Lone Warrior

Q !!Hs1Jq13jV6 30 Jun 2020 - 12:12:09 PM

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bWabnDttSZ8&feature=youtu.be> 🔍?

Q

4277



Video: THE GREAT AWAKENING WORLDWIDE

Q !!Hs1Jq13jV6 17 May 2020 - 7:33:12 PM

<https://twitter.com/EYEDROPMEDIA/status/12621466>

18419183616◆?

WWG1WGA!!!

Q

4544



THESE Are the times That Try Men's Souls

Q !!Hs1Jq13jV6 30 Jun 2020 - 12:09:31 AM

THESE are the times that try men's souls. The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of their country; but he that stands by it now, deserves the love and thanks of man and woman. Tyranny, like hell, is not easily conquered; yet we have this consolation with us, that the harder the conflict, the more glorious the triumph. What we obtain too cheap, we esteem too lightly: it is dearness only that gives everything its value. Heaven knows how to put a proper price upon its goods; and it would be strange indeed if so celestial an article as FREEDOM should not be highly rated. – Thomas Paine

Q

4249



Peace for the Storm: Have Faith in God

Q !!Hs1Jq13jV6 15 May 2020 - 12:49:10 PM

Peace_for_the_Storm_Quotes_Have_Faith_in_God_1024x1024.jpg

4530



We Will Not Fail

Q !!Hs1Jq13jV6 26 Jun 2020 - 8:15:35 PM

<https://twitter.com/elenoche>◆?

Rising to the occasion.
Understanding what's at stake.
God bless each and every one of you.
We will not fail.
WWG1WGA!!!

Q

4277



Video: THE GREAT AWAKENING WORLDWIDE

Q !!Hs1Jq13jV6 17 May 2020 - 7:33:12 PM

<https://twitter.com/EYEDROPMEDIA/status/12621466>

18419183616◆?

WWG1WGA!!!

Q

4593



Germany: "We Are Not Alone. More and More People Awake. Where We Go One, We Go All."

Q !!Hs1Jq13jV6 18 Jul 2020 - 12:52:47 PM

<https://twitter.com/Pnthii/status/1284522108521938944>◆?

When the news is no longer trustworthy it is up to each of us to use discernment.
Have faith and trust in yourself.
UNITY NOT DIVISION.
WWG1WGA.

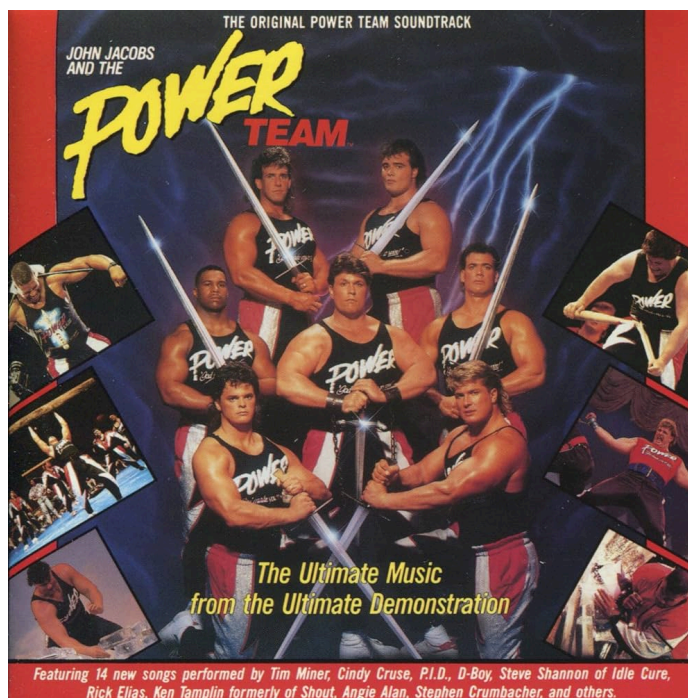
Q

Across all of the drops attached above, it becomes increasingly evident that the person or persons responsible for the persona of Q are knowingly exploiting the tendencies of Evangelical conspiratorial thinking. Specifically here, we see him exploit the Evangelical movement's increased willingness to believe when the information they are given is handed down to them by a figure of religious authority. This willingness to accept is not limited only to when the information is dispensed on Church grounds, however. There is a reason that many Qhristians do not seem to take much of an issue with the taking the word of God as dispensed by a stranger on an anonymous message board claiming to have government clearance, and this reason is the Evangelical emphasis placed on activism.

Activism as Bebbington defined it^[22] within an Evangelical context refers to the drive to express and spread the gospel through one's own direct action. This trait can broadly be attributed as the explanation for the formation of Evangelical religio-culture, as its encouragement of spreading of the Bible in unique ways has lent itself to the creation of gospel-themed alternatives for mainstream culture as has discussed briefly in the previous section. Many converts will come into the Evangelical movement having already reached adulthood with a number of hobbies, interests, and connections that one might not associate with traditional Christianity. Having converted, and now understanding their mission to actively spread the gospel in their own unique way, many begin to adapt their existing interests and connections to a form more suitable for this mission of spreading the gospel to others around them who may not be religious, but are interested in whatever other pursuit may be involved. The Evangelical strongmen on "the Power Team," (see below) for instance, have capitalized on public interest in professional wrestling and other feats of strength to spread the messages of the gospel for over forty years. It should go without saying that professional wrestling does not

appear in the Bible; Jesus never performed a top rope powerbomb on Judas. But nevertheless here it is in American schools, businesses, and churches being used as a method of delivery for the very same messages actually in the Bible.

The Power Team is a perfect example of the type of preaching that falls under the label of Evangelical activism. Activism is among the most easily understood and observable traits of the Evangelical movement when it comes to impact conspiratorial thought, as under this



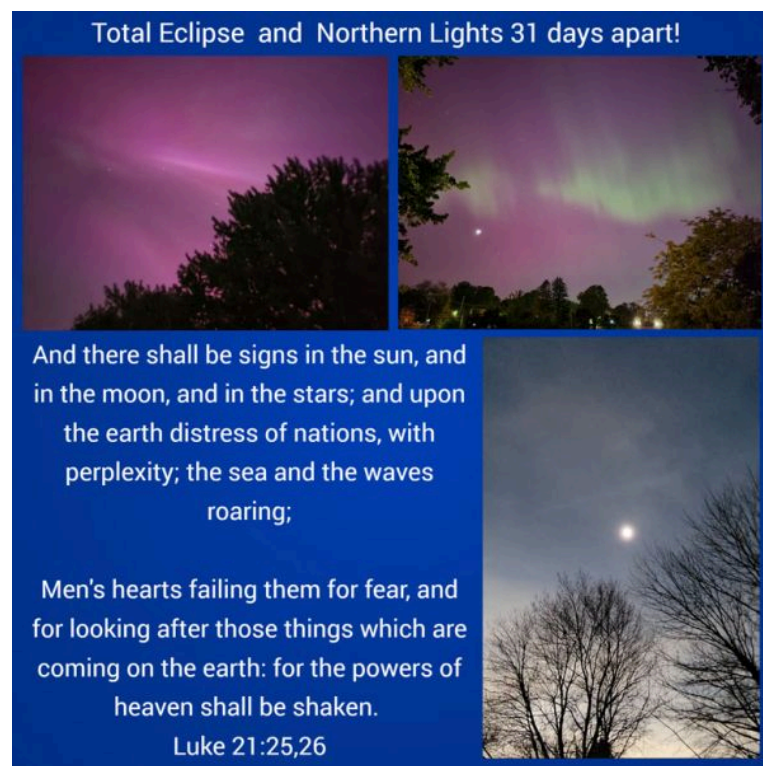
method of preaching, anybody in any environment can be a teacher of the Bible. Evangelical religio-culture has proliferated to the degree that an Evangelical alternative exists for most forms of media that are not explicitly forbidden by Church doctrine. Any believer can with ease receive the good word almost anywhere: on social media, at sporting events, at concerts, and on television, it is not hard for a believer to find somebody preaching the gospel. Over enough time spent engaging with this, one naturally becomes accustomed to it, and it becomes internalized as a standard component of religious life. Evangelical activism is something that has been going on for decades, and has only increased with the advent of the internet and social media platforms making it easier and easier to spread the scripture. This tendency to find the gospel in nontraditional places has molded the conspiratorial thought of the Evangelical movement over time towards an acceptance of preaching from secondhand sources. It gets harder and harder to critique an alternative attempt at preaching the gospel over years and years of consuming what is

believed to be authentic Christian media from sources that may not have even existed a century ago. This is a large part of how Q maintains his base of Christian believers, and how he goes unquestioned by so many of them. Though they may not have been, or still may not be users of the obscure right-wing sites he typically preaches from, they are not unfamiliar with somebody righteous using a strange or unfamiliar platform to deliver authentic Christian messaging, and with how much religious rhetoric he uses, as established earlier, there is no reason for them to not see him as just another believer doing activism somewhere they may be unfamiliar with. Q's use of explicitly Christian rhetoric when discussing the success of his mission "pray for us," "may God bless us," etc, is particularly good for drawing in and maintaining an Evangelical crowd because it appeals to existing experiences with preaching from sources other than the Church. With the use of subtle religious undertones, Q draws in Evangelical audiences by presenting them with the form of something that is familiar, use of the gospel in a nontraditional space, and then exploits them by pandering to the existing trends in their conspiratorial thinking. In many ways, he is no different than a news outlet that caters specifically to Evangelical Christians, only in the content of his messages does Q differ from what could be found elsewhere on social media. His ability to play into these sensibilities without facing scorn for the more elaborate and farfetched aspects of his conspiracy mythos is helped further along by the individualization of Evangelical religious experiences, and their approach to eschatology. Both of these I will be addressing as extensions of one another.

Dispensational premillennialism is hardly a term that one would hear frequently uttered by the average churchgoer, but nevertheless it is a crucially important theological framework for discussing Evangelical eschatology, and one that is self-applied by the more theologically-inclined within the community^[39]. Premillennialism is an approach to eschatology,

the theological study of the end of days, that proposes a unique perspective regarding the eventual return of Christ and the rapture of believers. Premillennialists, to be brief, believe that Christ will return to Earth after a period of severe tribulation, which will then be followed by a literal thousand-year reign of Christ and His followers on earth. Interpretations of premillennialism differ on exactly when the rapture of followers will occur: before, after, or during the period of tribulation, but the core itinerary of events for the return of Christ are universal across interpretations. Tribulation, rapture, millennial reign of Christ, with the first two not necessarily occurring in that order. Premillennialism is descended from a literal interpretation of Revelations 20:1-6^[35], and has come to prevalence among Evangelical believers over the course of the last century. This stands in opposition to postmillennialism, which proposes that Christ's return will occur after the millennium of His rule, which they propose is currently ongoing as Christianity spreads. Dispensationalism is a less essential component of Evangelical eschatology within the context of conspiracy theory, but one that is essential regardless. Dispensationalism is an approach to reading the Bible that proposes God interacts with humans in a different manner depending on the historical era, or dispensation. It also asserts a lack of continuation in who exactly the people of God are between testaments of the Bible, to support the idea of God interacting with His chosen people in differing ways across different eras. Dispensational premillennialism as a theological doctrine has led to the dissemination of apocalyptic eschatology among the Evangelical movement as believers begin searching for literal signs of the incoming rapture and/or tribulation in the world around them. The proposition of paradise on earth, the rapture, and the reign of Christ as something that will literally be occurring within the future naturally leads to speculation among believers, and over the century since this perspective's inception, prophesying and speculation about the nature and date of the

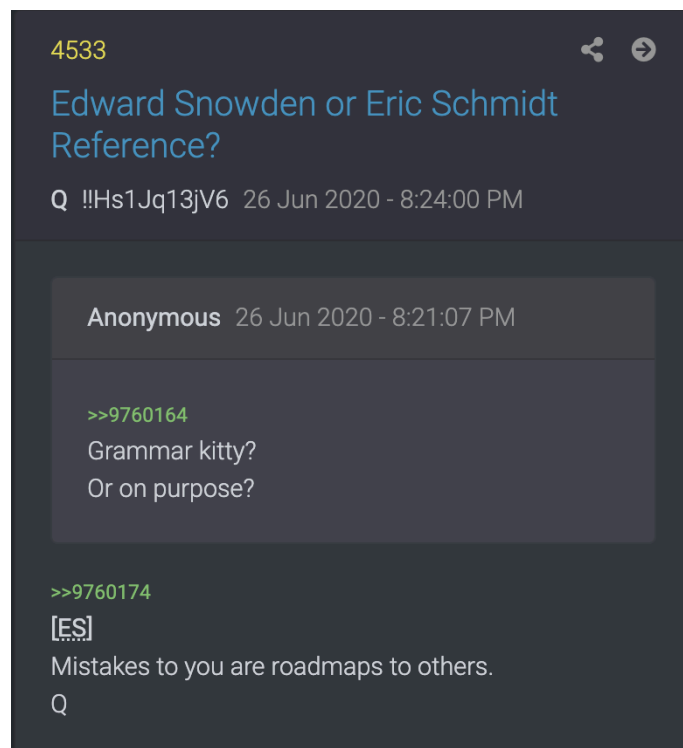
tribulation and rapture have become increasingly common. This speculation has profoundly warped the conspiratorial thinking habits of the Evangelical movement towards a tendency to find signs of the incoming tribulation and rapture in the smallest of spaces, and a tendency to accept what are often minor coincidences as signs of the coming rapture. See for example the Ohio Christian Alliance's (OCA) prophesying that the 2024 occurrence of the northern lights and total eclipse thirty-one days apart from one another is evidence that the Biblical time of tribulation will be soon arriving^[40], or televangelist Jack Van Impe's repeated preaching that the end-times would arrive on a number of different dates over the course of his career. Van Impe died in 2020, before the arrival of the end-times he had so



frequently predicted. The widespread tendency towards end-times prophecy among influential members of the Evangelical movement, and the broader acceptance of these prophecies can be attributed to the over-time individualization of religious experiences in Evangelical Christianity. As emphasis is placed in the movement on the centrality of the individual experience with religion, the prophecies of one person becomes increasingly valid to the average believer^[42]. Considering that the majority of Evangelical Americans come into the movement via conversion and rebirth, and the vastly different experiences heard of in each individual testimony, there exists a precedent in Evangelical theology that legitimizes the word of the individual with

regards to religious experiences and insights. From this legitimacy placed on the word of the individual, numerous aspects of Evangelical theology are strengthened. Activists preaching the Bible in a manner never before seen, or converts delivering testimony of being saved from the grasp of modernity's sins; both are made normal and acceptable because of the ongoing individualization of religious experience within the Evangelical movement. The centrality of the individual is something repeatedly reinforced by the political bent of the Evangelical movement. As previously established, the Evangelical tendency to manufacture an enemy often includes a message of brainwashing or single-mindedness among opposition. See the broad-stroke criminalization of minority groups done by the Nixon administration, or by popular Evangelical media figures like Jack T. Chick or influential evangelical James Dobson, who has spoken frequently in his programs about an "LGBTQ agenda" that he believes to be damaging and universal among queer people^[43]. This sort of demonization of opposition as a brainwashed hivemind is very common among the more politically active figures in Evangelical leadership, and is particularly reinforcing of individualization within the movement. When opposition is most markedly characterized by single-mindedness, the clear implication is that believers in the Evangelical movement are more righteous by virtue of their individuality: they are not brainwashed, they see the truth. The widespread nature of end-times prophecy in conjunction with ongoing individualization of religious experiences has profoundly shaped the conspiratorial thinking of evangelicals into an acceptance of minute details as proof of a broader conspiracy. This tendency is one that has been taken advantage of the most observably by Q. Many of the key terms and individual conspiracy theories that are central to the Qanon mythology have been shaped to serve the exact same rhetorical purpose that the rapture does within Evangelical eschatology. Q's proposed Storm, the period in which Trump's supporters will descend upon the

Shadow Government and begin making arrests, directly mirrors the way that evangelicals speak about the rapture. There even exists a mirror for the time of tribulation in the prophesied “ten days_[1],” a period of unrest that Q has prophesied will predate The Storm’s arrival. Theories about the arrival of The Storm and the language contained within directly mirror the habits of Evangelical end-times prophesying, down to the stretching of small details. See for example Qanon’s 2022 use of an episode of *The Simpsons*_[44] as evidence that The Storm would be coming soon. Q reinforces these habits among



followers with strategic use of Q drops. See above_[30] for instance, as Q explicitly identifies small “mistakes” as potential leads towards epiphanies about The Storm’s coming in the same way that Evangelical end-times prophets have been doing for decades. In abstraction, The Storm and the second coming can both be described nearly identically without losing out on any of the essential points. Both are periods after a time of tribulation in which a departed messianic figure returns to do away with evil and reward their loyal followers. With The Storm, Q has manufactured for his followers an alternative version of the second coming to believe in. He has tailored a rhetorical device to fit an audience that he knows it will be able to successfully entrap, and he has done so with the profiteering intent to establish a loyal and unquestioning base of Qhristian followers. To keep Qhristians loyal, Q has dispensed to them the same manner of dangerous fear-mongering conspiracy theories that have been sold since Mike Warnke and Richard Nixon. In 2020, a Qanon

conspiracy surrounding the furniture company Wayfair came to incredible popularity. The theory posited that the company was using their app as a front for the sex trafficking of kidnapped children^[45]. Once again demonstrating a characteristically Evangelical stretching of minor threads into evidence of the coming Storm, the theory's primary evidence consisted of screenshots showing a number of seemingly identical storage cabinets labeled with different names and sold on the Wayfair app for different high prices. Proponents of the theory claimed that the names applied to these cabinets lined up with those of missing children from across the nation, and the high prices were evidence that the sale of these cabinets was being used as a front for the sale of the missing children whose names were attached. In reality, there was no sex trafficking being coordinated through the Wayfair app. This, however, didn't stop hundreds of thousands of believers from taking details as small as names on a cabinet, and running with them as far as possible; over half a million people tuned into the Facebook Live stream of a supposed victim of the Wayfair sex trafficking conspiracy. Many believed that if they were able to publicize the Wayfair theory, they could blow the lid on certain members of the Shadow Government. The Wayfair conspiracy exemplifies the trend of details blown out of proportion with the encouragement of an individual theorist, used as evidence to support broader end-times prophecy. To the detriment of innocent families across the US, Q has used conspiracies like the Wayfair theory to cement the loyalty of his Qhristian followers used to searching for and accepting signs of rapture in small things and coincidences. But to what end does Q continue to exploit the conspiratorial sensibilities of Evangelical Christians? What is gained from the exploitation of this group of followers that is unique to them? The answer is the same that it was for Mike Warnke decades ago: profit. It could be argued that this is an uncharitable perspective

on Mike Warnke's motivations. It could be argued just as easily that Mike Warnke is undeserving of a charitable perspective.

Having established a consistent intent to tailor a conspiracy network appealing to the sensibilities of American evangelicals, it is finally necessary to establish a profit incentive for Q, as befits the definition of conspiracy theory proposed earlier. Establishing a financial profit incentive is hardly difficult when examining the spread of Qanon merchandising, and multi-level-marketing (MLM) schemes. Researcher for the Global Network on Extremism and Technology (GNET) Marc-André Argentino noted in 2021^[46] the emergence of an MLM strain of Qanon developing on social media that he termed "pastel Qanon" in reference to its use of soft pastel colors and other traditionally feminine aesthetic influences to draw in and market to women. Argentino noted that many of these pastel Qanon accounts had already formed a base of loyal followers through the use of MLM marketing before converting to supporting the cause of the Qanon conspiracy. Over the course of a collection period that lasted between March and September of 2020, the accounts surveyed by the GNET experienced a growth of 160% in their follower base as the COVID-19 pandemic began, and they began making the switch to marketing anti-vaccination in accordance with Qanon sensibilities. This data is important for a number of reasons, but most of all for establishing a precedent for the enmeshing of Qanon and business practices. With scholars such as Mara Einstein and Sarah McFarland Taylor going as far as to explicitly label Qanon both a religion and a business^[47], it is clear that there is a significant internal component to the Qanon conspiracy that functions as a business. Knowing this, one must naturally ask what it is about evangelicals that make them an enticing target for the profiteering dimensions of Qanon? The answer becomes obvious when examining the vast reserves of wealth belonging to some of the more influential American televangelists. Perhaps the best example is


the controversial televangelist Kenneth Copeland. While an exact net worth is difficult to pin down, one need only examine Copeland's seven million dollar Texas mansion and the heavy tax exemptions^[48] he receives on it to get a sense of the wealth that he has accumulated for himself on the backs of his Evangelical audience. Q's motivations for catering his conspiracy to the sensibilities of the American Evangelical movement becomes increasingly clear as one examines the wealth of figures like Kenneth Copeland, Joel Olsteen, and Benny Hinn. The Qanon conspiracy's profiteering tendencies, examined with considerations to the vast wealth that has been made by marketing to evangelicals makes the motivations of the Qanon conspiracy's ringleaders apparent. By consciously tailoring the language and contents of their constituent theories and overarching mythos to appeal specifically to the dimensions of the conspiratorial thinking of the Evangelical movement, Q is able to profit wildly in both money and power, with little consideration for the consequences of the dangerous rhetoric he is spreading.

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