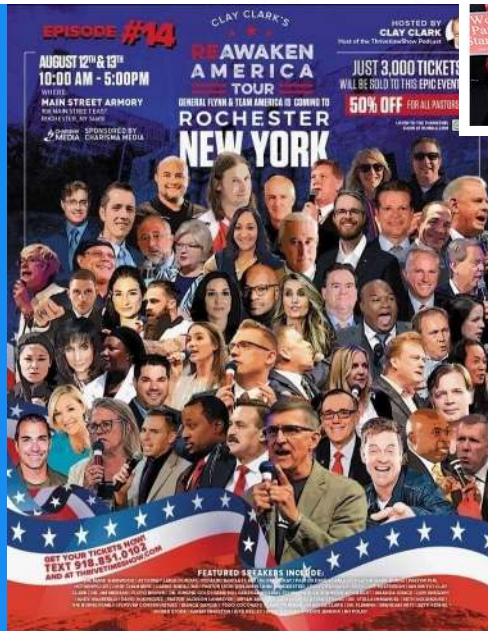


# Inside the Reawaken America Tour



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## INSIDE THIS BOOK

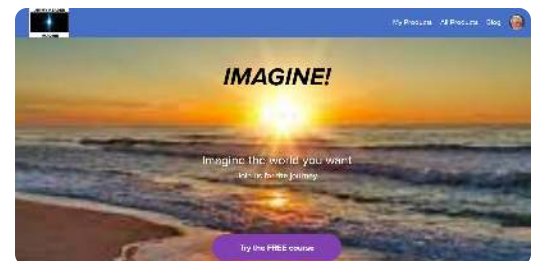
In this book, you will find posts from [my blog](#) about the Reawaken America Tour held in Batavia, near Rochester, NY in August 2022. While many people opposed to the event held a news conference or a workshop, and demonstrated outside the event, I chose to go inside. During 20 hours of fast-paced presentations and speakers, I took notes which helped me write my reflections and responses to this event. These posts are from the following weeks in the fall of 2022 and appear here as they were written at the time.



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If this book enhances your understanding of this movement, you will find other resources for an [Imagine Learning Community](#) to help you learn more as you respond to what's happening. You will also find interviews with people working nationally as writers, activists, and organizational leaders, along with links to what they are doing where you can join them.

Enroll for free - no charge ever - and find interviews with leaders, a "keep learning" section with an array of resources, and an Introduction to Christian Nationalism.



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## What happened at the Reawaken America Tour?

For eighteen hours over two days, I listened to the speakers at the Reawaken America Tour in Batavia, NY – a new one about every 15 minutes with no breaks. I took breaks, of course, and wandered through the carnival-like atmosphere of the grounds. Under the big tent, it was unapologetic Christian Nationalism with every speaker talking about God and Jesus, about being Christians in a Christian nation – and pleading with the 3,500 people there to “save America now.”

The formal title of this tour is “The Great ReAwakening vs the Great Reset.” One speaker used an old term for Upstate New York as “the burned-over district,” referring to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Great Awakening 200 years ago when people expected the fire of God’s Spirit to set the country ablaze with a new spirit. This crowd prayed for exactly that – for America to be a truly “Christian nation” again. Christian Nationalism to the core.

Unlike spiritual awakenings in the history of this country, this movement focuses on who is in control of the nation’s government, indeed who wants to control the world. Among the multiple conspiracy theories espoused was one they call “the Great Reset,” where “they” (always the nebulous “they”) used the pandemic – government-mandated restrictions and vaccines – to test “their” ability to control people everywhere. The cry of “freedom” was everywhere. “We” will not let “them” take away our freedoms.

In what sometimes felt like an alternate universe, I listened to the constantly-repeated claims of a stolen election and an illegitimate president – and how Trump will return. Joe Biden (they never called him our president) was called a traitor, along with everyone who stole the election and installed him as president.

Christian Nationalism threatens our democracy by calling for “real Americans”/Christians (only from within their “biblical worldview”) gaining control of every level of government, all while saying “we the people” will take “our nation back.” The rhetoric and “jokes” and casual references to specific groups of people all made clear who does not belong – LGBTQ, Jews, BLM, liberals, Democrats, for instance.

## Inside the Reawaken America Tour

Many speakers challenged the charge against them of promoting white supremacy and violence, pointing out that a third of the dozens of speakers are Black (although 95% of the audience was white) and that there was no violence in and around the event (although there were personal bodyguards and armed security). However, the myth of a Christian nation, chosen by God (historically controlled by white men) dominated the whole event. The idea of systemic racism and white supremacy is anathema to this movement. Only individual responsibility matters, and racism only exists (in their minds) if an individual consciously hates a person of another color. They also denied that they encourage violence, even though speakers regularly used the rhetoric of warfare and enemies and “the mission.” And the main speaker and organizer was always referred to as “the general” (Gen. Michael Flynn). It was not overt, but it was implicit throughout.

In the coming weeks, I will post about my experience at this event, with quotes, details, and reflections – and what people who recognize the threat can do to challenge it.

## What comes out of our mouths

A frequent question I asked myself for two days was, “How can they say that?” Not just the conspiracy theories and proven lies, but the way they demean and threaten people. In the Scriptures frequently quoted at the Reawaken America event, Jesus says “the mouth speaks what the heart is full of” and “the things that come out of a person’s mouth come from the heart.” (Matthew 12:34; 15:18) With that in mind, I want to simply quote some words I heard.



**Marty Grisham** ([www.LoudMouthPrayer.org](http://www.LoudMouthPrayer.org))

Covid mandates are a “decree of death.”)

[President] “Biden is an evil, usurping man.”

**Pastor Mark Burns** (<https://www.markburns.org/>)

“They hate you because they hate Jesus.”

“We are here to take over for the Lord Jesus Christ.”

[They are] “using race to divide us.”

“I’m tired of grown men wearing a dress and going into women’s bathrooms.” (*That got a standing ovation.*)

“They’re trying to take God out of everything.”

**Kash Patel** ([https://en.wikipedia.org/Kash\\_Patel](https://en.wikipedia.org/Kash_Patel))

“We will do to them what they did to us.”

“Corruption at the highest levels of our government ... Government gangsters at the DOJ and FBI... the Clinton Cartel”

**Christie Hutcherson** (<https://wffa.win/about-us/about-me/>)

“This administration is working with drug cartels and terrorists ... and this Administration has murder, blood, and rape on its hands.”

“Trying to destroy America and make it socialist, communist.”

**Mel K** (<https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/the-mel-k-show/id1587492577>)

“If you’re a liberal [you are in] the army of the left fighting against America ... There will never be peace until these people are destroyed.”

This language is a sampling from the first day – and does not include multiple conspiracies and easy-to-prove lies. A movement that calls itself Christian is rightly judged by the words of the one they call “Lord.” So ... what would Jesus say about this? What did he say? As a Christian minister, I think we can set his words alongside their words and discern what seems to be in their hearts toward people like me. And I don’t like it.

Today Heather Cox Richardson wrote “the current-day Republican Party needs chaos,” and the Lincoln Project tweeted that what remains is “an authoritarian nationalist cult dedicated only to Donald Trump.” ([https://heathercoxrichardson.substack.com/p/august-16-2022?utm\\_source=email](https://heathercoxrichardson.substack.com/p/august-16-2022?utm_source=email)) Chaos and Cult was my experience at the Reawaken America Tour.

### Meet Mark Burns

Over the next few weeks, I will introduce you to some of the speakers. Their influence often extends far beyond their thousands of followers on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, etc. For instance, Mark Burns was labeled by Time Magazine as “Donald Trump’s Top Pastor” (<https://time.com/trump-pastor/>), and he has appeared on a wide array of news networks. (See <https://www.markburns.org/> for more.)



When he stepped onto the stage, his rhetoric immediately cast him as either a “true believer” in the cause and mission of this tour or a consummate actor. “I am here to declare war on every demonic power in the state of New York,” he began. “We are here to take over for the Lord Jesus Christ.” He pivoted throughout his 15-minute spot from using specific Christian language one might hear in some pulpits to political and culture war topics.

“I’m tired of grown men wearing a dress and going into women’s bathrooms,” he shouted – and got a standing ovation. “They are using race to divide us.” Cheers. “They hate you because they hate Jesus.” He spoke about Martin Luther King, Jr. to (mis)use him to call the crowd to engage in a new civil disobedience movement aimed at taking over the country because “they’re trying to take God out of everything.”



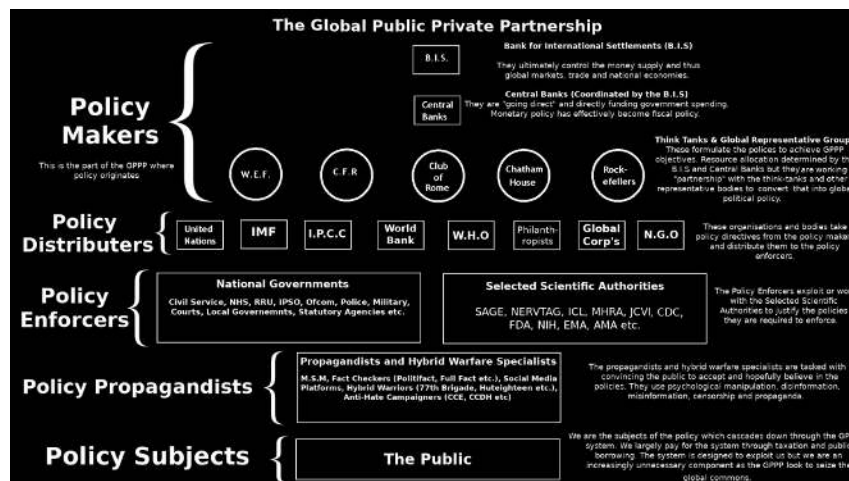
From there he jumped to repeating the false claims of this movement like “a stolen election” and “The Democrats messed up when they raided Trump’s home,” and the boos filled the air. Then ... “Do you believe Joe Biden is the president?” ... then called for Biden to be arrested for treason and led the crowd in chants for Trump to be president now. Watch this clip from that moment, posted by Right Wing Watch:

This tour has attracted tens of thousands of people to multiple events, yet the tour itself is but one slice of a movement threatening our diverse, democratic nation. The religion espoused at these events does not represent mainstream Christianity. What they call “a biblical worldview” does not represent my understanding as a Christian minister of our scriptures and faith traditions. The movement has already amassed enough legislative and judicial power to begin a reversal of the movement toward civil and human rights so many have worked for. It must be stopped.

# Meet Mel K

In the early afternoon of the first day of the ReAwaken America Tour in Batavia, NY, Mel K came to the stage. I had never heard of her, but the program described her much as her website does (<https://themelkshow.com>): “Mel K is a devoted lover of truth, facts, history, God, and America....focusing full time on exposing truth, uncovering hidden history...to inform the public of the embedded forces geopolitically and within America that are hell bent on a long planned One World Government where life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness will be replaced with surveillance, compliance, conformity, and control.”

She began with this – “JFK said there was a plot to enslave everyone in America, which is why he was killed....Trump tried to finish the job of exposing it.” I was even more startled by her claim that “David Rockefeller is behind a decades-long plot [to establish] a one-world government” – especially since he died at age 101 in 2017, assuming she meant David Rockefeller, Jr. Perhaps his lifelong friendships with people in the intelligence, banking, and foreign affairs communities – and his advocacy of political and economic cooperation among nations – is the reason. She also named the World Economic Forum, the International Monetary Fund, and the Council on Foreign Relations as part of this grand conspiracy. Mel K went on to explain this chart to us:



With the limited time each speaker had, Mel K moved to wrap up her presentation, with much of it accompanied by passionate amens and applause. [President] Biden “was installed by the ultra-wealthy,” and they are trying to divide us. Biden’s plan to Build Back Better, she said, is meant to “destroy what is.” George Soros is somehow involved in all of this and is “trying to destroy America and us.” And to a standing ovation, she ended with these lines: “If you’re a liberal ... the army of the left ... you are fighting against America. There will never be peace until these people are destroyed.”

If you have 11 minutes, and want to hear another presentation, click here and scroll down to Grand Rapids, MI and watch Mel K speaking at this tour event in August 2021. ...

<https://themelkshow.com/articles/must-see-mel-k-speeches/>

### A comedian and a doctor

Two characteristics of the Reawaken America Tour in Batavia NY were (1) a focus on conspiracies and (2) demonizing people. The dozens of speakers included high-profile people like Gen. Michael Flynn, Eric Tump, and Mike Lindell (“the pillow guy”), as well as preachers with a national “presence,” self-proclaimed prophets, business owners, attorneys, medical doctors, even a comedian who was a Saturday Night Live regular in the 1990s.

The comedian Jim Breuer (<https://www.jimbreuer.com/home>) – who has also hosted specials on VH1 and Comedy Central and is on tour right now – was on stage because he “has decided not to perform at any venues that require the RNA-modifying nano-technology COVID-19 vaccines” (according to the program). Like most current comedians, he was rude and crude and dismissive of people. How that behavior can be considered Christian seems strange to me, but he was not alone in speaking that way at this event. Even worse, though, he demonized people like Bill Gates and Barack Obama whose faces were on the “Great Reset” graphic behind all the speakers – that being a major conspiracy at this event. At times, what he said was subtle, and I almost missed it. For instance, he talked about people with faith and morals “who can think for themselves,” and said these people reject the vaccine shots, as if people who do not are without such “faith and morals.” You can get a sense of his comedy routine in this video and of how the people there felt about it in the comments below the video. At the event, the response was a lot of laughter and shouts of affirmation and long ovations. ([Click here to watch him in action on YouTube.](#))

One of the doctors, Jim Meehan, MD, spoke on “How to Fight Back Against Medical Corruption.” The program described him as a “leading Oklahoma medical doctor who has successfully treated 4,000 COVID-19 patients with 0 deaths.” He is an ophthalmologist MD, now licensed for general preventative medicine and nutrition, who also runs a company committed to “healing without harming your body with harsh chemicals or pharmaceuticals laden with negative side effects.” <https://www.meehanmd.com/> His approach to holistic health, however, has been accompanied with anti-vaccination activism. He was sued by a pediatrician in 2017 for his aggressive attack on her for giving vaccines to children (<https://www.nbcnews.com/health/health-news/anti-vax-message-gets-meaner-social-media-n809166>). And in September, 2020, he spoke at a state Public Health Committee hearing to say that “masks are ineffective at slowing the spread of the virus and that people of color need more vitamin D in their diets to prevent them from contracting COVID-19.” (<https://www.readfrontier.org/stories/thehead-of-an-oklahoma-public-health-committee-invited-anti-vax-doctors-to-talk-with-lawmakers-about-the-coronavirus/>)

As Dr. Meehan spoke at the event, he claimed that “friends and family are dying because of vaccines” and called Dr. Fauci a “domestic enemy.” He referred to the government’s efforts to control COVID with masks and vaccines as “luciferian” and said “they are coming for your children.” As with many speakers, he combined a wide array of his ideas as he continued: “They’re buying the fraudulent research they want. ... They’re going after the children to control us. ... They’re going to do something this fall to shut down elections. ... They’re using COVID vaccines as bioweapons unleashed on us.” And at times, he used scripture quotes to “support” his ideas about all of this.

Among other ideas, he suggested putting Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. on a science board to “help work against the deep state.” In 2019, before COVID, three Kennedys wrote an article in Politico where they said “he is part of a misinformation campaign that’s having heartbreaking—and deadly—consequences” because of his anti-vaccination stance. Numerous articles have been written about his high-profile opposition to masks and vaccines since then. You can read for yourself some of his ongoing work in this area on his Twitter feed – [https://twitter.com/RobertKennedyJr?ref\\_src=twsrc%5Egoogle%7Ctwcamp%5Eserp%7Ctwgr%5Eauthor](https://twitter.com/RobertKennedyJr?ref_src=twsrc%5Egoogle%7Ctwcamp%5Eserp%7Ctwgr%5Eauthor) and his Facebook page – <https://www.facebook.com/rfkjr>.

## Inside the Reawaken America Tour

I do not doubt that people like Jim Breuer and Dr. Meehan are Christian, as they claim, in their hearts and minds. What troubles me as a fellow Christian is how that faith can be used to demonize human beings and spread disinformation and lies through conspiracy theories that cause fear and harm the lives of so many people.

The movement toward authoritarian governance in our country, based on a narrative of America as a Christian and conservative nation, goes far beyond the Reawaken America Tour. Today's post is about CNN and the dismissal of Brian Stelter, who I was only vaguely familiar with until now. His statement in his closing segment has been widely reported: "It's not partisan to stand up for decency and democracy and dialogue. It's not partisan to stand up to demagogues. It's required. It's patriotic. We must make sure we don't give platforms to those who are lying to our faces."

Robert Reich, who I do follow (but whose name you may not know), had a column yesterday about this ([https://robertreich.substack.com/p/why-cnn-cancelled-brian-stelter?utm\\_source=substack&utm\\_medium=email](https://robertreich.substack.com/p/why-cnn-cancelled-brian-stelter?utm_source=substack&utm_medium=email)). Reich is Chancellor's Professor of Public Policy at the University of California at Berkeley and served as Secretary of Labor in the Clinton Administration. He is a prolific writer, author of 17 books, founding editor of the American Prospect magazine, and has created several documentaries. He knows what he's talking about. (You can see his website at <https://robertreich.org/>.)



Robert Reich

He writes: “For several years, Brian Stelter’s Sunday CNN show, ‘Reliable Sources,’ has been a reliable source of intelligent criticism of Fox News, rightwing media in general, Trumpism, and the increasingly authoritarian lurch of the Republican Party. *[Not all Republicans support today’s leaders of the GOP who are meant in this post.]* Last week, CNN abruptly canceled the show and effectively fired Stelter and his staff. Why?”

One of his common sayings is “follow the money.” CNN’s new chairman and CEO says he wants less criticism of political conservatives and more “straight news reporting” so that CNN can be “for everybody.” The new owner of CNN is Warner Bros. Discovery, Inc., and David Zaslav is the CEO. ... If you’re thinking you never heard of these people, neither have I, but we need to know who they are.

Robert Reich poses these questions: “How is it possible to report on Trump or Rudy Giuliani or any number of today’s Republican leaders and not speak of the Big Lie, or say they’ve broken norms if not laws? The anti-democracy movement in America (as elsewhere) is among the biggest issues confronting us today. Is reporting on it considered “straight news” or “opinion?” Wouldn’t failing to report on it in a way that sounded alarms be a gross dereliction of duty?”

What we learn from Reich is that “the leading shareholder in Warner Bros. Discovery is John Malone, a multi-billionaire cable magnate.... [who] describes himself as a ‘libertarian’ although he travels in rightwing Republican circles. In 2005, he held 32 percent of the shares of Rupert Murdoch’s News Corporation. He is on the board of directors of the Cato Institute. In 2017, he donated \$250,000 to Trump’s inauguration. Malone has said he wants CNN to be more like Fox News because, in his view, Fox News has ‘[actual journalism.](#)’”

Reich concludes with challenging words for us all: “When you follow the money behind deeply irresponsible decisions at the power centers of America today, the road often leads to rightwing billionaires. Sadly, there are still many in America — and not just billionaires like Malone — who believe that holding Trump accountable for what he has done (and continues to do) to this country is a form of partisanship, and that such partisanship has no place in so-called ‘balanced journalism.’ This view is itself dangerous.”

The Reawaken America Tour, even the larger movement of Christian Nationalism, is but one part of a much larger authoritarian movement, funded by billionaires and spanning the globe. That in itself may sound like a conspiracy theory, but it is not. Search names like Paul Weyrich and Richard Viguerie – key organizers of the movement in the U.S. in the 1970s and ‘80s – and do a quick read of the international movement at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New\\_Right](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Right). Paul Weyrich was one among many who have opposed the Separation of Church and State and organized Christian conservatives (Catholic and Protestant) for what is now called Christian Nationalism. How do we stop this movement? It won’t be easy, but it is essential.



# What will happen at the polls?

The Reawaken America Tour keeps popping up in news articles. MSNBC yesterday published [an opinion column by Anthea Butler](#) that says such rallies “have served as ground zero for organizing designed to encourage political contributions and election fervor among conservative Christians. The rallying call is the big lie that not only claims that Trump won in 2020, but that every election is compromised.”

She quotes Steve Bannon on a [World Prayer Network](#) call as saying that “what we need is poll workers. ... If we want to win, your congregations have to be in the counting rooms and prepared to have those knife fights.” Their website claims to show people how to “vote biblically” – not that “knife fights” seems like a biblical values – but this organized effort wants more than that. Butler says that “Evangelical churches and large religio-political rallies have served as ground zero for organizing designed to encourage political contributions and election fervor among conservative Christians. The rallying call is the big lie that not only claims that Trump won in 2020, but that every election is compromised.”



Turning Point USA represents students and young adults in this movement. [Their founding mission](#) focused on educating students about freedom, free markets, and limited government ... all traditional conservative values. However, they have joined forces with the Christian Nationalism movement, creating [Turning Point Faith](#) where their home page says, “Together we can restore America’s biblical values. We’re on a mission to engage, equip, and empower Christians to change the trajectory of our nation.”

Today's movement recruiting Christians to go to the polls exploded with the Christian Coalition, founded by Pat Robertson in the 1980s, and under the leadership of Ralph Reed. Until the last few years, their efforts focused on producing voting guides for "values voters," ostensibly non-partisan but what everyone understood to be a checklist for right-wing conservative policies promoted by the Republican party. As a midwestern Baptist pastor in those years, I experienced the transformation of Christian "values voters" into Republican-only voters.

That was not enough, though, for leaders of this movement. As Anthea Butler says in her column: "No longer is it enough to just get voters out to the polls or to pray. These organizations are designed to steer voters to their specific candidates, encourage them to work the polls and watch out for bogus voting. Republican candidates for office are even showing up at these large events."

My experience at the Reawaken America Rally in Batavia, NY supports her description of the event:

*ReAwaken rallies, which have been happening across the country since last year, have combined anti-vaccine messages, political action and religious services in order to reach their faithful. The Aug. 12 rally in Batavia, New York, featured Eric Trump and retired Lt. Gen. Michael Flynn. Held in a tent on the grounds of Cornerstone Church, the rally included signs for Republican candidate Mario Fratto. A considerable amount of attention was given to New York Attorney General Letitia James, who had expressed concern to the tour's organizers that the rally could lead to racial violence. At the rally, one of Trump's former pastors on the stump, Mark Burns, prayed of James, "If she does not repent and turn back to you, show the world what happens to those that come against your servants."*



Mark Burns at Batavia

## Inside the Reawaken America Tour

A “values voters” movement has now become a Christian Nationalist movement, intent not on getting conservative Christians to the polls to vote for Republican candidates, but that now seems determined to undermine trust in our elections, to demonize all who disagree with them, and to make the polls a battleground – in Steve Bannon’s words, a “knife fight.” I grieve for what has happened among Christians and in our nation, and I am determined to do what I can to change it.

## Why Eric Trump?

Why was Eric Trump at the Reawaken America Rally? Only because he's part of the Trump family. His "bio" in the program described him as "the son of America's real President, President Donald J. Trump." He was there to praise his father to this receptive, boisterous crowd. "We were the first honest family in the White House," he claimed. He listed multiple achievements for Donald Trump as president, which brought shouts of support and loud applause. The audience believed all of it to be true.

Eric Trump started right in on the FBI "raid" of Mar-a-Lago because it had just happened and the people there were very aware of it. "Third world gestapo stuff," he called it, continuing to feed the narrative of unfair treatment of Donald Trump. He used the language of this movement as he touched briefly on multiple topics, all of which are designed to heighten the passions of the crowd ... "deep state" – "drain the swamp" – "rigged election" – "corrupt government officials." Just the names of Hunter Biden, Barack Obama, and Hillary Clinton were enough to draw boos and jeers. He said that President Joe Biden "is the worst in the history of this country." And brought it to this climax: "Wouldn't it be nice to have my father back who would actually fight for this country?"

People say all the time that "you can't make this stuff up," but they do, of course. Eric Trump did, touting one false claim after another. "This MAGA movement is the greatest movement in the history of the nation, and we're winning. That's why they're raiding people's homes and weaponizing everything in our country. We're going to take back America."



Before Eric Trump left the stage, organizer Clay Clark stepped up to say “I believe God has chosen the Trump family for this moment.” Standing ovation. And someone prayed for the family in very specific religious language and prayed against “the acts of the wicked that the enemy has done.” Although Eric did not use the religious language of the movement, nearly everyone else on stage did. And they could not let him off the stage without two other people doing exactly that. What Sarah Posner describes in her book, “Unholy,” (<https://www.publishersweekly.com/9781984820426>) accurately describes that moment and the whole event:

*In that alternate, conspiratorial reality, any scrutiny of Trump or his inner circle is cast as a plot, deeply rooted in “fake news,” George Soros–funded protesters, Clinton family machinations, or even Satan, to bring down God’s chosen leader of the United States of America. (Posner, Sarah. Unholy (p. 247). Random House Publishing Group. Kindle Edition)*

I recommend this book to all who want to understand more about this movement. It’s not an isolated rally or tour event that’s our concern. We could let that go and move on. Christian Nationalism, combined with a larger political and cultural movement going back 50 years, and building internationally – this is not going away. It is a threat to democracy itself. Read carefully one more excerpt from Posner’s book:



*And so an untold number of Trump’s evangelical supporters believe that God has anointed him, God will protect him, and God will smite his enemies. However his presidency ends, the fundamental damage it has inflicted on our democracy will not be healed overnight. His “base” is not an accident of his unconventional foray into politics, or a quirk of this particular political moment. The vast majority of white evangelicals are all in with Trump because he has given them political power and allowed them to carry out a Christian supremacist agenda, inextricably intertwined with his administration’s white nationalist agenda. Conspiracy theories and lies about the core of our democracy—separation of powers, a free and independent press, and the dedication of public servants—run rampant through their print and social media, podcasts, and television programs. The depth and durability of their fervor have disproven the mantra “the religious right is dead” again and again—and their ability to sustain a presidency in the face of unprecedented scandal is the most compelling evidence against that mantra yet. Trump’s white evangelical supporters make up an army of partisans decades in the making, and they will not quietly retreat in the face of defeat. (p. 266, Random House Publishing Group. Kindle Edition)*

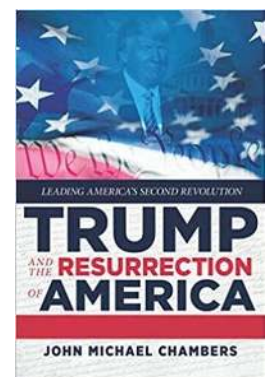
# What about violence?

Organizers and the host pastor of the Reawaken America Tour in Batavia vehemently denied that violence follows their events. In fact, they announced legal action against NYS Attorney General Letitia James for sending a letter suggesting there might be racial violence. [You can read the letter here](#). And here is a [public radio news story](#) about what happened at the event.

To be fair, there was no outward violence, or hint of physical violence, at the event (other than bodyguards and armed security). I did not hear any speaker urge people to riot or join a militia or use guns against anyone. When a constant theme of speakers, however, is that “they are coming for us, and we have to be ready” and “our enemies must be destroyed before they destroy us,” some people will inevitably hear that as a call to take violent action against their enemies.

One speaker on Saturday morning did exactly that. John Michael Chambers is creator and founder of American Media Periscope (<https://americanmediaperiscope.com/>), which “has interviewed such patriot guests as General Michael Flynn, Sydney Powell, and Kash Patel.” His website says it is “America’s Patriot Only Network,” and everywhere he speaks he claims to present “The News Behind the News.” His website, though, is more an online store for books and merchandise supporting Trump and various conspiracies.

His 15-minute speech began with prayer for “our president” and his family (meaning Donald Trump). “The storm is upon us,” he said – “Trump’s signal to patriots.” He uses the language of war and enemies – “We win, they lose ... We are at war, on a wartime basis ... Evil enemies of freedom.” As he repeated the “stolen election” lies, he even claimed that “all military branches documented it.” This means, he said, that “war has been declared.” If the “military steps in with midterm elections, we win.” And “the media is aiding and abetting the enemy.” This was a call to arms, to rise up for freedom.



This is how wars begin – with demonizing the other and stirring up hate toward “the enemy.” Words like “evil” and “demonic” were used throughout the event by multiple speakers, referring to President Biden, to LGBTQ persons, to “the government,” to the unspecified “them.” Organizers resist the charge that their events stir up fear and hate wherever they go. When speakers, however, constantly use the language of hate – evil, demonic – and call for “enemies” to be destroyed, that is the result. This event builds on a narrative of evil and enemies – a narrative that people in the audience hear and watch all the time on sites like Rumble (<https://rumble.com/>), One America News Network (<https://www.oann.com/>), Alex Jones’ Infowar (<https://www.infowars.com/>), and The Glenn Beck Program (<https://www.glennbeck.com/st/podcast>).

When speakers constantly use the language of enemies and war and evil, violence will inevitably follow – somewhere, sometime. Our nation must prepare for it.



# Conspiracies and lies

These words from Sir Walter Scott are a good fit for The Reawaken America Tour: Oh what a tangled web we weave / When first we practice to deceive.

Conspiracy theories and lies dominated the 18 hours of this event, and thousands of people cheered and clapped and shouted “Amen!” They were there for a show, and the speakers met their expectations. The underlying deceptions of this event began with its naming. It was publicly advertised as a Fresh Roasted Coffee Fest and Expo in Rochester/Batavia, yet this was always their advertising for the people who actually came:

In Batavia, the theme of the event was “The Great Reawakening vs. The Great Reset.” When the tour began in 2021, it was billed as a “Health and Freedom” event. Organizers often described it as featuring a host of speakers on freedom, faith, health, and family values. However, the event now focused on the idea of a conspiracy of “the global elite” trying to control the world through many nefarious means, including COVID mandates and vaccines. “The Great Reset” is a term coined in 2010 in a book on global economics and social/political changes and used again in 2020 in a book by Klaus Schwab, founder of the World Economic Forum (WEF), who wrote about how COVID-19 was changing everything and provided an opportunity to “reset” how we work together to create a more resilient, sustainable world. How did that become an evil, demonic threat to the health and freedom of Americans?

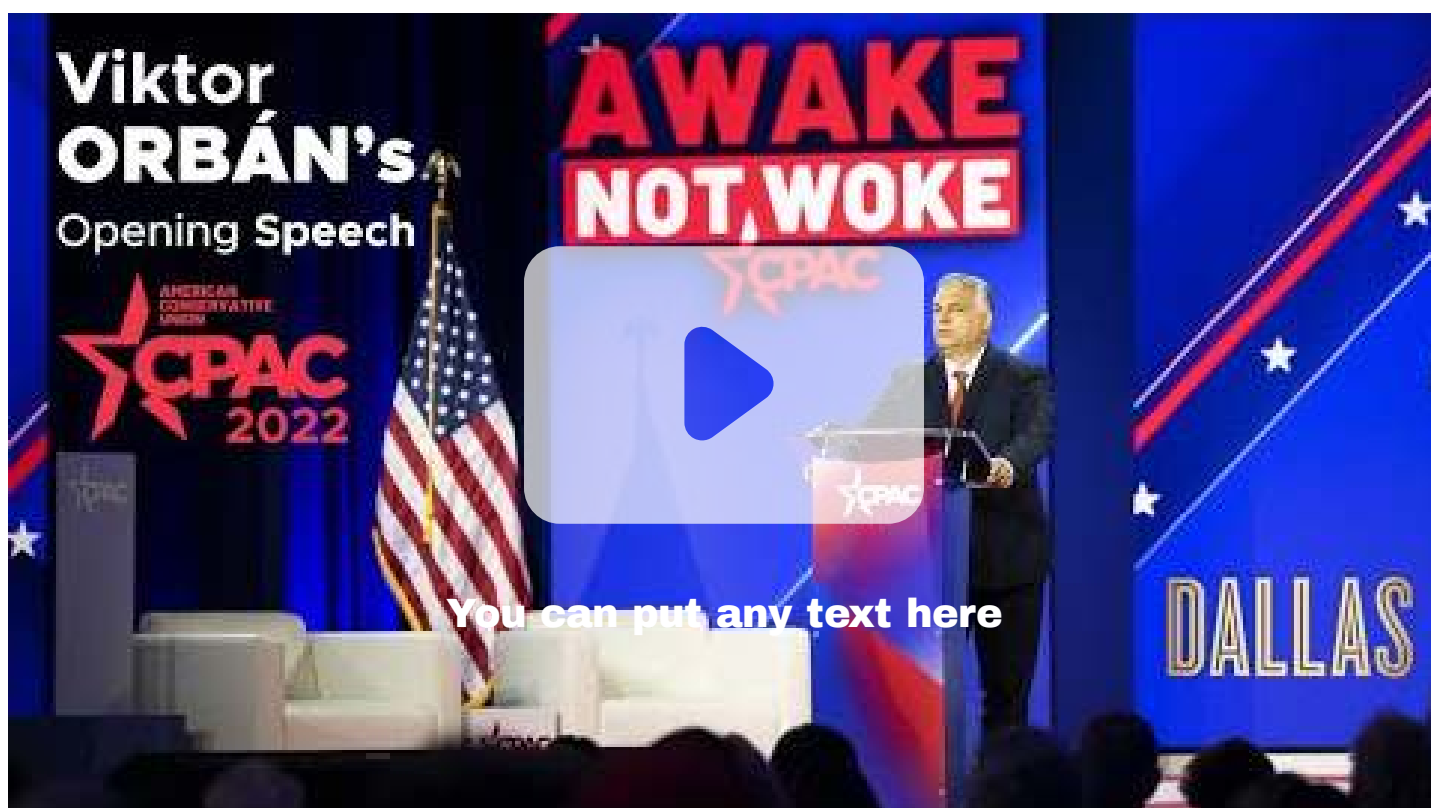


Eric Trump, Michael Flynn, Kash Patel, Mike Lindell, and Clay Clark headlined this event and, along with many other speakers, used the same false narratives of the “stolen” 2020 election, ongoing election fraud (by Democrats), and now the “politicizing” and “weaponizing” of the DOJ and the FBI (e.g. the FBI “raid” on Mar-a-Lago) to stir up the receptive crowd. Shouts of affirmation, applause, even standing ovations was the consistent response from the audience.

The presentations were filled with inter-related conspiracies that share one common theme: “trust no one from the outside.” You cannot trust the mainstream media, the government, politicians, researchers, scientists, etc. You can only believe what we tell you. This was one of several cult-like characteristics of this event – indeed, of a worldwide movement of which this tour is but one part. And the movement is characterized by deceptive use of language, demonizing of “the Left,” and declaring leaders of the movement as the only hope.

Victor Orban, prime minister of Hungary, has been elevated with Donald Trump to this heroic role. Orban spoke at a July 2022 CPAC (Conservative Political Action Conference) event in Dallas: “I’m here to tell you that we should unite forces ... in a battle for Western Civilization.” <https://www.politico.com/news/2022/08/04/viktor-orban-cpac-00049935>

This PBS News Hour segment both highlights his CPAC appearance and ways this movement in the U.S. has worked with Orban’s authoritarian dominance in Hungary. ([See here for his full CPAC speech.](#))



Sarah Posner writes that “In a 2014 speech, Orbán claimed liberal values ‘embody corruption, sex and violence’; predicted that the successful nations of the future would reject these values and draw inspiration instead from Russia, China, or Turkey; and claimed that nongovernmental organizations working on building up civil society were actually ‘paid political activists who are attempting to enforce foreign interests here in Hungary.’ (*“Unholy,”* p. 226, *Random House Publishing Group, Kindle Edition*)

She connects Orban directly to Donald Trump: “At this critical moment in American history, when the democratic experiment hangs in the balance, this totalizing political and religious culture, rooted in a white Christian nationalist political ideology, was tailor-made to go to the mat for Trump. For Trump’s white evangelical supporters, defending him became indistinguishable from defending white Christian America.” (pp. 259-260) That describes my experience at this event.

What can we do? – We can challenge every deception, every lie, every conspiracy. Wherever we see or hear someone state what we “know” to be false, challenge it. Confront them. Don’t ignore it. Be respectful of the person. Avoid aggressive communication, but be assertive in what we say and how we say it. And stand our ground, not being argumentative, but being confident. Research diverse sources, trust our discernment, and speak up. We can do this.

### How strange

How strange could it get? I did sometimes wonder that during the Reawaken America Tour in Batavia. I have been in Christian circles for decades where people used the language of “spiritual warfare” and prayed against evil and the demonic. There was a lot of that, but it did not seem strange – not even mixed in with the language of political enemies. I knew that was coming.

Bo Polny (<https://bopolny.com/>), however, surprised me. Unknown to me – he has millions of views on YouTube and more than one website promoting his work as an “analyst” in the Gold, Silver, and Cryptocurrency markets. What does that have to do with a spiritual and political “Reawakening” in America? Then it got stranger.

He packed a lot into 15 minutes, beginning with a video which included scriptures about vengeance and destruction of enemies and about the wealth of sinners being stored up for the righteous. This was the language of the video, not just my interpretation. There were dark images about war and judgment – and about Babylon – apocalyptic, end-times imagery and language wrapped up in a presentation by someone who works in the Gold, Silver, and Cryptocurrency markets. He portrayed Babylon (understood by many as the world economic power of “the last days”) as the Vatican and Washington controlling us “through a system of corruption and mind control.” Then he spoke like a prophet telling the future saying that “Babylon is coming down this year – the day of vengeance of our God.” That brought applause from the crowd.



From there it got stranger and stranger. He used bits and pieces of his “research,” abused isolated phrases and ideas from the book of Haggai, for instance, and drew on the language of “end times prophecy” to announce “September 24 as the day when everything, including the economy, will be overturned.” I guess we’ll see what happens in two weeks.

We could dismiss someone like Bo Polny as simply ignorant, maybe deluded, but he represents a part of Christian Nationalism which cannot be ignored. Books like *Democracy in Chains: The*



*Deep History of the Radical Right’s Stealth Plan for America,”* by historian Nancy MacLean, tell the 60-year story of how a radical view of Capitalism captivated radical conservative Christianity. What appear to be disparate political and religious streams merged into one movement with the force of a river at flood stage. That’s what we are seeing now. Why would a gold and cryptocurrency marketer use the language and imagery of end-times prophecy to announce the fall of Babylon in the fall of 2022? Seems so strange.

Christian Nationalism merges a specific “biblical worldview” with right-wing politics and claims that America is a Christian nation, with laws to be based in that worldview, and that only people who agree with this are “true Americans” and “patriots.” It also claims that the scriptures of both Jews and Christians – what they call the Old and New Testaments – teach “capitalism” as a God-given economic system. Anything else – like “socialism” and “wealth redistribution” – are therefore evil. That’s why the movement puts people like Bo Polny on stage.

Their “biblical worldview” believes that God gives wealth to the righteous, therefore the wealthy are “righteous.” This is an ancient idea, and there are scriptures which could be used to support that. Not in the gospels, though. Not in the prophets. Not in the words of Jesus. Still, this unassailable “truth” (for them) is at the heart of their movement. That’s why people like preachers of the “prosperity gospel” and billionaire Donald J. Trump are heralded as prophets and leaders. And it’s why people like Charles Koch have funded this movement since the 1960s. And it’s why people like Bo Polny are speakers on the Reawaken America Tour.

### Common ground?

With decades of work in conflict transformation, I must ask the question: “Do we have any common ground?” We oppose a movement that threatens democracy around the world. It must be challenged and its power destroyed. Yet a movement is made up of individual people. My question is whether I share any common ground with them and if that might offer hope for transformation.

This authoritarian, radical right movement is not a single entity. It includes radical economic and political conservatives, Christian Nationalists, MAGA followers, militia groups, and people who lust for power and money – all of which must be opposed. Are there not, though, individuals caught up in diverse parts of this movement who share desires and dreams in common with mine?



As I wandered among the vendor stands at Reawaken America and listened to the speakers and watched the people, I knew that at some level we all have similar desires:

- Health
- Happiness
- Family
- A decent income
- Freedom from fear
- Trust in our leaders and confidence in our government
- Hope for our nation and the world our grandchildren will live in

Dr. Mark Sherwood, with his wife, Dr. Michele Neil-Sherwood, founded the Functional Medicine Institute in Tulsa, Oklahoma (<https://fmidr.com/>). Their stories, briefly told on their website, sound inspiring, and their commitment to the health of the whole person seems genuine. While I might question some aspects of their practice of medicine, I do not doubt that we share some common ground in what we want for people in this life.

### Dr. Mark Sherwood

As Mark Sherwood spoke on Saturday morning, he talked about our desire to live and not die. Who doesn't share that desire? He talked about abundant living and a desire for a better life and a nation we want for our grandchildren. Even in that context, though, he also talked about "battling tyranny" – meaning the government and current administration. I disagree with that. He used the "Make America Great Again" language and claimed that our problems are because "we fail to put God first." While I may agree with that last statement, I am sure we mean very different things by what it means.



Among all the speakers those two days, Mark Sherwood's presentation brought me to ask the question of common ground, not with everyone but with enough people in this broad movement that we might change the trajectory. I doubt that he and I would agree on many questions of politics or religion, but don't we share common desires for a better life – for health, family, a decent living, freedom, trust in our leaders?

It's an opening, a place to begin – like the entrance to a dark cave where we don't know what's inside – but can we do it together? I may never sit down and talk with the

Sherwoods, but I know a great many people – family and friends – with whom I share common dreams and desires, but disagree on how to move toward them. This is one way forward in our nation. Sit down with people, listen to each other's stories – our desires and dreams – and create a new story for transformation in our future.



## Inside the Reawaken America Tour

At the Reawaken American Tour in Batavia, “rude and crude” characterized the language and demeanor of some speakers. The program described one Saturday morning speaker, Doug Billings, as “the man who Glenn Beck and General Flynn have referred to as the next Rush Limbaugh.” For 37 years, Limbaugh set the tone for this radical right movement on his radio show, and he seemed to revel in being rude and crude day after day.



Rush Limbaugh

Doug Billings, host of [The Right Side Show](#), was not as rude and crude as the two speakers who followed him, but he was dismissive of people who created “the nightmare” we live in. America right now, he claimed, has a “communist, socialist government.... and “we the people of God must take it back. – If we take it back, we win,” he shouted. “We are the party of life, liberty, and happiness.” This dismissive rhetoric dominated the whole event.

The next speaker brought the crowd to its feet with applause at his appearance on stage. I had not heard of most of the speakers at this event, but the audience had. On [Charlie Ward’s website](#), his story gives no real clues to who he really is and what he does, but if you read his May 5, 2022 newsletter, you know why he was at this event:



“Good day Patriot: This a very exciting week, the Quantum team are working extremely hard behind the scenes, nothing is in plain sight. This is a military operation, there will be NO telegraphing of information but also no reason to worry. Everything is under control, it’s important that the masses wake up to the truth. This is not an easy journey, people have been conditioned not to question what they see, hear and read. Hard for those who seek the truth to convince them they have been conned by people they believed they should trust.”

During Charlie Ward’s presentation, he was intense, loud, crude at times, building the crowd into a frenzy. Good thing it was only 15 minutes! To get a better sense of the experience, watch his TV segments – or just read the headlines and see the images from links on his website to his TV shows:



CLICK TO VISIT

**THE FIRST ARREST WILL SHOCK THE WORLD WITH CHAS CARTER & CHARLIE WARD**

Join Charlie on his Insiders Club every Wednesday



CLICK TO VISIT

**TAKE BACK YOUR HEALTH BEFORE THE MEDICAL SYSTEM COLLAPSES WITH DIANE KAZER & CHARLIE WARD**



CLICK TO VISIT

**ARE VACCINES CAUSING AUTISM? A RISK TO LIFE WITH DR SHERRIL TENPENNY & CHARLIE WARD**

TO JOIN CHARLIE WARD ON TRUTH SOCIAL NETWORK CLICK HERE

The third speaker reveled in being rude and crude. Scot McKay calls himself the **Patriot Street Fighter** and says he is “giving his voice to ‘we the people’, dedicating his time, effort, heart & soul to maintaining, through his platforms, the undeniable RIGHTS provided by our Lord & Savior- In other words, the beautiful freedoms all Americans enjoy! – Christian Nationalism in all its glory.



McKay came on stage with bodyguards, with video and sound like a wrestling event. In coarse language, he launched into the rhetoric of the “battle of our lifetime [against] the Satanic force out there circling this planet.” He talked about how his family opposed what he is doing and then said to the crowd: “Look around, this is your family.” He talked fast, moving from one idea to another:

- School boards voting in policies allowing kids to identify as furries
- Calling George H.W. Bush as a rapist and drug trafficker
- Urging people to bring Christ consciousness into this world
- Talking about the World Economic Forum, Klaus Schwab, and “government at every level doing what they want” – and how in Europe “they’re stand up by the millions” against it all
- Talk of the military and Trump taking over, using survivalist language to urge people to get ready and saying “this is Christ’s call”

Christian Nationalism and the radical right movement it is part of seems caught in a web of conspiracies and lies, unsubstantiated accusations, and demonizing of “the other.” The mixing of Capitalism, Christianity, and Nationalism combines with aggressive militancy and toxic masculinity to create not only a rude and crude, but a dangerous, culture.

### Cloaked in religion

Michael Flynn drives the movement behind the [Reawaken America Tour](#), organized by Clay Clark. General Flynn’s military career, including counterterrorism and special operations in the Middle East, positioned him to start the Flynn Intel Group in 2014 that provided intelligence services globally. In 2016 he became national security advisor to Donald Trump’s presidential campaign and in January 2017 was appointed National Security Adviser. Three weeks later, he resigned and eventually pled guilty to lying to the FBI about his communications with the Russian Ambassador to the U.S. – and was pardoned by President Trump a few weeks before he left office.



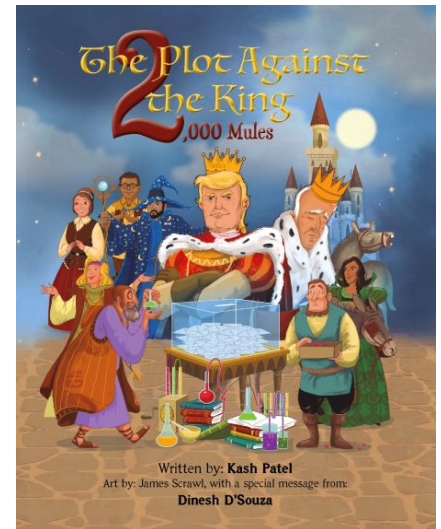
To some in this movement, Michael Flynn is a hero – “America’s General” – and he plays that role well. On Saturday of this event, inside the church building next to the vendor displays, Flynn held what he called a press conference. Positioned in front of a huge backdrop with his image and the U.S. flag, and joined by a few other speakers, he was “interviewed” by [The Epoch Times](#). Flynn said “our purpose is education for people with hope, helping them to be involved in our country. America has been reawakened, and we will continue with our mission.” Flynn was joined in this press conference by three men: Patrick Byrne, Kash Patel, and Aaron Lewis.

Together their “mission” became clear – to oppose the “tyranny” of an “out of control” government. “Even the Republican party is being infiltrated by the enemy,” Patrick Byrne said. “Our elections are junk. Both parties are corrupt.” On his website (<https://americaproject.com>), he talks about the Deep State and the stolen 2020 election. He claimed that “DHS just released a report saying election machines are flawed, casting real doubt on the 2020 election.” In fact, DHS has said the opposite.



Kash Patel’s first comments included the debunked claim that the government will hire 87,000 armed IRS agents. He talked about how “the federal government cannot decide how our elections are run because of states’ sovereign rights,” and added that “people don’t trust our election system.” That’s true for some people, of course – people in this movement where everything they hear undermines any remaining confidence in our government. His attack includes writing children’s books like this one – *The Plot Against the King*, which Trump just this week said should be read by every schoolchild.

Aaron Lewis, a Black pastor from Connecticut, more subtly challenged the government. “Martin Luther King is my hero because the FBI deemed him an enemy – for the same reason we are being opposed.” In his 15-minute spot later in the day, he continued his theme. “The overwhelming majority of leadership needs to be replaced,” he shouted, and “we refuse to co-sign a narrative that does not work for our people, for humanity.” He meant the narrative of Critical Race Theory which he says claims this movement is white nationalist,, white supremacist, racist. “They use lies against us,” he shouted.



## Inside the Reawaken America Tour

All of this was captured on video by staff from The Epoch Times. They say that their “mission is to bring you a truthful view of the world free from the influence of any government, corporation, or political party. We aim to tell you what we see, not how to think; we strive to deliver you a factual picture of reality that lets you form your own opinions.” A quick review of their website



or their ubiquitous newspaper will tell you otherwise. They operate in 35 countries with a media group including TV stations and YouTube channels, through which they have spread QAnon and other conspiracies, including anti-vaccine misinformation and claims of fraud in the 2020

election. That, of course, is why they were there, prominently involved.

Michael Flynn posted a video on the Fourth of July in 2020 where he [recited an oath to the QAnon conspiracy theorists](#). After the election, Flynn “called on [Donald Trump to suspend the constitution and declare martial law for the military to run a new election](#) ... and ran a full-page ad in *The Washington Times* that claimed the extraordinary executive actions were necessary to avoid the alternative of an imminent ‘shooting civil war’.” All of this qualifies him for hero status in this movement.

This side-event avoided religion, but the whole event was cloaked in it. Aaron Lewis is a pastor. Michael Flynn publicly claims to be a Christian. Patrick Byrne says he wants to protect “religious freedom,” a code word in this movement for traditional conservative Christianity. Kash Patel seems to be someone who uses this Christian Nationalist movement for his own purposes. These are sad times for those of us who are Christians who choose to follow the teachings of Jesus. They are dangerous times for this nation when 61% of Republicans ([according to a story released today](#)) favor “declaring the U.S. a Christian nation.” Join me in standing up to challenge this movement.

# Saving America from evil

Two Saturday speakers at the Reawaken America Tour in Batavia NY acted out a specific form of Christianity at the heart of Christian Nationalism. Amanda Grace, founder of [Ark of Grace Ministries](#), claims to receive prophecies directly from God. So did Hebrew prophets. So have many people through time. As we hear words of “prophecy” from people who claim a spiritual gift and “a window into the supernatural,” even for those of us who accept that such mysteries can be reality-based, the question is whether it “rings true” or “comes true.”



She spent much of her 15 minutes on stage “speaking words of prophecy,” sometimes with speaking in tongues and mostly in a loud voice. One claim was that there is “a spirit sitting on the Empire State Building” and that New York State “wants to destroy Trump and anyone who loves this nation.” As if they are one and the same. Since such a supernatural being would necessarily be invisible, no one can prove it’s not there anymore than she can prove it is. Many people in the audience under the tent evidently believed her claim and applauded what she had to say about New York wanting to destroy both Trump and “those who love this nation” – meaning, of course, people like them.



Another of her prophecies was that there would be “a complete overthrow of the system in the next three months.” Putting a deadline on a word of prophecy does make it easier for other people to know if “came true,” but how does anyone know what “overthrow of the system” actually means. It’s open-ended enough to deny the meaning someone else might give the phrase to say it didn’t happen. This kind of “word,” though, spoken to a receptive audience of thousands of like-minded people stirs up their antagonism toward “the system” (however they define it) and their hope that it will be destroyed.

Christian Nationalism combines two historical traditions in the Christian religion. One tradition believes that if “true” Christians are in charge of the nation, it will become the nation God wants it to be. The other tradition builds on the image of the ark – Noah’s ark – as a place of refuge from the evil world to be destroyed by God – or by the “people of God.” These two speakers build their work especially on the foundation of this second tradition. The world is full of evil when Christians – in their particular, limited view of that faith – are not in power. Until they are, God cannot be in control, and evil and darkness will continue to destroy the nation. While that continues to happen, “we” must stay in “the ark” together for safety.



Amanda Grace proclaimed that “God is not done with this evil nation.” She also called it God’s covenant nation – a core tenet of Christian Nationalism. The next speaker carried that theme further. Bernadette Smith, co-pastor with her husband of [The Eternal Word Church](#) in Grandville, MI, said that “we are God’s anointed people ... to eradicate the darkness in this nation.” She urged the audience to “be liberated with the truth.” One danger of this movement is that their “truth” is very specific and limited to what they are convinced is a “biblical worldview” – which a great many Christians deny as truly “biblical,” rooted in Scripture and the Gospel. The danger comes out of the merging of that “worldview” with an authoritarian, political power, willing to use violence if necessary.



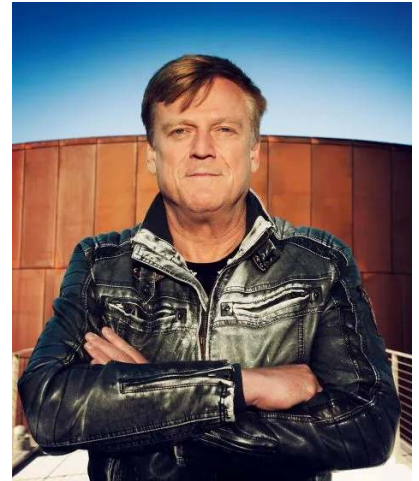
Several speakers, including this African-American speaker, attacked CRT (Critical Race Theory) as an attempt to divide “us.” Pastor Smith embraces the idea that “we are all one people” and that anti-racist education that talks about systemic racism is wrong because it divides us – as if our nation has not been divided. A third of the speakers at the event were Black and understandably denied charges of white supremacy against this movement. Systemic racism, however, is undeniably a historical reality of our American history. It is also a reality of the role of the Christian Church in this country because it supported slavery in the South and separation of races in the North. It still does in many places. To dismiss the evil of racism as an attempt to divide us is a willful denial of these realities.

This reversal of historical realities characterizes the movement. People in the audience and all of the speakers were absolutely convinced that they are being persecuted. For two days, we were told that a nebulous “they” want to destroy them, to rob them of their freedom. Liberals, the “woke,” Democrats, progressive Christians, social justice advocates – everyone considered to be part of these groups – are part of the “they.” People at this event feel deeply that “they” are destroying our nation, and they must stop it and change it and make Christian America great again.



### Intrigue of the movement

Patrick Byrne intrigued me as one of the final presenters at the Reawaken American Tour in Batavia, NY. He stirred my curiosity. Byrne holds graduate degrees in Philosophy from Cambridge and Stanford. He founded a company ([Overstock.com](https://www.overstock.com)) with \$2.5 billion in 2020 revenue. His father and Warren Buffett (a rare multi-billionaire who lives humbly in Lincoln, Nebraska) are friends and in business together. His manner of presentation drew me in to listen, but what he said appalled me.



His 15-minute talk focused on Frederick Douglass, a former slave and abolitionist, and referred to Douglass’ famous [Fourth of July speech](#) on July 4, 1852, in Rochester, NY. Why would he do that, I wondered. How does Frederick Douglass fit the context of this event? He didn’t quote the speech, directly, of course – or anything Douglass said. Rather, he abused his legacy of fighting for true freedom and misconstrued the meaning of his words to make Douglass sound like he belonged to the MAGA movement. Douglass, he said, “urged us to protect our rights.” Byrne claimed that “we are about consent – the consent of the governed” and called him a “defender of constitutional rights.” He even styled himself to be “a Frederick Douglass Republican.”



Frederick Douglass would be appalled at this abuse of his name and legacy. Some of his words might sound to this crowd as if they meant the same thing:

“To side with the right, against the wrong,  
with the weak against the strong,  
and with the oppressed against the oppressor! ...  
With brave men there is always a remedy for oppression.”

That’s only because the MAGA movement twists reality and the meaning of language to claim they are on the side of “the right, the weak, and the oppressed”! They speak of tyranny of government as if it is 1776, and they are patriots fighting against the British, when they actually are fighting on the side of the Confederacy in 1860. And that’s what Douglass would say to them.

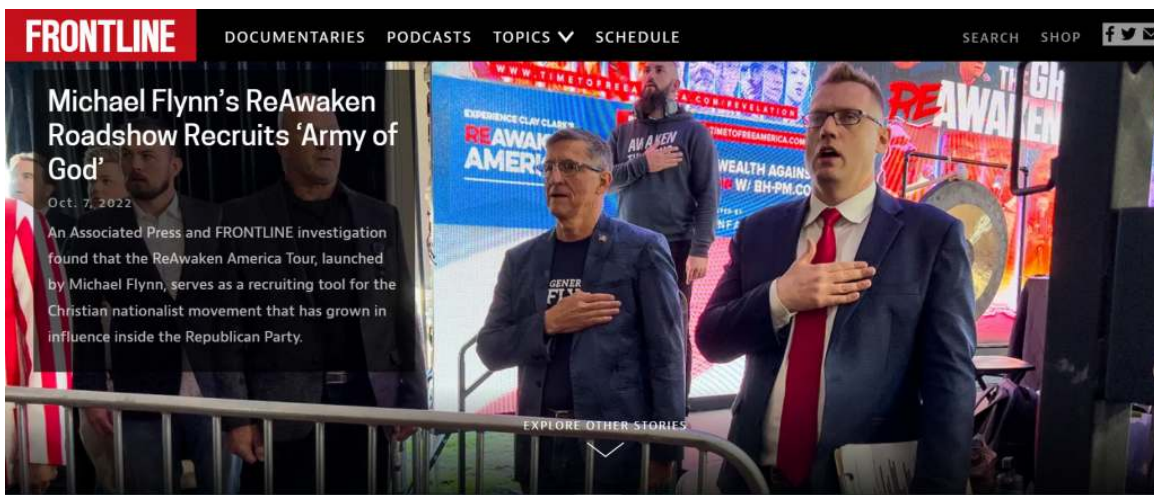
Byrne claimed that systemic racism is nonsense, that U.S. “history is the exact opposite of what people demonstrating (and CRT) are claiming,” and that “there is not a shred of white identity in this movement” – and the crowd applauded. I can imagine the crowd’s angry, vitriolic, even violent reaction Douglass would invoke with his actual words:

*“American justice is bound by the law to hear (only) the side of the oppressor. Let this damning fact be perpetually told. Let it be thundered around the world, that, in tyrant-killing, king-hating, people-loving, democratic, Christian America, the seats of justice are filled with judges, who hold their offices under an open and palpable bribe, and are bound, in deciding in the case of a man’s liberty, to hear only his accusers!” ... For my part, I would say, Welcome infidelity! welcome atheism! welcome anything—in preference to the gospel, as preached by those divines. They convert the very name of religion into an engine of tyranny, and barbarous cruelty. .... All this we affirm to be true of the popular church, and the popular worship of our land and nation—a religion, a church, and a worship which, on the authority of inspired wisdom, we pronounce to be an abomination in the sight of God.”*

Intrigue has a second meaning, other than curiosity and fascination. It also can refer to people making secret plans which are illicit and detrimental to others. The second meaning describes the leaders of these events and of [The America Project](#), and would-be leaders of this nation – Michael Flynn and Patrick Byrne, for instance. Claiming to be patriots working to “save America,” they boldly and publicly undermine all trust in our elections and elected officials. They praise the January 6 insurrection. They threaten violence in the streets if the FBI and DOJ – and Congress and the Courts – continue to investigate Trump for criminal behavior. And all the while, they cloak themselves in the language and symbolism of the Christian religion. But what I experienced at this event is in the words of Frederick Douglass: “a religion, a church, and a worship which, on the authority of inspired wisdom, we pronounce to be an abomination in the sight of God.”

# Michael Flynn's "Holy War"

Associated Press reporters and a [PBS Frontline](#) crew were at the Reawaken America event in Batavia, NY. They reported [in a PBS Newshour story](#) that “The AP and Frontline bought tickets for the Batavia event after Clark invited ‘Frontline’ to attend one of the tour’s shows. Reporters spent two days listening to speakers and observing the events from inside. On the second day, security escorted a ‘Frontline’ reporter from the grounds because, he was told, Flynn believed he intended to cover the event unfavorably. When an AP reporter began interviewing people attending the event at the end of the second day, she was also reported to security.”



[PBS Newshour](#)

Since I bought a ticket and stayed quiet, I was able to experience the full two days so that I could write these posts. The article’s summary statement is absolutely true: “ReAwaken acts as a petri dish for Christian nationalism and pushes the idea that there’s a battle underway between good and evil forces. Those who are considered evil include government officials and Democrats.”



## Inside the Reawaken America Tour

Their story is part of an ongoing investigation from The Associated Press and the PBS series “Frontline” that includes *the upcoming documentary “Michael Flynn’s Holy War,” premiering Oct. 18 on PBS and online*. I encourage you to watch it. I will. The AP article and the PBS documentary both describe how Michael Flynn is raising “an army of God”:

“The tour serves as a traveling roadshow and recruiting tool for an ascendant Christian nationalist movement that’s wrapped itself in God, patriotism and politics and has grown in power and influence inside the Republican Party. In the version of America laid out at the ReAwaken tour, Christianity should be at the center of American life and institutions. Instead, it’s under attack, and attendees need to fight to restore the nation’s Christian roots. It’s a message repeated over and over at ReAwaken — one that upends the constitutional ideal of a pluralist democracy. But it’s a message that is taking hold. A poll by the University of Maryland conducted in May found that 61% of Republicans support declaring the U.S. to be a Christian nation.”

The article quotes Katherine Stewart, author of *The Power Worshipers: Inside the Dangerous Rise of Religious Nationalism*, who attended a March 2022 ReAwaken America show at a church in San Marcos, California. She said it was like entering a “parallel messaging universe.”



“The leaders of the ReAwaken America tour are really driving people into a fact-free echo chamber,” Stewart said. “They have been persuaded and manipulated into believing they’re doing what’s right for their country. But all of their good intentions are being harnessed in service of an agenda that’s dividing our country as never before and, frankly, leading to the potential destruction of our democracy. ”

This article and documentary are focused on the role of Michael Flynn in this movement. Here's what I wrote [in an earlier post](#) of mine on Flynn:

Michael Flynn posted a video on the Fourth of July in 2020 where he recited an oath to the QAnon conspiracy theorists . After the election, Flynn “called on Donald Trump to suspend the constitution and declare martial law for the military to run a new election ... and ran a full-page ad in The Washington Times that claimed the extraordinary executive actions were necessary to avoid the alternative of an imminent ‘shooting civil war’.” All of this qualifies him for hero status in this movement.

What can we do to oppose this movement and minimize its power in our nation? First – learn as much as possible about Christian Nationalism and the larger anti-democracy movement. Read my posts. Watch the PBS documentary. Read the many articles available online. Attend the October 30 webinar. That's a start. Second – talk with people in churches and community organizations. Tell them what you're learning, and encourage them to find out more. And third – Take action. Vote for people at every level of our government who are not part of this movement, who are publicly opposed to it – people who will deny it the power it seeks to destroy democracy as we've known it. Together, we can do it.

### Why the MyPillow guy?

At the Reawaken America event in Batavia, [Mike Lindell](#) – “The MyPillow Guy” – was a star. When he came to the stage as a final presenter, the audience gave him a raucous standing ovation. Why? Most of us never heard of him until he became a public supporter and donor of Donald Trump. Now he’s almost a “hero” to people who follow this tour and the Christian Nationalism movement.



[Mike Lindell with Donald Trump at the White House](#)

[MyPillow infomercials on late night TV since 2011](#) and national media attention helped him build a 1,500-employee manufacturing business of pillows, linens, slippers, and more in Chaska, Minnesota. Never one for politics until 2016, his meeting in Trump Tower that August made him a staunch supporter of Donald Trump, which is why most of us now know who he is.

[As Lindell tells his own story](#), he was a gambler and cocaine addict for 30 years until 2009 (just two years before his company “took off”). As he tells it – mostly the only way we “know” much about his life – he prayed to be free of the addiction and the desire left. Maybe so, but he remains a man willing to lie and to use people to be in the spotlight. He did not publicly profess to be a Christian until 2017, yet now he is acclaimed as one used by God to help bring what he called “the greatest revival for Jesus Christ in history.”

[Liberty University in 2019](#), while Jerry Falwell, Jr. was still president, invited him to speak and awarded him an honorary doctorate (a man who dropped out of college after a few months). Falwell said about him: “I can’t think of anybody else who epitomizes the principles that built this school more than Mike.” And in his speech, Lindell said, that “he sees his success in the business world simply as an afforded opportunity to share his Christian faith. ... The pillow is just a platform for a much bigger thing. .... My calling is to speak out the word of Jesus.”



Mike Lindell at Liberty University

As he spoke in Batavia, I jotted down this question:

## How can Christians lie so much?

In his presentation, Lindell spoke in detail about “the stolen election.” He blames cyber technology which he calls “an evil threat in our nation.” He says it is the work of the “deep state” and a “unigovernment.” He referenced the Georgia primary and how “one precinct reported no votes for one candidate until they looked in the machine” to find the votes (whatever that means) and told similar stories. He claimed that “54 countries have lost everything due to machines.” This wild, nonsensical claim got applause when he followed it with “machines have to go.” He also claimed that “a New York Citizens Audit found huge discrepancies between Secretary of State and County Boards of Elections ... that names and identities have been changed ... that people serving are not who the people elected.” Stuff and nonsense, as the saying goes.

When nonsensical claims, conspiracy theories, and fact-checked lies are believed and applauded at these events by people who claim to be Christians and Patriots, our nation is threatened and the reputation of all Christians is dishonored. Here’s more of what Mike Lindell said [at a 2019 CPAC conference](#):



“Donald Trump invited me to meet him at Trump Tower in New York City. I walked into his office with high hopes on August 15, 2016. I walked out of that office after meeting with him, and I knew God had chosen him for such a time as this. ... God answered our prayers, our millions of prayers, and gave us grace and a miracle happened on November 8, 2016. ... We were given a second chance and time granted to get our country back on track with our conservative values and getting people saved in Jesus’ name.”

[Even some on the far right are backing away.](#) Lindell bought three hours of airtime on OANN – One America News Network – “to broadcast *Absolute Proof*, a documentary that makes false claims about the election.. ... OANN broadcast a lengthy disclaimer before the program saying the claims were Lindell’s alone, but that the 2020 election results ‘remain disputed and questioned by millions of Americans.’” That’s not much, but it’s a start.

In January 2022, “[Lindell claimed](#) that he possessed ‘enough evidence to put everybody in prison for life, 300-some million people’ for their part in the alleged 2020 election fraud, which, at the time, was about 91 percent of the U.S. population.” Stuff and nonsense.

When I began to follow the growth of this movement 15 years ago, most people thought “the religious right” was losing its power. Now a far more extreme version of this Christian Nationalist movement holds events with thousands of people around the nation. They have a powerful network of social, broadcast, and print media. They know how to dominate the news and spread their “message” farther every day.

And here we are. Too many people still want to dismiss the “nonsense” and trust that enough people will recognize lies for what they are. Yet “election deniers” are elected to state offices and the U.S. Congress where they will hold power to manipulate election results. **What can we do?**

Know the facts.

Speak up.

Challenge lies.

Vote!

***It is not too late. Do it now.***

## Reporting on the Reawaken America Tour

Renee Ricco, local “citizen journalist,” posted a video report of her experience at the Batavia, NY Reawaken America Tour. We experienced the same event, but her report differs significantly. She saw it as “a diverse group of speakers on different topics from God, love of America, health and wellness, and politics. ... and that there was a time in this country when we could agree on God and love of country.” Here is the video:



The 3,000 participants likely agreed with her views. I did not. Ms. Ricco presents as a rational, unbiased journalist, but she is not. Her website link doesn't work, and [her YouTube channel](#) seems limited to reports on this event and an earlier revival at the same church, with some recent interviews with the GOP candidate running against NY Congressman Joe Morelle. Her interviews highlight themes of Christian Nationalism and are filled with the language of a movement that sees itself as representing God and truth against people who reject it.

Her report begins with a dismissal (if not direct attack) on all other media reports. She says that “content was enlightening and provided a different perspective from the same old daily news.” She found “no basis in reality from the articles I read prior to this event,” and wondered “if anyone writing this stuff ever attended an event.” And “I wonder if those assigned to cover this event from the media are even allowed to present the truth....It is low-level reporting...and just stirs up people’s emotions.” As if that’s not what is true of her.



### Interview with Pastor Doyle

Ms. Ricco interviewed Paul Doyle, pastor of the Cornerstone Church that hosted the event. His words are unapologetic Christian Nationalism. Here are some excerpts:

“I’m tired of events being cancelled because they have a conservative Christian bent to them. ....

“I hope to see the fear come out of the Christian community, that they don’t have to be intimidated by the cancel culture. ... The Christian voice gave the input to found this country ... and it’s being cancelled out. ... Get back to believing in God, get back to believing America was God’s idea in the first place. Why would we want to cancel the very voice of the One who started this country?”

“America is a welcoming, tolerant nation because of Christianity. It’s why there’s so many multiple different ethnicities in America. ... Churches are resistant to this idea because of fear. There are churches that have bought into the narrative of mainstream media, big tech, and Hollywood that owns the narrative. ... We don’t have a voice of Christianity anymore. We have a voice of the culture.”

Ms. Ricci then shifted the interview to talk about the idea of the Separation of Church and State:

**Ricci:** “It was intended for the state to stay out of the church, not the other way around.”

**Doyle:** “It’s almost like a sound bite. They take it out of context and don’t read the rest (of Thomas Jefferson’s letter)...They want the church to be quiet.”

**Ricci:** “Would you ever be associated with anything that would ever denigrate any group of people?”

**Doyle:** “Our church is multi-ethnic ... ‘browns, whites, blacks’ ... We are a church that loves people.”

On Renee Ricci’s YouTube channel, you can find three other interviews with speakers at the event. All of them follow the same style of unabashed admiration for the interviewee and asking leading questions. One is with [Aaron Lewis](#), pastor and candidate for governor of Connecticut, fairly low-key. The other two are with unabashed Christian Nationalists.

Lance Wallnau, a self-proclaimed apostle, prophet, and movement leader who coined the term “[Seven Mountain Mandate](#),” had “a vision” in 2016 that the next president would be like King Cyrus in the Hebrew scriptures – a man who did not believe in God but was chosen by God to rebuild the nation of Israel. That man, of course, was Donald Trump whom he has met with and prayed over. In his interview, he claims that churches opposing Reawaken America and this movement are “agreeing with the slander and are on the wrong side of God.”



Rev. Leon Benjamin, pastor, “apostle,” and candidate for Congress in Virginia pastors two churches, one in Virginia and one in Tulsa. He is “Clay Clark’s pastor” – the organizer of this tour. He spoke of “freedom,, unmasking the lie, telling the truth” and of “election fraud, mask tyranny, religious tyranny, economic tyranny.” He listed areas of influence in society that this movement seeks to dominate, and they are the “Seven Mountains of Influence” of Lance Wallnau and many in this movement. He said about Reawaken America that “the message is unity and there is no racism. ... (and) we have to choose what’s right, either good or evil.” The clear implication, of course, is that anyone opposing the Tour and this movement chooses evil.



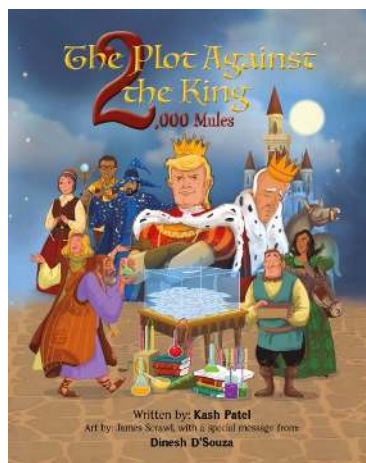
The language and values of Christian Nationalism embedded in these interviews require much more “unpacking” than I can do in one post. I will continue to write on it as we seek not only understanding but answers to what we can do to challenge it. Follow my blog (if you have not yet), and watch for announcements of a new online course available around Thanksgiving. Meanwhile, watch the videos and follow the links in my posts. Learn all you can. Be confident and assertive in your knowledge as you speak out against this threat to our democracy.

Rev. Jennifer Butler, founder in residence at [Faith in Public Life](#), wrote about her experience at the ReAwaken America Tour in Batavia, NY, in [a recent article published in The Philadelphia Inquirer](#). The tour is in Mannheim, PA, for two days this weekend, and her words are a call to action for Christians to stand against Christian Nationalism.



“The ReAwaken America speeches touted antisemitic, racist, sexist, and homophobic beliefs in the name of Christianity. Speeches were rife with apocalyptic and polarizing predictions of God’s vengeance befalling a wide range of opponents, including the founder of the World Economic Forum, President Joe Biden, and New York Attorney General Leticia James, who had written a letter to the tour’s local host, Pastor Paul Doyle, voicing concern that this event could spur violence. In the parking lot, I spotted a bus painted with the words “Patriot Street Fighter,” along with an image of a man in body armor with a bludgeon in his hand and the words “Get in the Fight” written in the red font of horror movies.

“Booths outside the tent played to peoples’ appetite for conspiracy. As a mother, I was disturbed by a display selling a children’s book called The Plot Against the King — named “King Donald,” who is trying to “Make the Kingdom Great Again.”



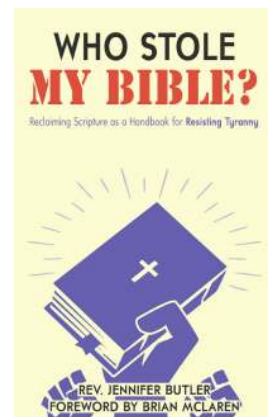
## Inside the Reawaken America Tour

Tour organizers and speakers deny charges of racism and violence. A third of the speakers in Batavia were African-American, and they point to that as they scoff at the idea. Yet the nation they imagine as a Christian nation was always governed by white men who made the laws to hold their privilege and power over anyone who was not white and male. And they resorted to violence if the laws failed them. That's the reality of our history as a nation. There was no actual violence connected to the event, and I think that has been true everywhere it has gone. However, as Jennifer points out, the “apocalyptic and polarizing” language of all the speakers and their demonizing of people they call “enemies” and blatant warnings of warfare kept a threat of violence at the core of the event. And as she writes in her article:

“Its recycled conspiracy theories have motivated recent deadly domestic terrorist attacks that targeted Jews in a Pittsburgh synagogue, African Americans at a bible study in Charleston, S.C., and a grocery store in Buffalo, N.Y., Latinos shopping in El Paso, Texas, and Sikhs at worship in Oak Creek, Wisc.”

Rev. Butler acknowledges the appeal of this movement to “people in real pain,” but I agree with her that Christian Nationalism offers “a false sense of solution.” As she says, “politicians and pastors under the ReAwaken America tent are touring the country, preying on the fear and anger of people — often white — who feel like today’s country is leaving them behind.” What they offer is a mix of religion and politics once touted as a movement of “values voters” and the “Moral Majority” which now lacks any coherent view of moral values supported by the Christian scriptures and the Gospel they claim to believe in.

For people who reject the “biblical worldview” of this movement and wonder if the Bible can be taken seriously, Jennifer Butler has written a book called *Who Stole My Bible: Reclaiming Scripture as a Handbook for Resisting Tyranny*. One summary of the book says:





“Scripture is replete with stories of those who followed God’s call to resist oppression and fearlessly pursue compassion, justice, and human dignity. Chapters focus on the liberating God of the Hebrews, the authoritarianism of King Solomon, the dream team of women in the Bible, and how Jesus came to bring truth and expose the lies of rulers. Each chapter illustrates the lessons of scripture with true stories of courageous religious communities countering authoritarianism and white supremacy in America today.”

Here is Rev. Butler’s call to people who call themselves Christians:

“As the Christian nationalist movement continues to expand, it is critical for Christians to speak out against this misrepresentation of faith, perhaps by joining the Christians Against Christian Nationalism movement. But we can’t do this work in isolation. We must demonstrate commitment to pluralism by building strong alliances across faith communities. .... Communities are being intentionally manipulated, divided, and conquered along lines of race, religion, and inequality in Christ’s name. This is not what Jesus stood for.”

# What can we do?

*Here is what I presented today as a panelist at a webinar sponsored by the New York State Council of Churches:*

The question I hear the most about Christian Nationalism is “what can we do?” What can we do about a movement that believes in authoritarian power and mis-uses the Christian faith to get power and keep it? The first action is to learn all we can and seek to understand why. This is personal for me for two reasons: Some family members are part of it – And I have spent over 50 years as a Christian minister; I am both angry and sad with what is happening. So I want to understand.

By birth I belong to a group that has always been a minority in this nation – white European heterosexual male and protestant Christian. Historically, this minority believed that privilege, power, and wealth were our birthright, even the divine order. This is the story we told, the narrative we crafted, the myth taught to our children. When we were challenged, we passed laws and used the courts – and violence if “necessary” – to enforce that privilege and power. It is not new.

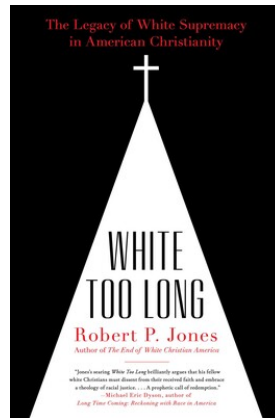


The great replacement theory is rooted in this historical narrative. Do these words sound familiar? ... “Civilization is going to pieces. ... If we don’t look out, the white race will be utterly submerged. It’s all scientific stuff. It’s been proved. It’s up to us who are the dominant race to watch out, or these other races will have control of things.” – That’s from *The Great Gatsby* in 1925 (p.11) The historical roots of this theory go back at least to Virginia in the 1600s, with their slave laws, and to Reconstruction after the Civil War when Black men could first vote.

## Inside the Reawaken America Tour

Robert P. Jones, in *White Too Long*, describes what became the southern myth:

“Reconstruction... was generally represented as a time when white southerners were victimized by vengeful occupying federal forces who supported black politicians primarily as a way of humiliating their defeated enemies. Southern whites were victims who were dishonorably treated after fighting a noble war.” – They had lost the war, but they would not lose their culture and their home. They would not have Black people replace them or their enemies govern them.



Book Cover

The Reawaken America Tour, rooted in Christian Nationalism, continues that persecution narrative. In Batavia, NY in August, I heard one speaker after another build on that story of being victims who are being treated unfairly by “the enemy,” shouting that their culture, religion, and nation are being destroyed, and they must defend themselves and their country.

The language of one speaker was typical: “The storm is upon us... We win, they lose ... We are at war, on a wartime basis ... They are evil enemies of freedom... War has been declared.... The media is aiding and abetting the enemy.” ... This was a call to arms – to rise up and fight for freedom. The organizers and leaders of this movement deny that they encourage violence, even though speakers regularly use the rhetoric of warfare and enemies and “the mission.” The main speaker and organizer was always referred to as “the general” – Gen. Michael Flynn – who [PBS Frontline](#) describes as raising “An Army of God” to fight “a holy war.”

Christian Nationalism threatens our democracy by calling for “real Americans” – that is Christians who accept their “biblical worldview”- to get control of every level of government and every sphere of life .... all while saying “we the people” will take “our nation back.” – The language of “we” and “they”, “them” and “us” is all I heard. The rhetoric and “jokes” and casual references to specific groups of people all made clear who does not belong – LGBTQ folks, Jews, liberals, Democrats – and “BLM” – that is black activists, or what some white people have called “uppity blacks.”

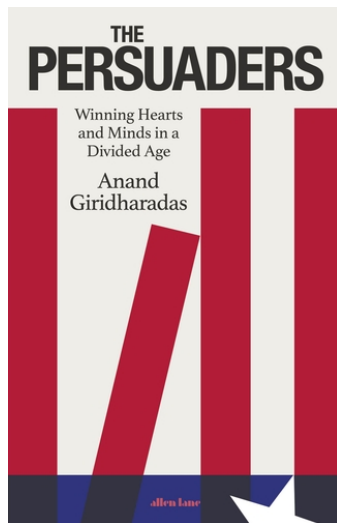


Mark Burns

Many speakers challenge the charge against them of promoting white supremacy and violence. They point out that a third of the dozens of speakers are Black (although 95% of the audience was white) and that there was no violence in and around the event (although there were personal bodyguards and armed security). However, the myth of a Christian nation, chosen by God, dominated the whole event – and this nation, of course, has historically been controlled by white men.

The ideas and language of systemic racism and white supremacy are anathema to this movement. Only individual responsibility matters to them, and racism only exists (in their minds) if an individual consciously hates a person of another color. That same core belief leads to a denial of “hate” being part of their movement. In their minds, they don’t “hate” their enemies – liberals, Democrats, LGBTQ folks, for instance – they just oppose them because “they are evil.” Strange reasoning to us, perhaps, but there it is.

So what are we to do? Perhaps most importantly, we must change the narrative and tell a story that persuades. In a [NYT article](#), AnandGiridharadas (gi-re-de-ha’-das), author of a new book, “The Persuaders,” wrote these words: “The right understands that the more one’s ideas are repeated, the more they seem to millions of people like common sense.” (5) Again ... the more a story is told, the more it seems like “common sense.”



That’s why so many people watch Fox News. Their staff repeat the same thing so often that viewers are convinced it is true. For instance, [a recent story](#) spun the narrative that Critical Race Theory is being taught in public schools, although denied by “Democrats and the Media.” (6) And, of course, with the assumption that it is bad for our children and our country. And what do they say is being taught?

- Systemic racism, unconscious bias
- White people have white privilege .... And, also ....
- America is a patriarchal society
- Gender is an identity choice

My response was to say “and...?” They know their audience believes all those things are wrong – evil – because they have told them so repeatedly. ... The dark narrative of Christian Nationalism and the larger authoritarian movement offers a false hope rooted in a false history. They want to go back to an imagined golden time when everything was good, but it never was – not for most people – not for those who never enjoyed the privilege, wealth, and power of white, heterosexual men, often professing Christians. It was never as good for them.

Our country will soon be majority non-white and non-Christian, and this movement stirs the fear and anger many people feel in this changing world. The leaders use this reality to persuade people it’s “common sense” that they must save themselves and their country, whatever it takes – including violence. People who have now experienced some freedom and privilege refuse to go back. That’s what Christian Nationalists fear and fight against – the very idea of a true democracy in a diverse, empowered nation.



The power of persuasion lies in telling a story that will win the heart and soul of people. For us, it must be a narrative that instills hope in a better future because people do need hope. – We need to learn how to do what leaders of this movement have been doing for a long time – craft a story that motivates people and repeat it so often that it “sounds like common sense.” For us, though, it will be a story that inspires hope for a better future for everyone.

How can we do that? – Let me highlight three things we can do:

**First: Listen and learn** – Refuse to argue (It does no good) – Do not attack the person – Ask questions that demand thoughtful response (expect them to think and explain) – Learn (in order to understand) what this movement is all about

**Second: Challenge the movement** – Vote and elect people willing to speak out – Be public and confident in confronting lies and speaking truth with respect and compassion – refuse to be their “enemy”

**Third: Tell a story of hope** – Craft an alternative narrative, a story that includes them without excluding others – tell it repeatedly everywhere until it “feels like common sense.”

Listen and learn – challenge the movement – tell a story of hope. This is what we can do.

## What now?

### FOLLOW MY BLOG

Go to my blog at [jimmyreader.blog](http://jimmyreader.blog) and click "[Get posts in your email](#)" to subscribe for free. My blog is about "finding light in the darkness." Why does it seem we live in different worlds from other people? And what can we do?

### JOIN A LEARNING COMMUNITY AT IMAGINE

Go to the [Imagine Learning Community](#) site. Enroll absolutely free - no charge ever - under "Community." There you will have access to:

- An introduction to Christian nationalism
- Interviews with writers, activists, and leaders building a better world - with links to learn what they are doing
- A "Keep Learning" section with an array of digital and online resources to make sense of the world and to work for a better world.

### AND COMING SOON ... MAKE SENSE OF IT ALL

A video series with learning guides:

- Why we seem to live in "different worlds"
- How that leads to conflicts in politics, religion, culture
- What we can do to work for a world we want