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Cancelling the *Second Coming*: Manufactured Christian Outrage Online

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Moral Outrage, Religion, and Comics

This chapter explores moral outrage online centered on the publication of a comic—*Second Coming*—and how this event may be understood in relation to Christian nationalism. Comics have a well-established place within American politico-moral discourses, ever since the moral panic centering on comics in the 1950s when they ended up at the center of debates about juvenile delinquency and the American way of life and depicted as a youth-corrupting peril from within (Hajdu 2009). This particular moral outrage began on January 9, 2019, when Fox News reported that DC Comics was set to publish a comic featuring the return of Jesus (Parke 2019), and cited the Christian Broadcasting Network (CBN), who described it as more "blasphemous than biblical" (Jones 2019). The Fox notice accumulated over six hundred comments in the span of a few days, expressing sentiments like how Christians constantly find themselves under attack and taunting DC to do a comic on Muhammad next.

This event is approached as a case study for understanding tensions surrounding depictions of Christian symbolism within the US context, which historically has been characterized by a close relationship between evangelicalism and media, cf. televangelism, and its apparent pragmatic openness in absorbing and employing various audio-visual media in conveying its message (Bowler and Reagan 2014; Hadden 1993). This case exposes how conceptualizations of blasphemy may be embroiled in processes of boundary marking, driven by moral posturing to defend group identity and signal belonging. This chapter contributes to the volume's overall aim of studying linkages between comics and religion by examining a particular "religious" response to a (at the time of the controversy, imagined)

portrayal of Jesus. I say "imagined" as no representative from CBN, nor Fox, nor anyone involved in commenting on the blasphemous nature of the *Second Coming*, had read the comic. Moreover, when the comic was later published in July 2019 by Ahoy (AHOY Comics 2019), no similar event reoccurred.

The *Second Coming* itself centers on God asking Sun-Star (a superman pastiche) to teach Jesus how to be more like him: "One omnipotent being to another—will you help me out? You know, take Jesus under your wing … show him how a *real* hero handles his chili?" (Russell 2020, 29, emphasis in original). Throughout the run, God and Sun-Star instead both come to learn from Jesus, and the comic provides commentary on violence and masculinity in comics. This portrayal and the message of *Second Coming* were irrelevant to the event itself, exemplifying how moral outrage can be expressed online in the form of a firestorm (albeit, a minor one), as the sudden explosion of critique was both intensely indignant and lacking in specificity, as is characteristic of a firestorm (Johnen, Jungblut, and Ziegele 2018; Pfeffer, Zorbach, and Carley 2014). Johnen, Jungblut, and Ziegele (2018) have argued that participation is driven both by the desire for social recognition and by a felt moral transgression. Deemphasizing the tendency to view social media phenomena as new or caused by social media, they explore continuity with literature on moral panics and use Goode and Ben-Yehuda's (1994) five characteristics—a concern that something is threatening the group`s moral values, hostility, exaggerated response, consensus, and volatility—to argue that an online firestorm is a form of moral panic, emphasizing that participation is mainly in pursuit of recognition, in the form of likes, or approving comments from strangers (Johnen, Jungblut, and Ziegele 2018).

Moral outrage has further been identified as contributing to political polarization (Carpenter et al. 2021), something that is said to characterize political elites in the United States (Hare and Poole 2014), and it is suggested that this has contributed to a greater degree of polarization in the US population overall following the civil rights movement (Baldassarri and Gelman 2008). Researchers like Whitehead and Perry (2020) instead consider cross-partisan patterns of nationalism, prejudice, and conservatism, and suggest that Christian nationalism is a better framework for understanding the current political landscape in the United States. Following their lead, "I ask how a discourse of moral outrage was articulated in reference to the announcement of the 'Second Coming,' and further if, and how, this discourse reflects Christian nationalism, exploring the circulation of moral outrage." In this chapter, I focus on the comment section of a Fox News notice with the aim of exploring how a discourse of moral outrage was articulated in reference to the announcement of the

Second Coming, and further how this discourse reflected Christian nationalism. I begin with an overview of the US political landscape, focusing on Christian nationalism, then give a brief overview of the incident in question, followed by an analysis of the Fox comment section.

Christian Nationalism

Christian nationalism is an ideology that—building on a mythologized version of US history centering on the idea that the country was founded by white, "traditional," Christian men, based on Christian principles—seeks to enact a racial, patriarchal, and religious hierarchy that they perceive as fundamentally American (Gorski and Perry 2022; Whitehead and Perry 2020). It does not refer to piety, but denotes a cultural framework that some US Americans subscribe to, but that all US Americans relate to, which conflates "religious identity (Christian, preferably Protestant) with race (white), nativity (born in the United States), citizenship (American), and political ideology (social and fiscal conservative)" (Whitehead and Perry 2020, x). Christian nationalism here refers to a distinctly American phenomenon, which should neither be conflated with Evangelicalism (even though there is a lot of overlap) nor with usages of Christian symbolism within other nationalist movements. It builds on the idea that the United States is chosen by God for greatness, and that this status is threatened by " 'un-American' influences both inside and outside" (Gorski and Perry 2022, 4); and outsiders within and without are viewed as violent, criminal, and interior (Whitehead and Perry 2020). In line with Mouffe's (2013) conceptualization, I thus argue that Christian nationalism presupposes an antagonistic division of the political field, where everyone who is not part of the ethnonational "us," is conceived as a threat.

Commitment to this hierarchical understanding of US society is decreasing, which Christian nationalists have come to interpret as marginalization and suppression of (their) religious freedom. Indeed, when talking about religious freedom Christian nationalists narrowly refer to a definition of Christian palatable to Christian nationalists, characterized by "a 'premillennial' worldview" connected to the idea that "God requires the faithful to wage wars for good," and thus includes veneration of the military, authoritarianism, and the nation (Whitehead and Perry 2020, 14). Christian nationalism is thus not about adherence to Christian doctrine but is primarily focused on political goals, using "Christian language and symbols to demarcate and defend group boundaries and privileges" (87). Such political goals are not limited to enacting

a strict racial hierarchy, but further include gender subordination, as well as a rolling back of rights and protections of LGBTQ+ people. As such, "the 'Christian' label simply signals shared tribal identity or veils political values that would otherwise be socially unacceptable" (Gorski and Perry 2022, 10). Moreover, white Christian nationalist discourse has shifted towards framing, for example, increased LGBTQ rights as an attack on religious freedom, which the authors argue "reflects a paradigmatic response of groups formerly in power (in this case, white conservative Christians) to situations in which they feel that power threatened—namely, to portray oneself as the victim" (Whitehead and Perry 2020, 134). The designated "other" can thus be identified as any number of persons and is referred to in a variety of ways, and includes Muslims, socialists, "leftists," and LGBTQ+ identifying people, conflating everyone on the outside as a threat (Gorski and Perry 2022).

Analyzing the Fox Comment Section: Islamophobia, Polarization, and Martyrdom

While *Second Coming* had been announced six months earlier, the negative reactions did not start until the CBN and Fox notices, after which a petition was started on CitizenGO aimed at canceling the release. This petition described the comic as "outrageous and blasphemous," suggesting that Jesus acts as a "sidekick to an 'all powerful' superhero," and asked readers to "please sign this petition if you agree that DC Comics should pull this blasphemous series" (CitizenGO 2019). The letter petitioners signed mentioned Muhammad—"Would DC Comics publish similar content about other religious leaders, such as Mohammed or Buddha?"—something that was reflected in the comment section of the Fox notice. It also reproduced a description of the *Second Coming*, which identified Jesus as "the roommate of 'an all-powerful superhero, named Sun-Man,' " not the sidekick of Sun-Man. The petition reportedly had over 235,000 signatures, and DC canceled the release on February 13, 2019 (Gustines 2019).

While CBN was the first to report on the comic, Fox News is one of the largest and most trusted news source in the United States (Gramlich 2020). Previous research has focused on Fox' audience as having distinct political attitudes and voting patterns, and "perceptions of political reality that differ from the rest of the television news audience" (Morris 2007, 707). Fox, which is aimed at providing a counterpoint to "liberally biased media," appears to particularly appeal to conservative attitudes, and especially to republicans

(Iyengar and Hahn 2009; Morris 2007). The Fox notice, unlike the CBN one, was accompanied by a comment section, which is the primary material analyzed for this chapter. Comment sections on news media offer ways for people to express their opinions on various political and social issues and can be seen to influence their perceptions of public opinion (Ziegele et al. 2020). While news comment sections thus theoretically function as forums of deliberative public debate, research has at best been inconclusive, at worst showing that such spaces tend towards hate speech (Eberwein 2020; Ziegele et al. 2020), and emotional language in news stories has been shown to contribute to decrease deliberative quality of related comment sections (Ziegele et al. 2020).

The Fox comment section contained 620 comments at the time of data collection (March 3, 2022, not including sixty-three comments that had been removed for violating the commenting policy, and two comments had been removed by users). Fox's comment moderation appears to include filters that pause comment publication until approved by a moderator (Fox News Team 2018). Comments may also be reported by users, they can also edit or delete their own comments, and comment sections may be turned off. According to the FAQ, moderation is used "to maintain a safe and respectful environment" and comments that "include vulgar, racist, threatening, or otherwise offensive language" would be removed (Fox News Team 2018). How moderation is practiced, and what guidelines exist around offensive language are otherwise unknown. Most comments (approximately 550) were left on January 9, 2019, followed by approximately fifty on the 11th, thirty-five on the 14th, thirty on the 12th, twenty on the 15th, twenty on the 10th, and ten on the 13th, with one comment left on the 19th, 20th, and 29th, respectively, and one user coming in and leaving three comments on February 18, 2021. All collected material was inductively coded in NVivo, paying special attention to how *Second Coming* was depicted, and what type of argument was being made against it, or in its favor. In the following section, the results of the coding are presented, focusing on negative framings of the *Second Coming*.

Tendencies Toward Self-Victimization: "They Think They Are Brave for Their Conformist Anti-Christian Nonsense"

Considering the number of signatures the CitizenGo petition got, it might be surprising to learn that the most prominent theme in the Fox comment section appears to be the questioning of Christians, Christianity, and jokes about Christians, followed by Christians arguing with or making disparaging

remarks about atheists, and debates among Christians on theological matters. This was, however, followed by complaints about how frequently Christians are mocked in today's society, pronouncements about the blasphemous nature of *Second Coming*, and talk about how atheists, and the creators of the comic, will be punished by God. The prominence of questions directed at Christians, arguments leveled back at atheists, and theological debates mainly refer to discussions between commenters, one example is a user answering a presumably Christian comment with "Rational skepticism for stated and unproven beliefs, is not 'hate.' Drama Queen Alert." Most comments left by Christian antagonists were by the same five users. Their comments range from prodding Christians, dismissing their arguments, to more outright mockery, an example of the latter is "oh they are tender little snowflakes that are melting everywhere over this, they need to lighten up and laugh a little more." This is then contrasted by presumed Christian commenters, where even the most frequent commenters only left a few each. Trying to identify the factors at play with these five commenters is difficult as the only context is that they attack other commenters, but I have written elsewhere about how atheists specifically may participate in similar forms of antagonistic othering (Lundmark 2022).

Critique and mockery of Christians in the Fox comments generally occurred in direct response to comments left by presumed Christians, which were followed by debates amongst Christians. In one comment thread, a user encourages others to share the story about this particular comic on social media, as well as thumbs down any stories from DC to mark displeasure. There are also comments from one of the most frequent Christian commenters questioning if this is really a Christian attitude, and suggesting that "There's nothing they can do to hurt Jesus, especially with a comic book!," Meanwhile, another Christian commenter suggests that the issue is not with attacking Christians, but that this comic questions "the Lord God of all." As another commenter expresses it, the comic is not about religion but "about mocking Christians and Christianity. That's a pretty popular trend that is going to grow." This sentiment appears frequently in the material; that Christianity is constantly being attacked, sometimes specified as happening in mainstream media (unclear if Fox News counts as mainstream in these cases), and sometimes conflated with leftists, atheists, or Democrats that are said to be opposing Christians or Christianity.

Commenter 1

The CW and DC have turned half the superheroes into homosexuals.

Commenter 2

Is that a problem?

Commenter 3

Yes.

Commenter 1

Not unless you think half the human race is homosexual.

Commenter 2

I don't think there are superheroes with super powers.

Did you think the comics are true and the superheroes are real? (the heterosexual ones, obviously)

Transcript "homosexuals" from screenshot Fox news (Parke 2019).

There is a minor tendency in the comment section to associate superhero comics and DC with homosexuality, and that DC is spreading false or evil messages, such as "The comics are there to indoctrinate you to their beliefs. This is an attack on people's beliefs." There appears to be a slippage between accusations of sacrilege or blasphemy, the notion that society is filled with anti-Christian sentiments, and that the "other side" is pushing some form of agenda that includes homosexuality. There are comments that narrow in on the supposed blasphemousness more directly, like "This comic book is a red herring, attempting to offer 'another gospel' other than the authentic one. The entire premise of the comic book is non-scriptural." Several commenters take the opportunity to either talk about the increasing irrelevance of DC or specifically about the irrelevance of the imprint (Vertigo) that was set to publish *Second Coming*; "Their superhero shows on WB kept pushing all sorts of agendas to the point I quit watching them, even though I was a fan of their comics growing up." This agenda is again related to homosexuality; "DC comics is doing a Village people reboot of the Justice League."

> Pretty lame concept. Just a way to take another cheap shot at people with religious and conservative values. I do love how these articles bring out the foaming-at-the-mouth atheists who can't *stand* the thought of someone believing in something that might be greater than ourselves. So much tolerance on the left.

This overlap between Christianity and conservatism is posed in some sense against perceived non-belief or apostasy. On the one hand, this is tied to a perception that anti-Christian messaging is ubiquitous within mainstream media—"There is only one truth …. There cannot be multiple truths. Mainstream media attacks Christianity (primarily), God is mocked in most every program

on television"—and on the other hand a notion that such sentiments are so common that even non-believers should be bored with them by now.

Commenter 4

Sure, it's blasphemous, but many of you enjoy that. Honestly, it's really unimaginative and uninspired. Shocking and predictably offending people is a calculated, lazy, talentless way to get attention, tapping the guaranteed resonance with the usual sick puerile lot that enjoy the same, as well as the free advertisement that comes with the doctrinally requisite boycotts by the good folk that won't ever, ever, ever forget that DC Comics also markets the formerly lucrative Batman, Superman, and Wonder Woman franchises.

Commenter 5

How can you say it's unimaginative and uninspired if you haven't read it?

Commenter 4

Why do we read things, why do content publishers put out teaser interviews and press releases, how do they calculate the influence of these things? Whatever you posture, don't you feel like we've been here a thousand times before? No thanks, boring.

Transcript "Blasphemy" from Screenshot Fox News (Parke 2019).

As a counterpoint, several of the Christian-antagonist commenters make comments about the appropriateness of mythology being used in comments, such as "Mythology in a comic book is a perfect match." The implication appears to be that Christianity is mythological, and thus fictional; "Not the first time he's [Jesus] been featured in a work of fiction." This centered around a minor argument presumed Christians and Christian-antagonist commenters were having, with Christians irritated with atheists for thinking they understand the Bible and Christianity better than Christians—"A commentary on how Christians misunderstand the Bible and Jesus? Like every other atheist, he thinks possesses great wisdom that we mere mortals cannot comprehend"—and Christian-antagonist commenters are irritated with Christians for assuming they do not understand Christianity: "You are making the ignorant assumption that i havent read the bible, i have many times and see it for the work of fiction it is, I dont fear your myths and superstitions."

Commenter 6

So another leftist strategy to bash religion and religious folk.

Shocking, absolutely shocking, totally shocked I am, color me shocked …

Hey, when do you suppose they'll do a cartoon about Allah and Muhammed? (Edited)

Commenter 7

Why are you assuming they'll use the comic to bash Jesus?

Commenter 6

Only because 99.9% of every lefty enterprise involving religion is used to bash it. But yeah, I can see why you'd go with the .1% possibility.

Commenter 7

The Presence, the Judeo-Christian God, is generally treated well in DC comics. I doubt Vertigo would trash Jesus.

Transcript "bashing left and Muhammed" from screenshot Fox news (Parke 2019).

There are a few threads to untangle when it comes to how Islam is positioned in the comment section. On the one hand, there are questions like the one posed above asking when or if they would make a similar comic about Muhammad, or simply suggesting that they would never be brave enough to do so: "They think they are brave for their conformist anti-Christian nonsense, but would never be brave enuf to mock the child molesting Prophet." On the other hand, we have a conflation of Islam and violence masking implied threats: "I wonder if the artists count themselves lucky that they can create such work without being murdered by Christians. Not every peaceful religious practitioner would suffer these artists to live were they in the same boat." Or suggesting that the lack of violence the comic authors and publishers may expect is proof of the superiority of Christianity: "How many people will die because of this comic? NONE. THIS is how I know Christianity and Islam are not the same."

In the transcript above we also see an association being drawn between "the left" and bashing "religious folk" (here, Christians), something that is suggested would not be done toward Islam: "How many Democrats who constantly slam and ridicule Christians ever do the same to Muslims? I've yet to hear one." These types of comments are entangled in a discussion that appears to collapse conservatism, Christianity, and Republicanism as existing in opposition to an amorphous other sometimes identified as "mainstream media," democrats, or "the left"; "Jesus bashing is of course OK, Would these fools ever dare blaspheme Mohammed or their one true Messiah … Barak!" In some comments, it appears as if Islam is seen as protected in ways that Christianity is not, such as "I dare them to do a second coming of Muhammod for the sequel (deliberately misspelled to try to get past filters)." In these cases, it is unclear if commenters perceive Fox

News to be part of mainstream media if Fox is also protecting Islam, and who is filtering out mentions of Muhammad. In some cases, it is even suggested that everything outside of Christianity is atheism: “Knowing Jesus is not a religion pal. But … Atheists pretending to be ‘religious’ to steal a lot of money from people trying to learn. Muslims are one example.”

> One more American tradition flushed down the toilet by atheist liberals … the comic book …
>
> lighten up snowflake!

The *Second Coming* was seen as part of a “leftist” agenda or strategy by some commenters, connected both to the positioning of Islam and the perception that religious (Christian) and conservative values go together. In part, the outrage appears to be rooted in an idea that what is Christian, and conservative is what is truly American; “Yet Mohammed cartoons sparked a terror attack in Paris. This is our own PEOPLE doing this! OUTRAGEOUS!!” Comments on this theme tend to depict a culture war narrative, suggesting that “berating and persecuting white Christians has been popular since oh, about the early part of November in 2008,” and that *Second Coming* is “just more Christian bashing by the Left.” The culture war framing can also be noted in comments that call for suppression of the comic, while taking part in a discussion emphasizing the supposed suppression of Christians in the United States: “Where do i sign up to join the lawsuit against this?”

Discussion

> Cowards. How about including allah?
>
> What’s cowardly—and flatout creepy with all this Islamaphobia - is how many idiots in this comment thread are getting so foamy-mouthed over a) a comic book; b) a comic book they haven’t even read yet; c) a comic book which actually shows Jesus to be a loving entity; and d) a comic book which mostly just satires hypocrites and comic book superheroes. Once again, Fox News has misled its gullible audience into grabbing pitchforks and getting incensed over an affront which doesn’t even exist. People, please: reconsider your news sources.

The latter comment was left by the sole user, who came in leaving comments in 2021 and appears to have read *Second Coming*. By contrast, the prevailing interpretation on the blogs and Christian news sites that jumped on the story, as well as among the presumed Christian commenters in the Fox comment section

outlined above, appeared to be the one originally found in the CBN notice. That "instead of a biblical account of Christ's return, it depicts Jesus as a failure who disappointed God by getting crucified when he first walked the earth. He is sent back to learn how to be a real Messiah by learning from the superhero 'Sun-Man' " (Jones 2019), like the Christian Examiner who referred to it as a "distorted telling of the Savior." Responding as they were to the press release, no one appeared to at that point have read the comic. The lack of specificity characteristic of moral outrage (Pfeffer, Zorbach, and Carley 2014) found in the varied responses, can be exemplified by the CitizenGo campaign mischaracterizing the press release's description while reproducing the press release right next to it. The type of moral outrage expressed thus appear to be an exercise in boundary marking, where *Second Coming* appears as a convenient foe, rather than a focus of genuine moral concern, suggesting that the event might have been driven by moral posturing to defend group identity and signal belonging. This was further emphasized by how the CitizenGo campaign at the time of writing still declared victory in its effort to cancel the comic, despite it having been published. This can be understood in relation to theories on the ways in which political statements are imbued with affect on social media more broadly, where politics becomes a way for people to affectively attune themselves to, rather than engage critically with, political issues (Papacharissi 2015). Assuming that politics become another mode for individuals to attune themselves or signal belonging, necessitates placing emphasis on how public discourse affects democratic space even when social media users may not perceive their actions as that serious, as such actions still have a cumulative effect (Lundmark 2019).

In this chapter, I set out to explore how a discourse of moral outrage was articulated in reference to the announcement of *Second Coming*, and further if, and how, this discourse reflected Christian nationalist narratives. As noted, moral outrage has been identified as contributing to political polarization (Carpenter et al. 2021), and in the case of US political discourse appears to presuppose an antagonistic division of the political field. Christian nationalism here refers to a specific set of assumptions about the history and culture of the United States (Gorski and Perry 2022; Whitehead and Perry 2020). While such views are not transparently expressed in the comments, they are hinted at. The presence of the outrage in itself indicates that some feel threatened, but there are also more specific examples like one commenter who expresses outrage that it is "our own PEOPLE doing this!" or another who refers to comic books as yet another "American tradition flushed down the toilet by atheist liberals." Aside from explicit mentions of Muslims, race is not much discussed in the topic. One

reason for this may of course be that the author, Mark Russell, is a white man from Oregon.

The direction of the perceived threat is hard to nail down in the comments but does appear to depict a sort of collapsed other. As Gorski and Perry (2022) note, the other is Christian nationalism, identified as a collection of identities that appear interchangeable, including Muslims, socialists, and LGBTQ+ identifying people, conflating everyone on the outside as a threat. In the comments we see people talk about leftists, liberals, and atheists in unclear ways, and making references to Obama as the second coming of Jesus for liberals, making it appear as if these terms are indeed interchangeable. The corrupting force of this other is apparent in how commenters derisively hint at DC Comics promoting homosexuality, contributing to the slippage between supposed Christian marginalization, and a mainstream media that attacks Christians while promoting a leftist or homosexual agenda, that is simultaneously atheist and pro-Muslim.

> Main stream media attacks Christianity (primarily), God is mocked in most every program on television … . Yes there may be a random joke about another faith. But Christianity is the primary focus. You can "site" a source … but the source I give you is main stream media … it is in our face every day. So any "source" that you sight would just be someone from media saying that "we are fair and impartial" So consider the source.

The tendency within Christian nationalism toward interpreting decline as marginalization and prosecution (Whitehead and Perry 2020) is exemplified in the comment above. This theme weaves through the comment section, and it is suggested that mainstream media controls narratives around Christianity (by attacking and undermining it), and Islam (by protecting it) and that it, as well as *Second Coming* are part of a leftist or liberal agenda. The collapsed other is visible in comments that seemingly suggest that Muslims are just atheists attempting to steal money from people searching for religion. In similar comments depicting Christianity as the one true religion, we also see a conflation of Christianity with conservatism and perceived "traditional" Christian values, which are under attack from *Second Coming*, and from mainstream media, and thus needs to be defended (e.g., "where do I sign up to join the lawsuit against this?").

The antagonistic way in which the other is described in the Fox comments recalls the view of violence as justified when perpetuated by Christian nationalists to defend the purity of the United States as a Christian nation, and disruptive when perpetrated by the collapsed other. This tendency is not very clear, but

may be hinted at in how violence was primarily associated with Islam and in comments like "I recommend the author write his next series about Mohammad and have his first signing in Detroit or someplace nice like that," which seemingly conflates Islam with other forms of marginalization and associates both with violence. Violence is thus used to demarcate how much better Christians are. In an interview, the author of *Second Coming* stated that he believed that "once people actually read the book, a lot of them will be embarrassed by how up in arms they were. It's actually a very pro-Christ comic, as he's the character who actually offers a meaningful alternative to violence" (Avila 2019). Russell himself thus maintains that the comic is not a critique of Jesus, but rather of superhero comics and their tendency to valorize violence; "drop-kicking someone into a volcano or throwing them through a plate-glass window only works for solving a very small percentage of human problems. The other 99.9% of problems require empathy and that's the superpower that Christ brings to the table" (Avila 2019). However, given the view of violence within Christian nationalist discourses, this depiction of Jesus may indeed be another point of contention with the comic.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have looked at how a discourse of moral outrage was articulated in a Fox comment section referencing to the announcement of *Second Coming*, and further if, and how, this discourse reflects Christian nationalism, exploring the circulation of moral outrage. The aim of which was to offer a case study for understanding tensions surrounding depictions of Jesus within the US context, and why—despite historical linkages between Christianity and media broadcasts—some usages of Christian symbolism would inspire the kind of outrage outlined in this chapter. This chapter thus exposed how conceptualizations of blasphemy may be embroiled in processes of boundary marking, driven by moral posturing to defend group identity, and signal belonging. I thus showed how the Fox comments held an undercurrent of comments that assumed a binary between Christianity, religiousness, morality, and conservatism on the one hand, and "leftist" blasphemy on the other. This other side was perceived as pushing an agenda where certain groups are protected (like Muslims) and some interests are "pushed" (like homosexuality), while others are unduly prosecuted, attacked, and ridiculed (like white Christians).

As noted, Christian nationalists are primarily focused on political goals, using references to Christianity to defend and mark belonging to the (white)

ethnonational "us." Outrage centered on perceived threats like the outrage discussed here is not about piety, or even about blasphemy, but rather about protecting against subversion of the "Christian values" preferred by Christian nationalists. The way Christian nationalism fuses national and religious symbolism legitimizes use of violence in defending this by reference to divine will. This legitimation process inhibits dialogue as alternative viewpoints are perceived as threatening. I thus suggest that Christian nationalism presupposes an antagonistic division of the political field, where everyone who is not part of the ethnonational "us," is conceived as a threat. In this way, the antagonistic construction of an "us" relies on the vilification of everyone who disagrees, as it divides the political field into two opposite antagonistic poles, which further clarifies the tendency in the Fox comments toward collapsing of the other into one amorphous entity which can contain atheism and Islam, liberalism, and socialism, all at once.

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