

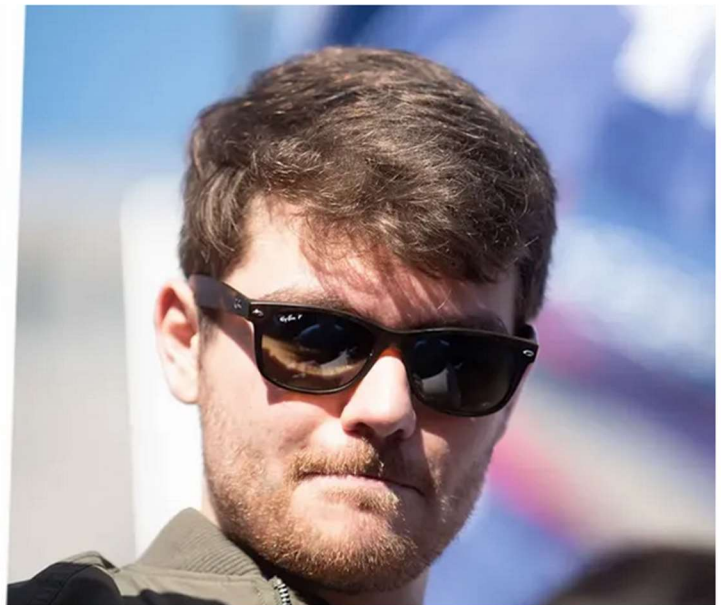
EXCLUSIVE

White nationalists get religion: On the far-right fringe, Catholics and racists forge a movement

Nick Fuentes' racist "groypers" movement is building a coalition with far-right Catholics. They have a plan

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Milo Yiannopoulos and Nick Fuentes (Photo illustration by Salon/Getty Images)

Last Sunday, as pro-choice supporters reacted to the leaked Supreme Court draft opinion that will likely overturn *Roe v. Wade*, a series of videos shot in lower Manhattan went viral. In one, a group of young men stood before an arched wooden doorway at the Basilica of St. Patrick's Old Cathedral, reciting the Rosary while protesters demonstrated outside the church gates. In their center was a young man wearing an America First hat and an FDNY fleece, closing his eyes as he prayed. By that afternoon, the video had been shared on social media by far-right Republican Reps. Paul Gosar and Marjorie Taylor Greene, who praised the men as "heroes" "defending their churches against the abortionist horde."

In two other videos taken the same day at the same location, the man in the America First hat heckled protesters, shouting from the church steps, "I am the people. The people have decided, the court has decided. You lose. You have no choice. Not your body, your choice. Your body is mine and you're having my baby."

The man was not, as the New York City Fire Department quickly pointed out, a firefighter. Nor was he merely a devout Catholic. Rather, he was a right-wing activist affiliated with white nationalist wunderkind Nick Fuentes' gleefully racist and antisemitic America First/"groypers" movement, which at its third annual America First Political Action Conference (AFPAC) this February drew widespread condemnation for its glorification of Vladimir Putin's invasion of Ukraine, Fuentes' praise of Hitler and the call by one speaker, a state senator from Arizona, to build "gallows" to hang political enemies.

On a popular groypers livestream show Sunday night, host and movement leader Dalton Clodfelter said he recognized the man in the videos and called him to join the show. As journalist and Western States Center senior fellow Nick Martin reported, Clodfelter said the man had made "a really bold statement today and it's going to be heard by a lot of people." The man claimed that many of the other praying men who assembled that afternoon were also groypers,

described the demonstrators he'd been heckling as "demonic creatures" and "animals" and said that one Black protester should be "enslaved" or "shot." "Whatever church they're going to attack next," he pledged, "we'll be there, and we'll crush them."

None of that seemed to matter to the right-wing politicians and media who held the man up as a hero of the faith. Prominent among those was Church Militant, a far-right Catholic media outlet that promoted its Monday night coverage of the protest with a picture of the groypers' face. That was more than accident or coincidence — Church Militant and the groypers are increasingly collaborating to mobilize their respective audiences to confront what both are calling "proabortionist demons" at pro-choice rallies across the country, and, more generally, to grow their movements on both sides.

All of this is part of a broader pattern of increasing overlap between the far right, including overtly white nationalist movements and leaders, with the extreme right-wing fringe of the Roman Catholic Church. This emerging coalition includes such figures as Milo Yiannopoulos, who was effectively expelled from the MAGA movement in 2017 over his remarks about child sex abuse; Canadian white nationalist Faith Goldy, similarly disgraced after appearing on a podcast of the neo-Nazi website Daily Stormer; onetime "Stop the Steal" organizer Ali Alexander; and "Kent State gun girl" Kaitlin Bennett.

All four have rebranded themselves as "traditional" Catholics (or "trad-Caths," in internet parlance) and allied themselves with an existing network of far-right Catholics that includes Pizzagate provocateur-turned conservative commentator Jack Posobiec, Trump confidant and adviser Steve Bannon and groypers-guru Nick Fuentes himself.

At one point, Resistance, the activist wing of Church Militant, began to mobilize supporters to counter-protest Planned Parenthood marches scheduled for this Saturday in Chicago, Nashville, Washington, San Antonio, Los Angeles and other cities. On Monday on the alternative social media site Telegram, Clodfelter called on groypers to attend these rallies. By Wednesday evening, more than five-dozen groypers on the site had eagerly signed on. As of Friday, however, Church Militant seemed to have abandoned this initiative, though Clodfelter still claims the groypers will rally in Nashville.

As we will discuss in part 2 of this investigation, at least one prominent staff member at Church Militant is also a groypers, and other employees of the right-wing Catholic group appear eager to build a united front between the two formations. In the larger political landscape of Trump-era America, this is more evidence that white nationalist and Christian nationalist movements, despite some meaningful differences on principle, strategy and tactics, are working side by side in the right's broader push to roll back abortion rights and enshrine white Christian dominance in America.

From its beginnings, the groypers movement sought to straddle the gap between the white and Christian nationalist movements. In the later years of the Trump presidency, as the largely pagan or atheist alt-right fell into disarray, Fuentes sought to distinguish the mostly Gen-Z groypers movement from its disgraced predecessor by garnishing its core white nationalist principles with the flag and the cross.

"[The alt-right] was a racist, atheist, post-American, revolutionary and transnational movement," Fuentes explained to followers in November 2019, attempting to chart a new direction for white nationalism in the U.S. "America First is a traditionalist, Christian, conservative, reformist, American nationalist Movement." While other white nationalists had given up hope of transforming the conservative establishment, the groypers, Fuentes argued, would redouble their efforts to influence the mainstream Right. This project continues today. "We have to push the envelope," Fuentes told followers in May 2021. "We are the right-wing flank of the Republican Party... we have got to be on the Right, dragging these people kicking and screaming into the future, into the right wing, into a truly reactionary party."

In today's groypers movement, classic white nationalist themes of "white genocide," white identity politics and conspiratorial antisemitism blend seamlessly with fervent appeals to Christian piety, slogans like "Christ is King" and militant calls to enshrine Christian fundamentalism as state policy. Most groypers are young and enthusiastic adherents of Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Latter-day Saints or other Christian faith traditions, and many are first drawn into the movement through its ubiquitous "trad" subculture — a largely online aesthetic celebrating a rejection of modernity and embrace of patriarchal, anti-LGBTQ values — and become "red-pilled" on the tenets of white nationalism along the way.

For the groypers, hard-edged, traditionalist opposition to LGBTQ rights, abortion and feminism is rooted in uncompromising misogyny and male supremacy, a worldview in which straight, white, Christian Gen-Z men are valorized as the rightful heirs to and guardians of the American nation. Today, the groypers' strategic blend of white and Christian nationalism has arrived right on time, helping the movement find natural allies among hard-right Christian groups — particularly Catholic right groups like Church Militant — and, from there, to build new pathways towards mainstream acceptance.

In a parallel project, Church Militant also seeks to transform mainstream Catholicism from its rightward flank. Just two weeks ago, Church Militant made national news for its hourlong interview with Rep. Greene, in which the Georgia congresswoman suggested that Satan is controlling the Catholic Church (mostly because of Catholic support for refugees at the U.S. southern border). While it might seem odd for a Catholic media site to celebrate such a charge coming from an evangelical Protestant — Church Militant titled the first segment of its weeklong promotion of the interview "Marjorie for Pope" — the outlet has long waged a vitriolic campaign against the church's current hierarchy, which it derides as both milquetoast and liberal and an "international crime syndicate" run by a "lavender mafia." By comparison, Church Militant presents itself as the home of authentically orthodox Catholicism (even as the Archdiocese of Detroit, where Church Militant is headquartered, compelled the outlet more than a decade ago to stop using "Catholic" in its name and has repeatedly denounced the group).

Last November, the outlet hosted a noisy, daylong rally on the Baltimore waterfront to protest the annual meeting of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops next door. Church Militant's emcee for the event, fallen "alt-lite" star turned groypers leader Yiannopoulos — who joined Church Militant as a regular contributor in 2021 after declaring himself "ex-gay" — directed the roughly 1,200-person audience to chant "Lock them up" at the bishops gathered nearby. It was he, in fact, who reportedly arranged for Marjorie Taylor Greene to speak at Fuentes' AFPAC III in February.

Another groypers leader speaking at Church Militant's Baltimore rally was anti-immigrant pundit Michelle Malkin. The day after speaking at the white nationalist American Renaissance conference, Malkin told the Church Militant crowd that USCCB aid to immigrants and refugees had the "ultimate goal of fundamentally transforming the United States of America and destroying the historic American nation" — white nationalist language that echoes the "great replacement" conspiracy theory, according to which whites in the U.S. are being "replaced" by non-white immigration.

Many of Church Militant's targets are within the Catholic Church itself. It has run articles "exposing" bishops as registered Democrats; called the first Black cardinal in the American church "African Queen"; demanded that Pope Francis resign; and vowed to use its claimed network of hundreds of priests and church staff, as well as thousands of lay activists, to dig up dirt on any bishops who "go after a good priest."

But much of the site's writing and advocacy is more directly political, as when it compared the Black Lives Matter movement to fascism, attacked the Catholic bishops' support for immigrants as a numbers game meant to "shore up" a "shrinking, shriveling church," and, in 2020, declared that "every Democratic leader in the country" should be "immediately arrested and imprisoned" for their role in pandemic public health restrictions. Church Militant was such an avid supporter of Trump's reelection campaign that it repeatedly warned readers that if Joe Biden were elected, Catholics would be "identified, hunted down, declared 'illegal,'" "gun[ned] down in the streets," or "herded onto the trains heading for the camps."

Church Militant is widely considered, even among many conservative Catholics, as so outrageous and aggressive that it is best ignored. But as Commonweal's Paul Moses reported, that outlet and the fellow-traveling LifeSiteNews together "garnered nearly 10 million visits to their alt-right 'news' websites during the last three months of 2020," helping to "spread bogus election-conspiracy claims to a huge Catholic audience." On Jan. 6, 2021, both Church Militant and its staff celebrated the riot at the U.S. Capitol, tweeting images of pro-Trump protesters carrying Catholic iconography and declaring the rioters "patriots."

The outlet has made common cause with many of the most controversial figures on the right, promoting interviews with Roger Stone, Joseph Flynn (brother of QAnon hero Michael Flynn), Gab founder and CEO Andrew Torba and Steve Bannon, who was to be the keynote speaker at Church Militant's Baltimore rally, although he ultimately didn't attend — because he was arrested that week and charged with contempt of Congress. Beyond its Baltimore rally, the organization routinely platforms voices connected to the groypers movement as well. Multiple Church Militant articles have featured

Torba and YouTube streamer John Doyle, who are both longstanding Fuentes allies and were featured as speaker and special guest, respectively, at AFPAC III. Church Militant founder Michael Voris recently appeared on a show hosted by white nationalist former Senate candidate Lauren Witzke, another prominent Fuentes ally.

Just a week after the Capitol insurrection, Voris interviewed another Fuentes acolyte, Jan. 6 planner Ali Alexander, about his then-recent conversion to Catholicism as well as their shared sense — in the immediate aftermath of the Capitol riot — that "dying an honorable death is an awesome thing." Alexander said he had come to realize there was a "war between the church and the people who have infiltrated the church," and Voris recounted attending several of Alexander's "Stop the Steal" protests in Michigan, including one at the state capitol in Lansing. That rally was led by Nick Fuentes and John Doyle and celebrated on Church Militant's Twitter account.

These points of overlap exemplify how the white nationalist movement and the Catholic right are both drawing together and influencing each other. But it is in the youth movement, and on the streets, where the most significant collaboration is now unfolding.

"We are intensely trying to cultivate the youth," Voris said in a February 2022 video entitled "CM Youth Movement," claiming that 24 of Church Militant's 63 employees are under the age of 30. "As men, it's really important that we act," professed one young Church Militant staffer in the video. "We can't just sit by and watch our civilization and church collapse into a cesspool of degeneracy."

Voris took note when Fuentes held AFPAC III, praising the conference as "where all the youthful (read: future) energy is" in the "real struggle for the heart and soul of the [conservative] movement" — a struggle, Voris said, echoing Fuentes' framing, which "will dictate the future of the [Republican] party and, to a large extent, the nation."

In a subsequent video entitled "Young Conservative Catholics," Voris drove the point home. Bemoaning the "collapse of the American empire," Voris compared contemporary young Catholics to the "first young Romans" who, in the wake of the collapse of the Roman Empire in the 4th century AD, "conquered the barbarians" and instituted a new Catholic civilization.

"Just like in the days of Rome, as it collapsed," Voris explained, "there was a generation of 20-somethings that beheld it, so too now, here, in the U.S...in the coming years but beginning now, what must be fought for is Catholic truth. Straight up, terrible, glorious Catholic truth." He went on to say that "establishment conservatism has betrayed the cause" and "it is the young more than anyone else who must understand the real war here." Fuentes and Yiannopoulos both shared Voris' video on Telegram, with a caption framing it as a direct appeal to the groypers: "'The cry 'Christ is King' must ring loud across the land.' Church Militant's Michael Voris on America First."