

QANON

The Christian Millennial Prophecy and Errand in the Make America Exceptional Again Phenomenon

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QAnon is a wide-ranging conspiracy theory network which found roots during the American 2020 presidential election by fabricating a conflict between then President Donald Trump and the supposedly malicious, even Satanic, operations of Democrats and Hollywood elites. While it has been acutely analyzed through contemporary political, psychological, and sociological frameworks, analyzing the QAnon movement through an American religious historical paradigm reveals that it is not an isolated conspiratorial anomaly, but rather the latest iteration of a well-established American historical occurrence: the Christian millennial prophecy and early Christian Errand. Select characteristics of American politics, including the multi-functional nature of presidential power, a combative two-party system, and the influence of Evangelical beliefs and constituencies in Republican Party practices, have facilitated this latest round of political activity with millennialist ornamentation. QAnon adherents have created their own prophecy, “the Storm;” they express anxiety surrounding their mission’s completion; and they express a dual-natured reactivity to Trump’s status, either heralding him as a Messiah-like savior or as an authority to which they must report. These parallels culminate in a similar psychological fallout upon the millennial prophecy’s failure to unfold as well as the failure of both QAnon and millennialists to fulfill their errand, a divine mission toward purity or perfection. Despite QAnon’s dwindling salience in political discourse, this analysis supports the conclusion that as the latest iteration of the prophetic and mission-oriented pattern, core components of QAnon doctrine and modes of thinking that have seeped into the Republican Party platform and psyche will likely remain there for the foreseeable future.

AN INTRODUCTORY NARRATIVE AND WHERE WE ARE HEADED

“Look at this and tell me what you think it looks like.” A crazed look in her eye, my sophomore year roommate drew her phone screen to my face. “A Q, right? Why would they make soldiers march in a Q formation *right* after the military generals announced the ‘Storm is coming?’” Why indeed. According to her, and potentially hundreds of thousands across the nation, what seemed like a set of coincidental military actions was actually indicative of a gigantic plot unfolding right under our noses — one whose scope was impossible to visualize unless you knew just where to look. Her assertion was an expression of the web of conspiracy theories known as QAnon, which encompasses a vast range of tenets all vaguely connected to the American social, political, technological, and historical climate. Its adherents are very disparate in ideology, and any two self-labelled QAnoners might hold some entirely unrelated or even contradictory beliefs. Ultimately, however, they are aligned by a shared conviction that former President Donald J. Trump will save thousands of children from a trafficking scheme involving demonic torture rituals perpetrated by Hollywood elites and Democratic operatives.

QAnoners profess a conspiracism that

remains impervious to contradiction or scrutiny about the secret, malicious, even Satanic deeds of the powerful elite. This mode of conspiratorial thinking is not new to American culture; it has been common since the founding of the United States and even before, from the witch trials to the supposed international control of the Illuminati and Freemasons to anti-Semitic contentions about the United Nations and world banks. While the political, psychological, and sociological components of those conspiracies have been well discussed, a historical analysis of Puritan American doctrine provides a uniquely enlightening paradigm through which to view QAnon adherents’ psychological state. The concepts of the Christian millennial prophecy of earthly destruction and rebirth, the early Puritan settlers’ Errand mission to establish an exemplary Christian “city upon a hill” for their English homeland to model, and their lamentations upon failing to build either to fruition will be outlined stage by stage in this essay. The QAnon conspiracy will then be viewed as a distinctive innovation on these original Errand and millennial prophecy patterns considering America’s unique executive power structure and the indispensable American Evangelical influence on both QAnon and the Republican Party. John Winthrop’s “City on a Hill” will be discussed as the arbiter of that Errand,

striving to fulfill its “commission” by God to build an exemplary model of Christian community, and contrasted to QAnon’s negative mission of exposing and destroying its enemies percolating in American elite circles (Winthrop, 1630).

The driving anxiety of achieving this original Errand, as well as the archetypal Messiah and England authority figures involved in ordaining its achievement, will also lend themselves as apt points of comparison to not only the behavior of QAnon adherents, but also the dual nature of Trump’s role in their mythical construction.

AN EXPLANATION OF QANON

QAnon’s big-tent conspiracy network includes various anti-vaccination and COVID-19 related theories, from 5G chips and the idea that COVID came from a Chinese laboratory, to chemtrails, the faking of 9/11, uncertainty surrounding JFK Jr. and Jeffrey Epstein’s deaths, and many more. Despite the incongruity of these sub-conspiracies, Kevin Roose (2021b) of the *New York Times* writes that “the core falsehood of QAnon”—in other words, the one aspect that ties the loose community that is QAnoners together—is that “a group of Satan-worshiping elites who run a child sex ring are trying to control our politics and media.” According to Roose, “this cabal includes top Democrats” and “entertainers” like President Biden, Hillary

Clinton, Barack Obama, George Soros, Oprah Winfrey, Tom Hanks and Ellen DeGeneres, as well as “religious figures” such as Pope Francis. He further observes that many QAnon members “also believe that, in addition to molesting children, members of this group kill and eat their victims to extract a life-extending chemical called adrenochrome.” This dire illustration is not without a glimmer of hope and triumph, however; President Trump is strategically working behind-the-scenes to locate these rings and demolish them, as well as the “Deep State” conspirators who have infiltrated the halls of government to protect them.

The vehicle for the dissemination and discussion of these beliefs is, unsurprisingly, a number of notoriously toxic Internet forums. Most QAnon postulations stem from anonymous posts on 4chan starting in October of 2017 by an individual codenamed “Q Clearance Patriot,” or simply Q. Q claimed to be a “high-ranking government insider” with “access to classified information about Mr. Trump’s war against the global cabal,” which they would release in cryptic clues called Q-drops (Roose, 2021b). 4chan/8chan trolls, Redditors, and other right-wing Internet detectives would then work to decode these Q-drop messages in a vast collaborative online network. A comprehensive 2018 Vox

investigation of every post on the popular QAnon subreddit /r/greatawakening determined that while the majority of the almost 55,000 users were either lurkers or infrequent commenters, one solid group of “about 200 users” accounted for an entire quarter of the forum’s comments, indicating they were the most loyal conspiracy theorists “who believe[d] they [were] investigators unearthing the truth” about the cabal (Chang, 2018). Additionally, as a conspiracy network inherently connected to the success of Trump’s office-holding—after all, conspiracists claim he was “recruited by top military generals to run for president in 2016” to fulfill their mission—it naturally co-opted conspiracies about Trump’s November re-election through the notion that the Deep State and Democratic Party actors were coordinating nationwide to file fraudulent ballots, allowing illegal immigrants and dead people to vote, and throwing away or even setting Trump ballots on fire (Roose, 2021b). Q predicts this conspiracy will culminate in an ultimate punishment for the perpetrators: the Storm. The Storm was to be a grandiose public event in which Trump would preempt Biden’s inauguration on January 20th; instead, he would unveil himself as victorious against the child torturers by publicly revealing the cabal and either outright executing or submitting the main actors to military tribunal

(Roose, 2021b). Trump would thereby bring political stability and restore truth to American government by purging it and the broader elite stratum of adrenochrome-pumping Satanists.

THE MILLENNIAL PROPHECY AND HOW QANON RELATES

Firstly, we must outline the history of Christian millennialism and its basic components. The millennialist prophecy’s timing, top-down versus bottom-up execution, divine justice, and believer reward are directly reflected in the modern-day iteration that is the Storm prophecy of the contemporary QAnon movement. According to Richard Landes (1998), professor of history and director of the Center for Millennial Studies at Boston University, Christian millennialism is a broad religious prophetic theory “grounded in the expectation of a time of supernatural peace and abundance on earth” preceded by a catastrophic event meant to cleanse it. Landes notes that “the key determinant of millennialism’s impact on society is timing.” In other words, millennialists maintain an adamant insistence that their prediction will unfold within a certain period or even on a concretely defined day. Landes writes that “the day of redemption is” always “yet to come,” and “no matter how often apocalyptic beliefs have proved wrong,” “expectations are repeatedly

revived” into “powerful and volatile catalyst[s]” for revolt or change. Christian millennialism also carries a tenet of “ultimate divine justice,” where a promise is made by God to provide “solace” from “the suffering of countless generations of” previous believers through a judgment of good worth at the End Times (Landes, 1998). This grants them permission into the sanctified post-catastrophe in-group. Thus, they are comforted by the thought that their participation and belief will be immensely rewarding. Finally, Christian millennials “find themselves at the center of the ultimate universal drama in which their every act has cosmic consequence” (Landes, 1998).

Christian millennialist prophecies commonly take one of two forms, categorized by motive and implementation. The first is a top-down approach that anticipates a new kingdom will be established, ruled, and protected from chaos by a fair yet strict authoritarian; the second, a bottom-up approach, anticipates that a populist, anarchical, yet still holy society will come from human conflict (Landes, 1998). Excited anticipation of earthly revival has always motivated these apocalyptic millennial believers to rebel against the established order in hopes of quickening the promised kingdom’s arrival. But this drive did not rise to “aggressive” levels until the new millennium—that is, 1000 A.D. itself—

arrived. As the prophetic years 1000 A.D. and 1033 A.D. passed with no cosmic transformation, “apocalyptic expectations did not disappear in medieval Europe; on the contrary, there was a sea change in millennial hopes” to a new form, postmillennialism. According to this updated theory, “Christ would come after a millennial kingdom was wrought by the saints,” rather than by incidental divine decision (Landes, 1998). This extension of millennial theory provided sufficient justification for believers’ direct involvement in fulfilling these Armageddon predictions, encouraging militarization of larger movements such as the Crusades to achieve the prophetic end. This highlights the bottom-up tendency of millennialism as a method of more quickly achieving the prediction or allowing believers to support those who are destined to achieve it (a role to which our former warrior president nicely accedes, as later discussed). In all, these outlined tenets of Christian millennial theory act as the framework for further comparison to today’s QAnon movement so that its new innovations can be identified.

Christian millennial beliefs and actions map directly onto the QAnon-based Storm prophecy and adherents’ beliefs and actions. QAnon’s theories have indeed inspired the mythologization of Trump’s employing his

presidential power to save the children and rid America of evil actors, as later discussed. But recall that when the QAnon Storm did not unfold, some adherents became agitated and violent, even going so far as to attack American political institutions and democracy as well as those tasked to uphold them. These theories have thus also motivated smaller-scale, grassroots efforts against this perceived evil, illustrating the two Christian millennial tendencies of top-down and bottom-up execution. Indeed, Trump's supposed clandestine efforts to bring down the Satanic Democrats are a close exemplification of the first tendency—the authoritarian ending chaos. But as Roose (2021b) highlights, “QAnon has also seeped” beyond message-boards “into the offline world” through dangerous and even deadly attacks, thus reflecting a postmillennial bottom-up influence where believers play an active role.

One such episode of remarkable real-world violence took place on December 4th of 2016, when 28-year-old warehouse worker Edgar Maddison Welch drove to the Comet Ping Pong pizzeria in Washington D.C. and stormed it with weapons to save the abused children he believed were trapped in its basement. Michael E. Miller (2021) narrates how he entered through the front doors, AR-15 in his hand and Colt revolver on his belt, searching for a Satanic dungeon that

did not exist. After shooting down a locked door only to discover a computer closet, he put down his weapons and calmly met the dozens of police officers waiting outside. He was arrested immediately. “I came to D.C. with the intent of helping people I believed were in dire need of assistance,” he wrote in a letter to his case’s judge, but “I realize now just how foolish and reckless my decision was” (Miller, 2021). Welch’s case illustrates the pressure found in the QAnon adherent’s self-adopted mission, as it ascribes responsibility and near-divine importance to solving Q’s bread-crumbs trail, hunting down the Satanic Democrats, and destroying their child-trafficking rings. As Jim Kline (2021, p. 51) for the *Jung Journal* writes, Swiss psychoanalyst Carl Jung noted that “the unconscious drive to sacralize our lives...remains” for many people “a potent force in our too secularized era.” This is an impulse which many QAnon adherents, including Welch, have responded to by throwing themselves into active planning and arduous participation of their own accord. In his video manifesto to “the two young daughters” he left in Salisbury as he drove 350 miles to D.C., Welch says, “I can’t let you grow up in a world that’s so corrupt by evil...without at least standing up for you and other children just like you” (Miller, 2021). Four years later, Pizzagate’s legacy endured through

the January 6th siege on the Capitol by a QAnon-populated crowd which led to five total deaths, countless injuries, and more than 200 arrests. They intended to prevent the Congressional vote to transfer presidential power—a merely formal process, the election already having been decided (Miller, 2021). Just as it played out in earlier millennial movements, the steadfast QAnon faithful pursued their prophecy’s completion and attempted to orchestrate a more just world, one in which children and the government would remain pure and, through Trump’s re-installation, adherents are finally vindicated as the true silent majority.

AN INTERLUDE ON THE CONNECTION BETWEEN QANON’S RELIGIOUS ROOTS AND THE REPUBLICAN PARTY

QAnon’s innovation on early Christian millennial philosophy is based on the unique American political construction of an influential Evangelical base and strong anti-Democratic sentiment, lending to the strong probability that at least its essence will live on past its immediate impact through the political sphere. After interviewing eight QAnon experts, including various “journalists and researchers” who have covered the movement since before the 2016 presidential election, Sean Illing (2021) of Vox observes that QAnon is “less a political movement

than a religion—” a secular religious belief, in other words. Its dogma transcends evidence and favors faith, manipulating events and their supposed connections to profess an unknowable, divine agenda. Recall when my roommate insisted that Q-shaped military formations were some hidden clue from United States generals that “the Storm is coming.” QAnon’s driving message is an apocalyptic prophecy that America will crumble into chaos at the hands of Satanic Democrats, starting with child sacrifices. But not to worry, because Trump will stop them by cleansing the United States government and political realm of Satanic, Democratic evil.

In fact, QAnon beliefs are inextricably tied with modern-day American Christian Evangelicalism and rooted in a history of Satanic scares. For one, despite the diversity of the QAnon movement in both membership and belief tenets, Evangelical Christian philosophy dominates its integral system. Even if a QAnon supporter is introduced to the movement wholly secular, they are co-opted into an alarmist belief system underlaid with Evangelical doctrine. According to Kline (2021, p. 49), the cabal’s “evildoer agenda” conflicts with contemporary Evangelical political-religious stances because the agenda is QAnon’s “distorted interpretation of liberal Democratic ideals:” “free abortions” until the third trimester,

“forced restrictions on individual freedoms” for the sake of reducing climate change, “forced vaccinations that are known to cause birth defects,” and most relevantly “the legalization of child sacrifice rituals and blood drinking in honor of Satan.” Moreover, in writing about Pizzagate and Welch’s expectation of Satanic ritualistic paraphernalia in the pizzeria basement, Bleakley (2021, p. 10) notes the “lengthy history in the United States” of “organized child abuse being linked to Satanic rituals,” which came to a head in the 1980s when childcare facilities were forced to debunk pedophilia accusations by hysterical parents. QAnoners’ thorough, longstanding hostility toward the policy platform and leaders of the Democratic Party, in part due to anti-Satanist fears, is only further exemplified by the QAnon discussions that led to Pizzagate: the Comet pizza parlor was originally identified as a potential Satanic child trafficking hub only because the group believed the phrase “cheese pizza” in the leaked emails of Hillary Clinton’s campaign manager John Podesta was code for “child pornography” (Miller, 2021).

This anti-Democratic sentiment ties a particularly American, team-sports, pure good-versus-pure evil political component to the secular religious belief that is QAnon. This is an important observation because President Trump

relied heavily on white Evangelical voters for his Republican electoral base. In fact, 85% of “white evangelical Protestant voters who attend religious services frequently” voted for Trump, and “about six-in-ten White Catholics who attend Mass monthly or more often...supported Trump” (Nortey, 2021). Thus, while QAnon is a secular movement, the bedrock importance of its hyper-religious Evangelical adherents to the base of the Republican Party—an entire half of our dual-party system—is a political innovation that makes the influence of QAnon’s tenets on our political environment more likely for the future. As Roose predicted in an interview with Sean Illing (2021), even with Trump out of office and of Twitter, QAnon’s “core beliefs” may get “watered down a bit, stripped of the Q-related language, and dissolved into Republican Party orthodoxy” due to the political overlap of its tenets with the party’s platform, combined with the influence of its adherents as a strong foundation of the party’s base.

THE PURITAN ERRAND AND HOW QANON RELATES

Beyond millennial prophecy, another aspect of early Christian thought is relevant to understanding how QAnon’s foundational characteristics inform its purpose and future. While the concept of the Massachusetts settlers’

Errand as described by some scholars is not a perfect match for the aims of QAnon adherents, this uniquely American phenomenon, and the anxiety that drove it in the late 16th and early 17th centuries, is still palpable in the modern conspiratorial context. Writing on Perry Miller, one of the foremost scholars on Puritan America, Isil Ozcan (2012, p. 236) highlights Miller's observation that the Puritans believed America had an "exceptional status" as the location for their Christian "errand into the wilderness," what he called the "New England Mind." In Miller's description, this Errand was a "positive sense of mission" to "create a model of Christian perfection" in the United States, and it is this positive, constructive mission that serves as the Puritans' motivation for their pilgrimage, not being "driven out of England" by religious persecution as is the standard explanation (Ozcan, 2012). Miller's hypothesis is most evidenced by the "City on a Hill" sermon delivered by John Winthrop. In this widely recognizable and representative speech of Puritan thought, the Massachusetts colonial leader declares that the settlers cannot simply remember their forefathers who were persecuted in England (Winthrop, 1630). They must also fulfill their "covenant" with God by engaging in charitable and selfless activities such that "men shall say of

succeeding plantations, 'may the Lord make it like that of New England'" (Winthrop, 1630). According to Ozcan (2012) and Murray G. Murphey (2001), another Puritan scholar, Miller's idea of the "'exemplary Puritan mission... redefined the field' by providing key emotional, religious, and intellectual insight" to otherwise unjustified "'bizarre or perverse' behavior," such as maintaining settlements long after they had been abandoned, forbidding anyone from living alone, or only allowing saints to vote and hold office—decisions based on God's standard of perfection and geared toward eliminating isolation, perversion, and political or financial greed. Ozcan (2012) also addresses how Sacvan Bercovitch, a scholar writing some decades after Miller, contributes to literature on the Errand by building upon the New England Mind motivation argument to posit that the Puritans' mission was directly affirmed by "'a climate of anxiety.'" He further asserts that they sought to instill a "social norm" of crisis, fixating on it and even going so far as to invent new forms of it if necessary, making "affliction their seal of progress." This too is exemplified in Winthrop's speech: "if we shall neglect the observation of these articles," he warns, "the Lord will surely break out in wrath against us, and be revenged of such a people, and make us know the price of the breach" (Winthrop,

1630). By stressing the Massachusetts community's heightened anxiety as what facilitated their strive for the perfect Christian model, Bercovitch constructs another perspective on the Errand, one that centers around constant awareness of its unfulfillment compounded atop the doctrinal perfectionist pressures.

For its own motivations, QAnon inverts Miller's outline of the Massachusetts colony's mission. The Puritans held a primarily positive, constructive City on a Hill goal with a secondary, negative consequence of God's wrath if they failed. In contrast, QAnon's positive goal of retaining Trump's presidency and restoring American democracy is only secondary to the ultimately negative, destructive Errand of tearing the Democrats and the "Deep State" from power and bringing down the cabal to save the children. On another level, however, the driving force of both movements is arguably the same. Because of the conspiracy's basis around not only broadly stopping evil, an amorphous concept which can be molded to fit any supposed enemy, but an evil hidden from direct view at that, QAnon members experience a constant, looming, humming sense that Satanic evil is around every corner, in every childcare facility, in the basement of every pizza parlor, and in every statement by every major player in this conspiracy. This brings forth an

important conclusion, one that aligns with Bercovitch's interpretation: the anxiety becomes for the Christian millennials and QAnoners alike "its end as well as means" (Ozcan, 2012, p. 242). Both groups become driven to obsession over the status of their mission, the pieces they have solved or are surely just on the cusp of solving, and the forces working tirelessly to stop them, often even obfuscating the ending-child-trafficking-and-Satanic-rituals goal they profess. As Bleakley (quoting Cosentino) notes, QAnon is "an open-ended collective narrative based on paranoid attitudes toward political institutions and establishments," a paranoia that becomes the belief itself and engulfs the conscience of every Q-drop puzzle-solver (2021, p. 5). The visible futility of their march toward fulfilling the Errand—the failures of Welch and the January 6th rioters, for example—alongside supposed social media silencing or "shadowbans" contributes to their anxiety of impending doom and self-victimization, further driving them inward toward the eye of the conspiratorial Storm and away from our reality. Again, because this paranoia can be mapped onto any enemy, "Satanic Democrats" and "Hollywood elite child trafficking rings" become easily co-opted by Trump and the Republican Party into their messaging and platform. Such paranoia also fuels

any future Errand of the party, as it is locked in the minds of QAnon adherents even after the political salience of this specific conspiracy web declines, infiltrating even those who entered the QAnon sphere due to non-religious strings of the conspiracy.

TRUMP'S DUAL ROLE IN THE QANON ERRAND

As Perry Miller and Sacvan Bercovitch address in their analyses, another aspect of the early American Christian Errand which makes it unique among other potential millennial prophecies is that the authority to whom this mission's status is reported is the same figure that acts as the group's Messiah. Trump's uniquely strong executive authority as conferred by the American presidency entangled him in the conspiratorial Errand to fulfill this dual role. A vital component of the Puritans' Errand toward the creation of a pure Christian society in America was their desire to send that model as a "guide" back to England, where it could be emulated once its formulation had been perfected (Ozcan, 2012). As Miller explains, "The Puritan errand relied on the extent that their city on the hill was recognized as a successful religious venture by Europe," making them "not the doers of an errand but rather...errand-boys who expected the recognition of a fulfilled mission" (Ozcan, 2012,

238). In essence, it became as if "the very mission they designated for themselves was ordered by England and they were expecting confirmation of its fulfillment" (Ozcan, 2012, 238). However, it was revealed to the colonists via "England's toleration of heresies" that they were no longer the "headquarters to whom reports could be sent" (Ozcan, 2012, 239). Miller likens this arrangement to a husband who remembers being instructed to complete a task by his wife—an "errand-boy"—but while in the process of completing it, discovers that she has entirely forgotten about her request (Ozcan, 2012). Thus, the idea and status of the Errand is thrown entirely into disarray because it is unclear whether the errand was ever ordained by the higher authority to begin with, injecting into the colonists a sense of purposelessness and failure. Bercovitch builds on Miller's metaphor and outlines how, following this discovery, the second generation of Puritans "refused to acknowledge the mistake and persuaded themselves that their errand had nothing to do with England"—that they were no longer errand-boys, but failed "errand-doers"—and self-criticized their own sinful commercialism and internal spiritual corruption for their inability to establish a successful Christian model community (Ozcan, 2012). The metaphorical colonial husband sets aside his homeland wife's forgetfulness and adopts

the errand as his own idea, then attributes his failure to complete it to his own personal faults.

It is not difficult to imagine how QAnon adherents' relationship with their heralded leader, Trump, precisely mirrors this chronology of the arrangement between the colonists and their detached headquarters. QAnon members repeatedly attended Trump's events and fervently attempted to contact him regarding the progress of the mission on their end or the perceived failures on his. Although Trump's aides and associates strove to separate his image from the "crazy people," removing those with Q flags or T-shirts from the audience behind him or kicking them out before they might have a conversation with him, Trump's recognition of QAnoners and the Capitol rioters' priority status in his electoral base has formed a difficult political situation for him such that he is compelled against disavowing the movement. He has even actively met with QAnon-supporting figures such as congressional candidate J.R. Majewski (Nguyen & McGraw, 2021). His comment that he knows "very little" of the group except for their dislike of pedophiles" in one interview with NBC was then peculiarly seen by a subset of "QAnon adherents as confirmation of his support" (Nguyen & McGraw, 2021). After all, some rationalize, this is the most he can do without

compromising the status of his covert, ordained role in destroying the child-trafficking cabal, a justification reminiscent of the colonial husband's leaps in logic to contend with his homeland wife's lack of acknowledgment. While his statement is certainly not a denial of their beliefs and perceived mission, it is stretching to the point of unreason to interpret one broad anti-pedophilic comment as a secret nod of endorsement to the veracity of QAnon's entire belief network. More likely, it should be interpreted as a way to placate them or vaguely appreciate their political support while granting himself plausible deniability from their conspiratorial claims.

At the same time, QAnon proponents such as Donny Warren wrote frequently to Trump himself complaining that predicted events such as the proto-Storm event Red October never materialized, just one of many instances further indicating they trusted the integral role he played in their fruition (Colson, 2021). In this way, Trump simultaneously acted as a Messiah figure in what many believers perceived to be the mythic battle playing behind the scenes, concurrent to other believers' pizza parlor basement- and Capitol-storming for which they sought his approval. While this role duality is yet another manner of indicating the simultaneous top-down and bottom-up approaches of executing

QAnon's millennialist prophecies, it is also the primary exemplification for the unique power the American president holds which rationalized this apparent dichotomy of Errand fulfillment among QAnon supporters. In comparison to parliamentary systems where the executive function is distributed separately to one symbolic figurehead-of-state president and another executive head-of-government prime minister, who oversees the practical implementation of legislative rules, Trump was ordained with the entire slate of executive authorities. Depending on the current context, he could act in a myriad of executive capacities: as commander in chief, message-conveyer, chief administrator, chief diplomat, chief citizen, and most importantly, both symbolic head-of-state and strong executive power roles (Gaddipati, 2019). The ambiguousness of Trump's role in this conspiracy—as powerful Messianic figure singlehandedly capable of saving America, or the symbolic authority from which QAnon adherents desperately yearned for approval and publicization of their own mission's success—perfectly fit with the obscurity of the errand-doer versus errand-boy paradigm in a manner that could not be executed in any other country, as the American presidential office structurally and naturally supports a view from both angles.

EARLY AND PURITAN CHRISTIANS' AND QANONERS' LAMENTATIONS ON THEIR FAILURES

Finally, early Christian and later Puritan Christians' lamentations on the failure to fulfill their Errand or millennial prophecy are the prototype for the psychological fallout and decisions after the immediate failure of QAnon's January 20th Storm prophecy, as its adherents either questioned or left the movement, insisted it had been completed but by a different means, or desperately claimed it would be completed at a new impending date. As Landes (1998) writes, early patristic/medieval Christian millenniums experienced “the profound disappointment of unfulfilled expectations” each time the prophecy's timing passed. As a result, they punted the prophecy's timing to a later date or somehow manipulated its prediction to retroactively fit the situation such that its completion could be believed. In the 5th century, for example, Augustine banned millennial thought and argued that “the millennium was not a future event but one that had already been set in motion” (Illing, 2021). Charlemagne, who originally brought European millennialism to the West, adjusted the apocalyptic chronology from AD 800 to 1000. In more recent history, the 1844 Great Disappointment led Baptist minister and

End Times predictor William Miller to revise his prediction of the Second Coming multiple times. He ultimately determining that his final date, October 22nd, did not refer to Christ's return to Earth, but rather an event that took place in heaven (Illing, 2021).

These methods of psychological justification for obviously disproven predictions are no less apparent in everyday QAnon discourse. For example, some believers reconfigured their unsubstantiated hypotheses to “accommodate a transfer of power to Mr. Biden” by considering “the possibility that...the incoming president was actually part of Mr. Trump’s effort to take down the global cabal,” thereby ensuring their overarching conspiratorial accusation remained intact (Roose, 2021a). Similarly, other believers recalibrated the end prophetic dates to fit already existing prophetic aspects with newly invented justifications. March 4th, “the original date that presidents were inaugurated,” thereafter became the new true date once January 6th and 20th both fell through (Beaujon, 2021). Others insisted the new date could be March 20th, because of “a clause in the Constitution that says that power doesn’t transfer till March 20th,” according to a Q supporter interviewed by *Washington Post* reporter Dave Weigel (Beaujon, 2021). The strength of this psychological phenomenon is

so palpable, in fact, that even public disavowal by ardent, highly authoritative actors in the movement may not break through their dissonance. As Roose (2021a) writes, major proponents of the QAnon theory such as Ron Watkins, one of the foremost commentators in the QAnon-sphere and someone who has even been suspected of being Q, offered not a lamentation at all but rather a questioning of these beliefs’ veracity and resigned acceptance of their refutation. By the afternoon of the inauguration, the supposed date of reckoning and the culmination of the sanctified Storm mission, Watkins posted a note on his Telegram account urging this chapter of conspiratorial history be closed. “We have a new president sworn in and it is our responsibility as citizens to respect the Constitution,” he writes, advising his fellow QAnon adherents to remember “all the friends and happy memories we made” along the way (Roose, 2021a). Others, naturally, began to realize they had been duped: chat participants on Twitter, Telegram, and other social media/messaging apps expressed their disappointment with exclamations like “it’s over” and “wake up, we’ve been had,” evoking similar expressions of incredulity as followers that had been unconvinced earlier, like Donny Warren (Roose, 2021a). Whether by twisting perceptions of reality to match

existing beliefs or making the vast leap toward admitting fault, all QAnon members attempted to preserve their own psychological integrity, aligning with the very human pattern presented by previously mentioned Christian examples of failed predictions, such as Augustine's ban on the millennium, Charlemagne's date adjustment, and William Miller's insistence that prediction dates were not wrong, but rather attributed to the wrong astral geography.

CONCLUDING SENTIMENTS

Having flourished in the American context of multi-faceted executive authority, Evangelical political strength, and generally adaptable anti-Satanic, anti-Democratic sentiment, QAnon—or at least its distilled and reapplied principles—is likely to linger in the Grand Old Party platform, vaguely floating in the minds of mainstream and extremist Republican circles. Kline predicted in September of 2021 that “if Trump and the anonymous Q can maintain their savior and prophet-like mystiques, the QAnon movement will no doubt remain an influential force impervious to contradictions, inconsistencies in logic, and rational means to thwart its beliefs.” Though QAnon as a movement seems to be dwindling, potentially discrediting Kline's hypothesis, other pundits suggest that as not only an adaptable movement fit to the American

political context but also the next iteration of a long-standing Christian prophetic pattern, its core is here to stay. These latter commentators contend there will always be a certain segment of individuals who hold steadfast to the base principles of QAnon conspiracy, just as there will always be those who believe in a coming catastrophe and earthly renaissance time and time again after these prophecies have failed.

However, like the QAnon faithful claimed about Trump's Messiah status, my own dire illustration is not without a glimmer of hope. In an analysis by Phadke, Samory, and Mitra (2021, p. 29) of myriad 4chan/8chan conspiratorial message boards and 1.2 million Reddit posts, they determined that any self-disclosures of dissonance resulted in significant decreases in user contributions to these platforms. “High levels of experienced dissonance” also “correlate[d] with users ultimately leaving the communities” entirely, indicating it is possible for these conspiracists to break free from this specific set of beliefs (Phadke, et al., 2021). I do not know whether my sophomore year roommate would still insist that Q-shaped military formations are evidence of Trump's crusade to defeat the Satan-worshipping, child-sacrificing cabal of Hillary Clinton and Georges Soros if I spoke with her today. She may have moved on to a different political hot-button

conspiracy. But I do not doubt QAnon's lingering whispers have taken root and anchored in her thoughts and views on American sociopolitics, just as they have with the hundreds of thousands of QAnon supporters who may or may not remain ardently faithful, and just as it did with the rationalizations of the New England Mind.

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