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Spiritual Warfare in America after the Cold War

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What is Spiritual Warfare?

Spiritual warfare refers broadly to those practices within Christianity by which believers are called to struggle against malevolent supernatural forces in their lives and environs. In the fourth century ce, spiritual warfare was a key element of both Christian monasticism and evangelisation efforts. Drawing on the motif of Jesus's encounter with the devil in the desert, monks would sojourn into the wilderness to confront the demonic, weather its temptations, and thereby temper themselves into singular soldiers for God (Brakke 2008). Urban Christianisation projects were also cast as part of a spiritual war, here against incumbent pagan (demonic) deities in which the relic of martyrs acted as potent weapons for advancing God's kingdom (Kalleres 2015). Later, in the late medieval and early modern periods, demons and their alleged human agents (witches, Jews, magicians, and 'sodomites') were figured as threatening the social and spiritual fabric of Christendom and the divine authority of rulers, requiring both religious and secular responses and galvanising projects of Judeophobic and gender-based violence. Ideas of demonic forces working with and through 'othered' social groups were subsequently exported to Europe's colonies, where they formed a key metaphysical component of genocidal enterprises like racial slavery and settler colonialism.

While spiritual struggles against demonic forces have remained a staple of popular culture, overt practices of spiritual warfare in Europe and America are often seen as declining in the wake of the Enlightenment. Nonetheless, the practice remains alive and well. The Catholic Church reported in 2018 that reports of demonic possession and demand for exorcism had surged, while Christian thinktank Theos reported exorcisms as representing a "booming industry" in the United Kingdom, especially among Pentecostal churches (Sherwood 2018). Active and antagonistic engagement with demonic forces is a core practice among many Pentecostal and Charismatic forms of Christianity, sitting alongside other supernatural elements such as healing, prophecy, and speaking in tongues (glossolalia). This article focuses on discourses of spiritual warfare within conservative evangelical neo-Charismatic communities in the United States of America from 1989–2020. Growing out of the Pentecostal revivals of the early twentieth century, which gave rise to organisations like the Assemblies of God, and then the later post-war Charismatic revivals, which saw Pentecostal modes of practice emerge within more mainline churches, evangelical spiritual warfare in America today exists mainly inside the complex milieu of post- or non-denominational Christian evangelicalism. Often termed neo-Charismatics, these do not constitute a singular hierarchy or

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organisation, but rather form reticulate, transnational networks of families, churches, charities, businesses, speaking circuits, and publishing houses. Spiritual warfare in America today is often highly personalised and ad-hoc, with leadership emerging from a number of distinct charismatic thought leaders, each with their own idiosyncrasies in doctrine and practice (Christerson and Flory 2017). Accordingly, spiritual warfare exists alongside, synergising and at times conflicting with other paradigms within wider evangelical subcultures, including dominionism, differing strands of apocalypticism, and the prosperity gospel.

In scriptural terms, most contemporary spiritual warfare discourse derives its claims of legitimacy from Ephesians 6:10–18, in which Paul cautions believers that they "wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places" (6:12, KJV) and exhorts them to don the "full armour of God" (6:11) for this purpose. Verse 12 is used as a justification of the reality of the demonic, a loose taxonomy of their hierarchy (principalities, powers, rulers, spirits of wickedness), and an explanation that believers should not seek to combat people influenced *by* demons (the demonised) but the spirits working through them. However, this last claim, as I will demonstrate, often obfuscates more than it elucidates. It frequently functions as a universalisation of the homophobic adage to 'love the sinner, hate the sin' (Pellegrini and Jakobsen 2003), only applied to a broader worldview in which 'sin' encapsulates anything that deviates from a narrow conception of conservative evangelicalism. At the same time, despite the frequent usage of Ephesians 6:12 and similar biblical verses in many spiritual warfare texts, it is important to clarify that the majority of spiritual warfare discourse—particularly its demonologies—emerges not only (or primarily) from scriptural exegesis but is also assembled in an ad-hoc manner from personal tales of demonic encounters disseminated and semi-codified through sermons, TV, radio, and internet broadcasts, blogs, op-eds, pamphlets, and books.

Among the most widespread of such books are 'spiritual warfare manuals,' a hybrid genre that merges self-help text with military-esque tactics manual and demonological treatise, through which evangelicals present loosely codified interpretations of encounters for wider believers. Distributed primarily through evangelical bookshops, publishing houses, and websites, and written consciously for an insider audience, such manuals run a gamut from self-help works designed to teach believers to discern and defeat demonic forces influencing their individual and familial lives to more macro-level conspiracist texts fixated on exposing demonic influence in national and international politics and society. Irrespective of focus, however, such texts are built on a shared model of cosmic order. This model presumes the genuine reality of a spiritual world, that this spiritual world is split into opposing camps (light and darkness, good and evil, God and devil), and that the conflict between these camps intersects with, influences, and is influenced by events in the material world. The goal of spiritual warriors is then to engage this struggle, shifting the balance of forces from darkness to light. This is accomplished in several ways, ranging from prayer, prophecy, spiritual discernment, and exorcism/deliverance rituals to overt projects of political activism, as well as activities that blur the boundaries between these like the Jericho March (discussed later), in which practitioners will circumambulate a building, monument, or locale deemed a seat of demonic power, praying for God to shatter its defences, as with the city of Jericho in Joshua 6:1–27.

While spiritual warfare discourse might initially appear less apocalyptic than many of its evangelical sibling discourses, the reality is more complex. Much of the worldview underlying spiritual warfare practice is implicitly apocalyptic, based on the assumption that the heightened demonic activity believers are called

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to combat is due to the proximity of the End Times. While the central role of missionary activity within many spiritual warfare writings often gives such texts a post-millennialist flavour, spiritual warriors are often pre-millennialists, with post-millennialist elements emerging chiefly both through a commitment to evangelisation and conversion and through a dominionist commitment to take command of secular institutions and geographical territory and transform them in line with understandings of divine will (Ingersoll 2015). Apocalypticism in spiritual warfare texts often appears as inchoate and ad-hoc, with brief mention of (but rarely focus on) events such as the Rapture, the coming of the Antichrist, and the return of the Jewish people to the state of Israel—the last of which often shows the prominence of Christian Zionism in the wider spiritual warfare milieu (Durbin 2018; O'Donnell 2021a; Sturm 2021). Identification of and combat against demons is the primary focus of spiritual warfare, taking place against an implied apocalyptic backdrop that only rarely takes centre stage. This article explores spiritual warfare and its implied backdrop, outlining several of the key phases and practices of the movement since the end of the Cold War and situating them within their broader sociopolitical dynamics in the United States.

Spiritual Mapping and Apocalyptic Territoriality

The late- and post-Cold War periods in the United States saw several significant developments in spiritual warfare, both organisationally and in terms of beliefs and practice. On the organisational level, the growth of post-denominational and non-denominational forms of evangelicalism led to the rise of loose networks organised around charismatic leader figures, or "Independent Network Charismatics" (Christerson and Flory 2017). This shift away from intra-denominational homes and specifically Pentecostal organisations facilitates the transmission of forms of Charismatic practice, including spiritual warfare, into US evangelicalism more broadly. Shifts were not simply social or organisational, however. These ran alongside and facilitated the growth of new paradigms, such as that of the New Apostolic Reformation (NAR), also called the Kingdom Now movement, 'third-wave' evangelicalism or the strategic-level spiritual warfare, spiritual mapping, or prayer warrior movement (McAlister 2014). Originally terms coined by evangelist C. Peter Wagner, the NAR or "third wave of the Holy Spirit" framed itself as a further revival building on the earlier waves of Pentecostalism and post-war Charismatic revivals, and sought to reinstate the lost holy offices of prophet and apostle. Unlike other strands of evangelicalism, the NAR held that God still appointed apostles to govern the Church and continued to reveal supernatural revelations to modern-day prophets—ones that might supplement, if not supersede, those contained in the Bible. Influenced by and overlapping with parts of Christian dominionism, NAR or third-wave ministries became heavily involved in spiritual warfare, attempting to reclaim parts of the world they saw as under Satan's control. This focus on territorial reclamation has led to a strong emphasis on evangelising and missionary work, a social focus on the elevation of 'kingdom-minded people' to the upper echelons of politics and society, and the development of new, at-times controversial, paradigms of spiritual warfare. Among the most central of these was 'spiritual mapping.'

Developed by Wagner and other third-wave authors like George Otis, Cindy Jacobs, and Rebecca Greenwood, spiritual mapping refers to a process by which evangelists mapped out the spiritual topography of particular areas of space. These areas varied in size, from individual houses to neighbourhoods and cities to entire nations or continents. Drawing on the narrative of Daniel 10, in which an angel informs the prophet that he fought against the "prince of the kingdom of Persia" for 21 days (10:13, KJV), those engaged in spiritual mapping assign each region a spiritual ruler that governs its

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character, society, and destiny. This ruler is either divine or demonic, depending on the 'righteousness' or 'sin' of those within the territory. Such sins vary in character, ranging from interpersonal or generational abuse or addiction to gang violence and murder to the perennial concerns of conservative culture warriors—homosexuality, abortion, and 'idolatry' (a category encompassing all non-conservative evangelical forms of religiosity) (O'Donnell 2017, 2021b). Similarly, as the size of the territory under spiritual rule grew larger, so too would it require more tightly networked spiritual entities. Whereas a person or family might be tormented by a single demon—for example, a spirit of lust, violence, or addiction—cities, nations, and continents were seen as enthralled by complex and interwoven hierarchies of demonic forces, including both generic spirits of sins and 'named' demons (such as Leviathan, Jezebel, or Baal), culminating in Satan himself. The goal of spiritual mapping as a practice was to discern the identity of demonic forces and subsequently overthrow them through a blend of 'militant' prayer and social and political activism, thereby transforming the area into one governed by God's rule.

It is in this commitment to territorial transformation that spiritual mapping reveals both its roots in Cold War bipolarity and its deeper history within American ideologies of Manifest Destiny and broader frameworks of settler colonialism. First emerging in the mid-1980s and proliferating in the build-up to the millennium, spiritual mapping conceptualised the world as divided along binary spiritual—and ideological—lines. The spiritual ruler of a territory was understood as conditioning everything within it, shaping cultural and political norms, the shape and operations of institutions, and the individual lifeworlds of inhabitants. Everything—from regional politics and architecture to folklore, folk art, and behavioural norms—was seen as emanating from the spiritual ruler. During missionary work, evangelists would analyse these elements, dissecting street art or the prominence of buildings and monuments to work backwards to the identity of the ruling power. For example, street art of syncretistic Catholic saints Santa Muerte or San La Muerte might indicate the presence of a spirit of death while sexual artwork or the presence of red-light districts that of a spirit of lust. Conceptualising the world in totalising ideological terms, spiritual warriors view these powers as creating and constraining regional cultures. By dethroning them through works and prayer, they open the way for rapid, widespread evangelisation. In versions influenced by the prosperity gospel, the new supremacy of the divine is further assumed to bring material wealth (Adelakun 2022).

Spiritual warfare's territorial focus is apparent in the missionary concept of the '10/40 Horizon,' which gained considerable traction in NAR circles during the 1990s. Situated between the tenth and fortieth lines of latitude, the 10/40 Horizon was a missionary classification encompassing nations from the Middle East and North Africa all the way to East Asia, complementing existing missionary investment in Central and South America. These were regions where evangelical Christianity was considered numerically weak and thus to be 'strongholds' of powerful demonic forces (here, non-evangelical traditions like Islam, Catholicism, Hinduism, Confucianism, Shinto). These forces had to be discerned and dethroned to enable evangelisation, ideally prior to the year 2000. As noted, this focus on territorial conversion gives spiritual warfare a postmillennialist impression, one that unlike the premillennialism found in fundamentalist circles more broadly emphasises the gradual building of God's kingdom on earth at the climax of which Christ returns as the keystone of a perfected world. Indeed, major elements of the NAR rely on such frameworks. Yet the reality on the ground is more complex. Premillennialist narratives of imminent apocalypse abound in spiritual warfare texts, both overtly and subtly, while spiritual warriors themselves often overlap with wider survivalist and conspiracist circles. While these two paradigms might initially seem at odds, the territorialised rubric of spiritual warfare itself sutures them through its emphasis on dominion.

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Asserting Dominion, Foreign and Domestic

In her book on Christian Reconstructionism, Julie Ingersoll (2015) demonstrates the complex ways in which ideas of dominion work to suture pre- and post-millennialist paradigms in US evangelicalism today, uniting them under a rubric of preparedness. As she relates, pre- and postmillennialist anticipations become filtered through dominion theology so that the capture and conversion of territory and institutions is seen as both groundwork for an imminent catastrophe (secular and/or supernatural) and as preparation for either widespread religious revival or a bastion of security against a coming Antichrist kingdom. Spiritual warfare is part of this dominion-infused milieu: the discernment and dethroning of demons acts as strategic preparation for the coming crisis, allowing believers to be fully ready to either capitalise on or endure it. At the same time, spiritual warfare inherits an older relationship between demonology and dominion. As Renaissance scholar Armando Maggi notes in an exploration of symmetries between early modern and contemporary exorcism practices, the exorcist's capacity to command (and excise) the demonic was traditionally rooted in the dominion over the earth that Adam was given in Eden, subsequently lost to Satan in the Fall and which was ostensibly restored by Jesus's crucifixion (Maggi 2014). The vanquishing of demons here functions as a restoration of 'proper' time and space, a 'taking back' of territory from its diabolic usurpers and the reinstatement of a prelapsarian (and postapocalyptic) eternity over fallen time. Leveraging ideas of dominion, practitioners of spiritual warfare transcend normative pre/postmillennialist divisions of apocalypticism. They adapt to religious and sociopolitical contexts, heightening the stakes and tensions by rendering believers active participants in a territorialised struggle over the future—whether in an attempt to expand God's kingdom on earth or to capture and safeguard national and domestic spaces in preparation for a coming End-Times struggle.

Within third-wave evangelicalism, however, this apocalyptic framing of demonology and dominion became inextricable from both the Cold War context of its formation and older US constructions of Manifest Destiny and Christian nationalism. In his history of the spiritual mapping movement 1989–2005, René Holvast (2008) links the latter strongly to America's Cold War political imaginary. Like the image of Cold War bipolarity, spiritual mapping divided the earth into two opposing forces who vied for territorial and ideological control. Nor was there any confusion about which side in this conflict the United States stood for. Regions under demonic control were conceptualised as being in spiritual chains, weighed down by the darkness of their own sins and by the demonic agents who reinforced these sins. They required intervention and liberation. From their bases in the continental United States, spiritual warriors coordinated global speaking tours by prominent evangelists, leadership training programmes, and active missionary networks to effect this liberation. Prominent individuals in global spiritual warfare networks were either American or trained in or financed by American networks. The continental United States became, implicitly or explicitly, the spiritual and political centre for a global assault on the forces of evil that would win the hearts and minds of people, releasing them to a freedom that was at once that of both Jesus and America.

For Holvast, this vision of freedom linked spiritual mapping to older notions of Manifest Destiny. Manifest Destiny has its origins in America's nineteenth-century westward expansion, where it referred to a tripartite belief that held that (1) the unique virtues of the American people and its institutions that gave them (2) an irresistible destiny to accomplish (3) the redemption and remaking of the American West in the image of the agrarian Eastern United States. The concept became a founding principle of American imperial projects, in and beyond the continental United States, galvanising wider notions of US

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exceptionalism and empire-building. Visions of spiritual warfare have long been central to Manifest Destiny, as its notions of territorial redemption often drew upon its language to frame Indigenous Americans as diabolic agents, their souls in need of salvation and their lands in need of settlement. The endurance of this rhetoric is readily discernible in spiritual warfare today, with writers continuing to cast Indigenous lifeways as diabolic in origin (O'Donnell 2021b), while Manifest Destiny's concept's expansion to overseas imperial projects can be readily discerned in spiritual warfare framings of spaces outside the United States itself.

A notable example here is Japan, which came to prominence as a missionary target by Wagner and others in the 1990s due to its marginal Christian population. NAR discourse about Japan in this period typifies themes of militarisation, occupation, and conversion, literally and metaphorically. For writers like Wagner, Japan's history—especially its empire—was a product of its governance by demonic forces, identified with spiritual beings from Shinto—forces whose power was broken by the nation's 1945–1952 US occupation. The occupation is heralded as (re)introducing Christianity following its expulsion in the 1600s, thereby causing Japan's post-war economic boom. Christianity, American influence, and capitalist prosperity here intertwine through the lens of spiritual warfare, with later events such as the collapse of the 1991 Bubble economy and the 2012 '3/11' Tohoku nuclear disaster being accredited to a return to Shinto. Framing Japan's economic decline as due to the influence of demons, NAR figures such as Wagner conducted speaking tours of the nation and contributed to domestic revival movements (O'Donnell 2019a). These tours combined militarised prayer with imagery of Japan's earlier defeat, as Cindy Jacobs casts Wagner as akin to the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, praying "that Peter would be used like a bomb in the Spirit to break apart the darkness" (Jacobs 2009, 111). These examples make the assumed homology between divine and US power especially apparent, highlighting America's long history of Christian nationalism and the influence of Cold War bipolarity, casting America as the force of Christianity, freedom, and goodness against the threatening spectre of an evil empire.

At the same time as prayer warriors like Jacobs and Wagner were projecting divine power abroad, however, both they and other spiritual warriors were increasingly concerned with transformations in the US domestic landscape, where spiritual warriors framed the ongoing culture wars in cosmic terms. The US culture wars, which rose to political prominence in the 1990s, centred on a variety of polarising political issues that dominated the media landscape of post-Cold War America, such as abortion, church-state separation, drug use, homosexuality, gun ownership, and the censorious threat of "political correctness" (Hartman 2015). For conservative evangelicals, and especially for spiritual warriors, this polarisation came to figure a demonic assault on the fabric of the nation. Drawing on the long history of American anti-urbanism (Conn 2014), which positioned cities as spaces of decadence, sexual promiscuity, and interracial and intercultural hybridity against a presumed-homogenous rural heartland, it was the cities that were framed as the front line of this assault. Demonic forces were positioned as acting through municipal governments to shape urban areas according to their sinful ends, promoting cultures of financial greed, multicultural and multireligious pluralism, and new gender and sexual norms that threatened to bring about the end of American prosperity. These narratives of demonologically-engineered decline then fed into premillennialist anxieties of US declension and imminent apocalypse, while also galvanising prayer campaigns to dethrone regnant spirits, cleanse sin, and reassert dominion over urban landscapes.

Of the demonic figures who gained prominence in spiritual warfare texts at this time, the spirit of Jezebel was among the most ubiquitous. Adapted from the biblical narrative of 1 and 2 Kings, where she is a

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Canaanite princess who marries the Israelite king and leads the people into Baal worship, and a symbolic recurrence in Revelation 2:20, the figure of Jezebel came to index intertwined threats of femininity, foreignness, and idolatry for conservative culture warriors in the 1990s (Quinby 1999). In spiritual warfare discourses, Jezebel transcends her biblical role to become a demonic principality, one who drew substantial attention not simply among third-wave authors—for whom she was an especially powerful demonic entity—but for other spiritual warfare authors like Francis Frangipane in his 1995 *The Jezebel Spirit* and John Paul Jackson in the 1999 *The Veiled Ploy*, in which she comes to represent a general figure of demonic feminine corruption and the undermining of (often explicitly masculine) authority. Associated with phenomena ranging from feminism and reproductive and LGBT+ rights to globalisation, the international drug trade, and 'illegitimate' authority more broadly, Jezebel personified the shifting of boundaries around the normative family and the US nation (O'Donnell 2017, 2021b). During the 1990s, these changes came to be particularly associated with the 1993–2001 presidency of Bill Clinton, especially the prominent public role of his wife, Hillary Rodham Clinton, who was associated with Jezebel both during the nineties and in her 2015–2016 presidential run against Donald Trump (O'Donnell 2020, 2021b). Whether seen as embodied in specific individuals or as a more nebulous force hanging over the nation, Jezebel represented an apocalyptic threat to American life, one whose demonic reign was hastening US moral decline and who thus had to be both guarded against and dethroned and replaced, spiritually and politically, if the nation was to evade divine judgement.

Spiritualising a Clash of Civilisations: Spiritual Warfare Before and After 9/11

Prior to the year 2000, spiritual warriors' struggle for dominion in both domestic and international spheres was one that took place against a legion of variegated demonic entities, whether Jezebel or a host of non-evangelical religious figures like Catholic saints or Shinto deities. Faced with a mass of different demonised figures abroad and a perceived decline in 'Christian values' at home, spiritual warriors' concept of dominion allowed them to mediate pre- and postmillennialist strands, between a need to expand divine (and US) influence globally while securing the homeland from diabolical subversion (O'Donnell 2019b). This dual push between expansion and securitisation would come to characterise much of spiritual warfare in the post-Cold War era and is dramatically rendered in the growth of apocalyptic narratives around 'Islam' at this time. As one of the core religions located in the '10/40 Window,' Islam was ever-present in third-wave missionary discourses, being presented as an especially potent bastion of demonic threat. While space was also given over to other non-evangelical traditions, Islam came to hold particular prominence—one which was only magnified after the attacks on the World Trade Center on 11 September 2001 and the launch of America's Global War on Terror (GWOT). These events would signal not only a growing focus on Islam within parts of the spiritual warfare milieu, but also subtle changes to the imaginaries of spiritual warfare itself.

Among the earliest dedicated works on 'Islam' in spiritual warfare was George Otis's 1991 *The Last of the Giants*, which framed Islam as the religion that would fulfil the apocalyptic role of Antichrist's one-world religion (a staple of evangelical apocalyptic prophesies). This trend continued through the 1990s, both in spiritual warfare writings like that of Iranian-born American evangelical Reza Safa's 1996 *Inside Islam*, and in evangelical literature more broadly. This trend would only intensify with the onset of the US-led War on Terror, which became framed in spiritual warfare literature as a war against 'Islam' as demonic principality.

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Works such as Ralph Stice's 2005 *From 9/11 to 666*, Robert Livingstone's 2004 *Christianity and Islam: The Final Clash*, and Safa's own 2004 *The Rise and Fall of Islam* fed off rising Islamophobia in US society to further apocalyptic and evangelising agendas, casting Islam and Muslims as existential threats to Christianity and the United States itself. Such texts joined a desire for evangelisation with one for homeland security. While authors such as Safa continued to push a need to missionary and media evangelisation that might convert (and thereby destabilise) Muslim-majority countries from the inside, others were increasingly concerned with a Muslim takeover of America. In a particularly dramatic example, *From 9/11 to 666* opens with a chapter-length fictionalised rendition of a Muslim Antichrist's takeover of America in 2017, where—backed by the United Nations and acting as head of an "Islamic-European union" (Stice 2005, 14)—he oversees a transfer of US power to Islamic clerics and 'sharia law,' cuts executive pay, institutes a 20% flat tax, and moves the sabbath to Friday: assaults on American freedoms and industry that pave the way for his subsequent totalitarian regime and the resultant End Times.

Much like post-9/11 US culture witnessed a boom in popular, policy, and academic literature that purported to 'explain' the religion of Islam and phenomena such as 'jihadism,' so did evangelical literature, including that of spiritual warfare. This work exemplified the quasi-anthropological elements in spiritual warfare broadly, with 'ex-Muslim' evangelicals and those from majority-Muslim nations functioning as 'insider' sources, while others touted extensive missionary work as giving them privileged knowledge (O'Donnell 2021b). For those lacking this narrative of expertise, strategic quotations from the Qur'an and hadiths as well as Islamist political writings have been used to support claims. The goal, however, was always to establish 'Islam' as the final threat of Christianity, discerning its allegedly 'demonic' essence so that it might be dethroned from those regions it was seen to rule. In addition to GWOT-era Islamophobia, these narratives often drew on wider secular narratives of a coming "clash of civilisations" popularised in 1993 by political scientist Samuel P. Huntington, although here cast in fated and familial tones as the coming clash became recast as the result of an ancient biblical sibling rivalry between Isaac (representing Jews and Christians) and Ishmael (representing Muslims) (O'Donnell 2021b). Eliding the long, complex history of interaction, tension, and cohabitation between the traditions and their adherents, spiritual warfare authors preferred to read contemporary geopolitics as merely the latest iteration of an immemorial apocalyptic struggle between good and evil, chosen and unchosen. This vision of spiritual-civilisational clash then fed into the adoption of other reactionary anxieties over the growth of the Muslim population in 'the West' and the erosion of 'Judeo-Christian' culture. Fears of the demographic 'replacement' of (white) Christians by racialised Muslims, the influence of Saudi finance, the institutional infiltration by organisations like the Muslim Brotherhood, and the conversion rates of African Americans—all parts of non-spiritual warfare Islamophobic narratives—merged with specifically apocalyptic and demonological fears of an Islamic "Antichrist spirit" and other dark principalities manipulating global affairs (O'Donnell 2018, 2021b).

At the same time as it was absorbing and recontextualising ascendant Islamophobic currents, much as third wave spiritual warriors had drawn on a (post-)Cold War framing in their model of warring ideological and spiritual territories, authors during this period began to adapt the War on Terror's paradigms of warfare to their models of spiritual reality—a trend that substantially outlasted the war's initial phases under the George W. Bush presidency. Sometimes these adaptations were literal. Spiritual warfare author David Hayes, who gained prominence in the Trump era for involvement in the viral QAnon conspiracy movement under the nom de plume Praying Medic, published *American Sniper: Lessons in Spiritual Warfare* in 2015, which used a close reading of the movie about Iraq War veteran "deadliest marksman" Chris Kyle, *American Sniper* (2014, dir. Clint Eastwood), to introduce and teach the tenets of spiritual

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warfare to his readers. Other authors drew broader comparisons: Ray Pritchard's 2007 *Stealth Attack* compared demons' attacks on believers to those against the United States on 9/11, while Linda Rios Brook's 2012 *Lucifer's War* analogised spiritual warfare's battle over physical and ideological territory to the conflict with the Taliban in Afghanistan. Texts like these rested on the same implicit analogies between divine and American power that prevailed in earlier writings. Still other authors refigured the demonic itself through a lens of terrorist attacks and asymmetric warfare. In addition to controlling geographical territories, demons were recast as terrorist cells intent on destabilising omnipresent divine authority. In his wide-reaching 2014 *101 Answers to Questions about Satan, Demons, and Spiritual Warfare*, prominent evangelical author Mark Hitchcock reimagines demonic activity as modelled on asymmetric warfare, where the goal was not only or primarily to win and control territory—as they were contingent beings, and spiritually and militarily weaker than their angelic opponents—but rather to deploy a diversity of tactics to exhaust believers (and, by proxy, the United States) into withdrawing from the spiritual battlefield.

In its renewed emphasis on Islam—often in opposition to a perceived 'Judeo-Christian' culture—and its adoption of GWOT-models of conflict, post-9/11 spiritual warfare cemented its location within broader Euro-American reactionary networks and synergies with US exceptionalism and empire-building. Blurring images of post-Cold War American unipolarity where the United States remained sole superpower with the omnipresence of God's power, spiritual warriors cast the demonic less as a vast evil empire (although this remained) than a series of embattled cells caught within a global totality of divine/American omnipotence. Whether projected onto Islam and Muslims directly or simply reconfigured as 'terrorists' (coded as Muslim in post-9/11 US culture), demons reflected shifts in the spiritual warfare imaginary that nonetheless retained apocalyptic continuities with what came before. This new model exemplified and modified the earlier dichotomy in spiritual warfare between securitisation and expansion, between a post-millennialist drive to instate the kingdom on earth through the vanquishing of a demonic other and a pre-millennialist desire to ensure the bodily integrity of the 'Christian nation' as refuge for the coming tribulation. Both would continue building prominence through the 2010s, with the latter playing a critical role in spiritual warfare's adaptations to the Trump era.

Spiritual Warfare in the Trump Era

The relation of President Donald Trump to the wider evangelical movement has been the subject of numerous studies and analyses. Trump's share of the white evangelical vote in 2016, 80–16 percent, surpassed even that accrued by Bush when they voted for him by an overwhelming 76–21 percent in 2004. In the years since, this turnout has sparked reassessments of white evangelicals which explore the latter's investment in systems of power rather than their stated principles (Whitehead and Perry 2020; Butler 2021; Stewart 2022). Part of this reassessment requires situating Trump's campaign and presidency in a history of evangelical declension narratives. Trump's campaign to Make America Great Again drew heavily—if in semi-secularised form—on evangelical narratives that warned of the nation's growing sin and pushed for urgent course correction if America was to evade divine judgement. Spiritual warriors, partially bolstered by the evangelising efforts of figures like Trump's personal spiritual adviser Paula White, cleaved to these narratives, while also positioning the Trump presidency as a chance for religious revival. Filtered through contrasting apocalyptic visions that prophesied revival or ruin for the nation, Trump's unexpected 2016 victory was cast as a sign of divine intervention. Recalling spiritualised culture war narratives, his victory over Hillary Clinton was quickly lauded by several as dethroning a "spirit of Jezebel" that had

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reigned over the nation since the 1990s, one which paved the way for the restoration of America as a 'Christian nation' (O'Donnell 2020). Indeed, as dominionism acted to bridge the gap between pre- and post-millennialist strands of apocalypticism, Christian nationalism emerged under Trump as fertile soil for growing ties between more mainline evangelicals and Pentecostal and Charismatic groups. The language of spiritual warfare played a role here, bolstering imaginaries around the securing of the American homeland as a Christian nation and of the rebirth of American global power as a locus of worldwide revivalism (O'Donnell 2020, 2021b).

Yet at the same time as they consolidated under his banner, many remained ambivalent on Trump himself. In an analogy that became widespread, Texas-based evangelical spiritual warrior Lance Wallnau proposed in his 2016 *God's Chaos Candidate* that Trump should be compared to the Persian king, Cyrus, a pagan ruler who God used to liberate the Jewish people from captivity in Babylon. In this analogy, Trump becomes a (potential) non-believer being used by God for providential ends: the liberation of a 'chosen people' (here, evangelicals) from their captivity in an American Babylon (O'Donnell 2021a). Trump's presidency here became seen as divine not due to Trump's identity but due to his power and potential—something that had to be carefully managed. Some prominent spiritual warriors like Cindy Jacobs, Wallnau, and others formed POTUS Shield—here, Prophetic Order of the United States—to wage spiritual warfare and erect a spiritual barrier around the president to safeguard him from demonic influence. Indeed, the machinations of demonic forces angry at Trump's providential victory have been called on by spiritual warriors to explain and demonise surges of popular protest, from the 2017 Women's March to the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests sparked by the murder of George Floyd. At the same time, pre-existing spiritual warfare concepts of demons working through structures and networks synergised more directly with conspiratorial discourses, including those around QAnon and the threatening image of the 'deep state' (O'Donnell 2020; 2021b).

QAnon, a viral conspiracy theory originating on anonymous internet image board 4chan, became a much-discussed topic of the Trump era. Combining elements from the Satanic Panic with broader evangelical conspiracies about a coming New World Order, QAnon purported that Trump was embroiled in a secret war against a 'deep state' of Satanic 'globalists' (politicians, financiers, actors, and celebrities) who ritually sacrificed children to achieve unnatural longevity. Beyond the direct involvement of spiritual warriors like the aforementioned David Hayes, QAnon drew heavily on the language of US religious revival and spiritual warfare. Using overlapping spiritual and conspiracist registers, adherents cast themselves as engaged in a spiritual struggle between good and evil culminating in a 'Great Awakening' that would radically transform the soul of the nation. Also known as 'the Storm,' this event was apocalyptic in framing, signalling an imminent moment in which justice would be meted out to the wicked and the righteous would be vindicated and live in a nation purified of evil. Critically, while it leveraged religious tropes, the Storm itself was almost entirely secular: the justice meted out was enabled not (directly) by God but by the president, judges, law enforcement, and private citizens, with the wicked being punished by either incarceration or execution. In its blend of secular and religious, QAnon shows the ambiguity and slippage between the two categories, particularly in the context of an apocalypticism whose vision of judgement is fundamentally this-worldly. At the same time, its focus on Trump highlighted the authoritarian elements in evangelical subculture, framing the president as primary (or sole) bulwark against diabolic forces they saw manifested in the complex bureaucratic systems of US governance.

These immanent and imminent apocalypticisms came to be on particularly forcibly display at the close of

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the Trump presidency, also highlighting emerging alliances between reactionary Catholics and Protestants. Scholars and journalists have noted the Christian nationalism that underwrote the 6 January 2021 insurrection; however, less commented on was an event occurring a month prior: the 'Jericho March' on Washington, DC, on 12 December 2020. Led by conservative evangelical figures such as Eric Metaxas and Ali Alexander and former White House staffers like Mike Flynn, the event united conservative charismatic evangelicals, Catholics, Jews, and Orthodox practitioners around the slogan "Stop the Steal"—the claim Trump had won the 2020 election and Biden was usurping the presidency. Deploying strategies of spiritual warfare, attendants were led in collective forms of militant prayer against the demonic forces of the 'deep state,' hoping to bring down the walls of the demonic 'stronghold' of Washington, DC, and so guarantee Trump's allegedly God-given victory. While more passive and restrained than 6 January, the Jericho March operated on similar principles, declaring the illegitimacy of the electoral process and calling for intervention against nefarious (here, literally demonic) forces to avert catastrophe and ensure that the spiritual and spatial territory of America remained in the 'proper' (divine) hands.

Conclusion

Over the last thirty years, spiritual warfare has emerged as a key component in the contemporary American evangelical milieu. Comprised of a diverse if overlapping range of texts, individuals, and networks, spiritual warfare has synergised with other elements in evangelical culture (e.g., pre- and post-millennialism, dominionism, and the prosperity gospel) and those of wider right-wing and reactionary movements (e.g., fears of demographic and cultural 'replacement,' border security, Islamophobia, broader conspiracism). The confluence of these dimensions has led to a gradual evolution of spiritual warfare, particularly in relation to its apocalyptic elements. Conceptualised in the crucible of the Cold War, the movement began with a model of both binary territoriality—dividing the earth into territories of light and dark, good and evil, God and devil—and, with the Cold War's end, a dominionistic expansionism by which divine (and US) power might encompass the globe. Enduring resistance to evangelisation, the culture wars of the 1990s, and later the events of 9/11 and its aftermath, complicated this paradigm. On the one hand, models of spiritual territory shifted to encompass new models of warfare more in keeping with US unipolarity, with demons and their human agents becoming rendered as 'terrorists' in regional cells battling futilely against omnipotent and omnipresent force. On the other, the American heartland became seen as under threat by domestic and foreign agents: feminists, queer and trans folk, Muslims, immigrants, and others who implicitly or explicitly challenged the supremacy of a white conservative evangelicalism. Spiritual warfare thus mirrored the broader political trajectory of expansion and securitisation, the extension of frontiers marked by an awareness of fragility. Spiritual warfare in the Trump era was galvanised by this sense of fragility, with the 45th president becoming the figurehead of a push for religious revival at home and abroad that might lay groundwork for the kingdom while staving off imminent apocalypse. The demonic was, again, central to this imaginary, acting through figures like the 'deep state' and movements for racial justice and reproductive rights that challenged the spiritual warriors' vision for the nation. Taken collectively, the journey of spiritual warfare and its apocalyptic elements since 1989 has been profoundly reactionary—not just politically, but in how the movement has reacted to shifting circumstances, political movements, and models of warfare, adapting and incorporating them into its pre-existing demonologies. This is a trend that is likely to continue for the foreseeable future.

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