Frederic C. Rich, author of "Christian Nation," is a partner at a law firm based in New York and understands many of the legal issues of an evangelical coup.

Christian Nation
By Frederic C. Rich

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"I'm not like you," Greg, the narrator of Frederic C. Rich's new novel, tells his best friend, Sanjay. "I am not a person of passion. I'm practical. I have made choices in life. I chose to pursue a career in the law. I chose to try to make partner." Although what Sanjay has just said "was awesome, really scary stuff," everything inside Greg, everything he knows about the world and how it works, tells him the same thing: "You're wrong because it can't happen here. It's America in the twenty-first century and it cannot happen here."

It can, of course, and in "Christian Nation," it will. Taking as his models Sinclair Lewis' "It Can't Happen Here" and Philip Roth's "The Plot Against America," Rich, a partner at a law firm in New York, presents a narrative about a takeover of the U.S. government by fundamentalist Christians that begins with a victory by John McCain and Sarah Palin in the election of 2008.

Anticipating criticism that he "overstates the influence of the dominionist and reconstructionist theologies within the evangelical movement," Rich indicates in an Afterword that his novel is not a prediction but a warning "that such an outcome is possible." Because it would be so catastrophic, Rich believes the possibility "demands our vigilant attention."

To make its case that Americans might accept a law called "The Blessings," with 50 specifications, including a provision that denying the existence of God constitutes treason, "Christian Nation" draws on polling data about the actual beliefs of Americans, statements actually made by evangelicals, and Rich's sophisticated understanding of the U.S. Constitution. Article III of the Constitution, he reminds us, permits Congress to make exceptions to the Supreme Court's appellate jurisdiction, which provides an opening to zealots trying to prevent federal courts from deciding cases related to abortion or gay rights.

**Straining credulity**

In 2003, Rich reveals, 78 percent of Americans objected to the removal of the 5,000-pound granite
monument of the Ten Commandments Alabama Judge Roy Moore installed in his courtroom. In 2011, six secessionist organizations were active in the state of Texas, some of them inconsequential, but others laying out sophisticated philosophical arguments.

Designed as a tract for our times, "Christian Nation" is not all that "novelistic." The narrative is, well, preachy, and the characters are mouthpieces for a point of view. Emilie, Greg's wife, is a stand-in for social climbing. Presented to us as a font of wisdom, Sanjay has a predilection for sermons that seem pretty darned obvious. His advice to Greg about corporate law is typical: "You are a fine person. But you will be at the heart of Wall Street. It is a culture that does not merely accept self-interest but celebrates it. There is a tendency toward grasping and shallowness that is endemic. There is striving always and, I fear, much disappointment. Such a place could change a person." And Greg keeps reminding us that evangelical Christianity is "a form of brain-washing that completely undermined the role of rational argument that lies at the heart of democracy. This, more than anything else, laid the groundwork for the totalitarianism that would follow."

Rich's scenario strains credulity. After the "Secular Bloc," led by Michael Bloomberg, the governor of New York State, (in effect) secedes, Rich writes, "somehow goods moved around, energy sources remained reliable, consumers consumed, employment stabilized, and the impact on ordinary families was far less" than Greg and Sanjay had predicted. What about the stock market, one wonders? What about international corporations? Wouldn't the economy have collapsed amid a Civil War - and wouldn't the political party in power pay a price for it?

Setting aside desire

Recent developments, moreover, may well cast doubts about whether "it" is likely to happen here. White evangelical males are declining relative to other groups in the United States. Even more important, support for gay rights, the principal obsession of the fire-eaters in "Christian Nation," is growing rapidly.

Having been forced to watch his friend be stoned to death, put in solitary confinement, tortured and brainwashed, Greg is asked by a colleague whether he hates the Holies. "I do not hate them," he says. "Socrates, I think, said that deep desire is the root of all hate. And I desire nothing. ... I can hear Sanjay saying, as he often did, that only by setting aside desire can we find freedom. ... I wish he were here to talk to." It is a sentiment unlikely to be shared by his readers.
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