

# BATTLE CRIES

A watercolor illustration depicting a scene of grooming or preparation. A woman with red hair, wearing a yellow dress over a white shirt, is using a straight razor on a man lying down. The man is wearing a blue shirt and a red vest. Blood is visible on the man's head and the woman's dress. In the background, there is a tree with red fruit. Two children are watching from the left.

DANNY HOUK



*The Sow and the Sower*



*Milgram's Progress*



*Between Me and God*

## INTRODUCTION

***Battle Cries*** is a triptych of panoramic mixed-media artworks composed of images and words inspired by 35 years of being in American Christian churches. The title refers both to the seemingly ubiquitous political and culture wars waged by Christians in the name of God and my lament over the never-ending harms that result from those wars. The triptych is a visual onslaught held together by dream logic, although each panel puts forward distinct themes and has separate subtitles, which are *The Sow and Sower*, *Milgram's Progress*, and *Between Me and God*.

I followed my intuition in selecting images or subject matter and improvised where they went and how they'd be rendered. I don't have a satisfying rationale for why each motif received the medium that it did. Sometimes my choice was compositional (matching colors or material for balance), sometimes it was for a certain connotation (like referencing classical motifs with similarly classical methods of pen and ink or making a child-like image in colored pencil), and sometimes it was due to technical capacity (like using an image transfer technique to get the most faithful reproduction possible). Sometimes my visual statements would be angsty, melancholy, hopeful, or introspective and I'd choose the motif and media in the moment based on my emotional state. Other times my process would trigger a memory, leading me to introduce something autobiographical.

Throughout the Bible, there are many stories of people receiving revelations from God in the form a dream, and someone else, usually a prophet or mystic, must interpret the dream. Similarly, I'm putting my vision, or fever dream, on display and leaving it to the viewer to interpret. Although this zine offers extra context and details, I don't claim authority over the interpretations. Most of my creative decision-making happened intuitively, meaning I would insert images without a conscious intent to make a specific statement or dictate how viewers should think about it. By trusting my subconscious, I was able to be surprised by what happened on the paper and hopefully to also give viewers a more rewarding visual experience than if I had orchestrated the scenes in more didactic or overtly ideological ways.

I believe an artist's job is to look thoughtfully, critically, and emotionally at the world and share what they see—no matter how biased, bleak, or beautiful. When it comes to what I conceive of as the “sin in the system” of Christian nationalism, disparate groups of people must identify and agree about evils before collectively working to reform or reimagine them. I identify these evils

as ostracizing LGBTQIA+ communities, abusing power and covering it up to protect the powerful, legislating and imposing Christian doctrines onto society, and coddling white supremacists, to name a few. These harms are enabled both by “centrist” Christian leaders who gain and organize power, ultimately reinforcing an unjust status quo, as well as more extremist actors who are outright fascistic in the practice of their faith.

Thankfully, there are other contingents of Christians in America who affirm LGBTQIA+ identities as good and beautiful, work for gender equality, acknowledge racial inequities and work to repair their harms, engage in grassroots efforts to feed the hungry, shelter people experiencing homelessness, and provide healthcare to all. Granted, these people are currently a minority, but they take Jesus' command seriously to “love God and love your neighbor as you love yourself.”

While this zine shares context and insights, I hope viewers witness the work through the lens of their own experience to draw their own meanings.

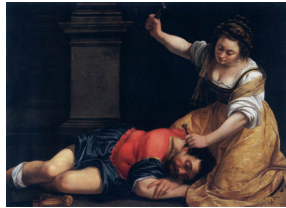
# ART HISTORY

Artists are always in dialogue with other artists both past and present. These are a few art historical references you might find.



**John Martin**

*The Destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah*  
(1852), oil paint on canvas

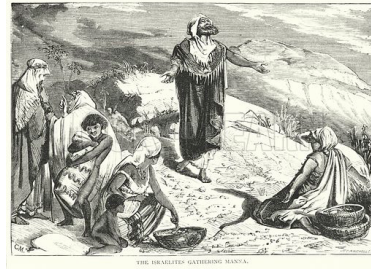


**Artemisia Gentileschi**

*Jael and Sisera* (1620),  
oil paint on canvas

*Jael . . . picked up a tent peg  
and a hammer and went quietly  
to him while he lay fast asleep,  
exhausted. She drove the peg  
through [Sisera's] temple into  
the ground, and he died.*

*Judges 4:21 (NIV)*



**Artist Unknown**

*The Israelites gathering Manna*  
Illustration for Little Folks (Cassell  
Petter & Galpin), Vol III, c 1876.



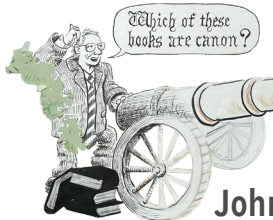
**Chris Burden**

*Trans-Fixed* (took place April 23,  
1974) photo of performance



# PASTORS GONE WILD

There are great many good pastors in the world. But it's my belief that unchecked power will corrupt any person no matter their moral standards and good intentions. So, Christian pastors who become celebrities, live luxuriously earning millions of dollars a year, seek power without accountability, or exploit their position to silence victims of abuse quite possible cause the most harm in God's name. The prominent pastors I reference were ones I listened to at some point in my life but who would do the most good by stepping down from authority. These men often think of themselves as more important than others, when in reality they lack the color, depth, and distinctiveness of the people they serve.



**John Piper**



**Mark Driscoll**



**James Dobson**



**Nathaniel Jolly**



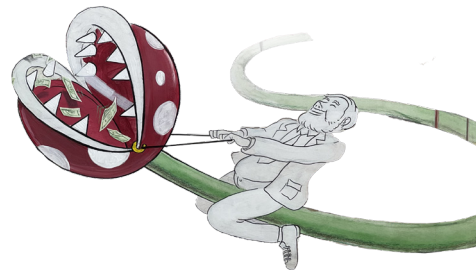
**John MacArthur**



**Andy Savage**



**Jim Bakker**



**Douglas Wilson**

# WHITE CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM

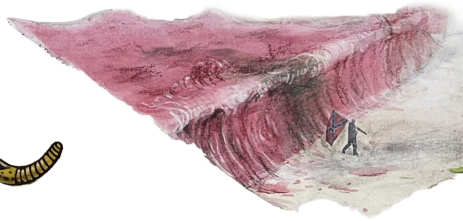
A friend once told me that there isn't Christianity, there are Christianities with diverse doctrines and cultural expressions. I see America's peculiar brand of white Christian nationalism as materially harmful to those oppressed by it and spiritually harmful to its practitioners. These are some of the artwork's references to Christianity's dark legacy in America—many of which continue to this day.



groyper frogs  
(alt-right)



Gadsden flag



Confederate States

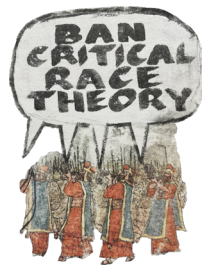


Klu Klux Klan



Republican  
worship

segregationist  
theology



racism denial

# WORD BECAME FLESH

Jesus Christ was poetically described as “the Word became flesh.” In the same spirit, my artwork includes words that take on physical form and consequence. Words are a form of power used for creativity, identity-making, healing/hurting, and foundations for entire religious traditions. Here I want to share more about some of the language-based images found in *Battle Cries*.

## A Calligraphy of Excrement

This excerpt was inspired by one of my favorite poems *Praising Dark Places* by Yusef Komunyakaa. The poem inverts value judgments we often make between light and dark, and ends with the line “To the ground. In this cellular dirt / & calligraphy of excrement / Light is a god-headed / Law & weapon.” This image reminds me that hope is often found in unexpected and repellent places.



## Our Father Who Arts in Heaven

In this play on the line from the Lord's prayer, I've turned *arts* into a verb to position God as a cosmic creator at work anywhere we encounter love and liberation. The phrase sits on the horizon as an aspiration, paradoxically both visible yet out of reach. The barely-visible “arts” is discerned through a rainbow hinting at the epic flood story of Genesis and a beacon of LGBTQIA+ acceptance.

## The Great God Bird

In this vignette, one of my favorite artists Sufjan Stevens sings a line from his song *The Lord God Bird*. It's about the Ivory-Billed Woodpecker (seen perched on the left crucified arm across from him), which was considered extinct until it's been spotted in the past couple of decades. This reminds me of the mysterious and elusive nature of the divine.



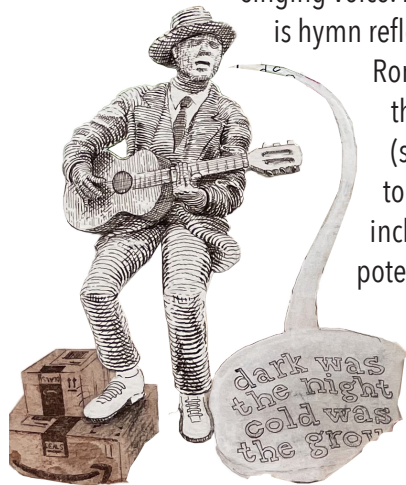
## God is Gay

I've depicted a happy (or, gay) child gripping the balloon strings, elevating them off the ground. The churches I grew up in were not affirming of the LGBTQIA+ community, and it took years to challenge my inherited orthodoxy before arriving at a place where I'm fully affirming of queer identities. My assertion "GOD IS GAY" is provocative against the conservative backdrop of my childhood. To express the way most contemporary churches still condemn LGBTQIA+ people, a pastor rendered in traditional pen and ink shooting bibles at the balloons and pondering, "Which of these books are canon?" The pastor's words are flat, black and white, and in a Gothic style, whereas the child's words are colorful, buoyant, and dimensional.



## Blind Willie Johnson

American music owes everything to the contributions of pioneering black artists in the genres blues, gospel, folk, jazz, rock, and hip hop. Blind Willie Johnson (b. January 25, 1897) was one such pioneer with a distinctive gravelly singing voice. His song *Dark Was the Night, Cold Was the Ground* is hymn reflecting on the day Christ was murdered by the Roman police. The only way Johnson could express that event was through tortured groans and moans (so he never actually "sings" any lyrics, contrary to the image). In 1977, the Voyager space probes included recordings to portray Earth's culture to potential extra-terrestrial life forms. The recordings included the sounds of crickets, volcanoes, a human heartbeat, laughter, greetings in 55 languages, and 27 pieces of music, including Johnson's haunting lament.







Made for Danny Houk's May 2025 MFA thesis exhibition *True Crime*.