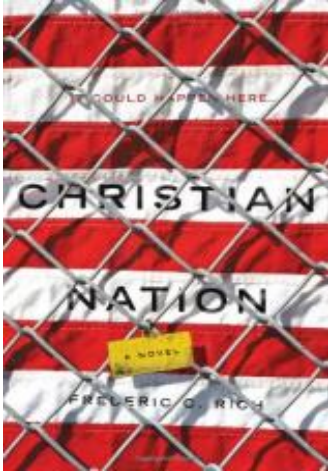


Christian Nation

by Frederic C. Rich



About the Book

So ends the first chapter of this brilliantly readable counterfactual novel, reminding us that America's Christian fundamentalists have been consistently clear about their vision for a "Christian Nation" and dead serious about acquiring the political power to achieve it. When President McCain dies and Sarah Palin becomes president, the reader, along with the nation, stumbles down a terrifyingly credible path toward theocracy, realizing too late that the Christian right meant precisely what it said.

In the spirit of Philip Roth's *THE PLOT AGAINST AMERICA*, one of America's foremost lawyers lays out in chilling detail what such a future might look like: constitutional protections dismantled; all aspects of life dominated by an authoritarian law called "The Blessing," enforced by a totally integrated digital world known as the "Purity Web." Readers will find themselves haunted by the questions the narrator struggles to answer in this fictional memoir: "What happened, why did it happen, how *could* it have happened?"

Discussion Guide

1. How do Greg, Emilie, and Sanjay each react as the country takes small incremental steps toward theocracy? Why are their reactions different? If you were under the same circumstances, do you think you would react more like Greg, Emilie, or Sanjay?
2. Has your view of John McCain's selection of Sarah Palin as his vice presidential candidate changed as a result of reading this book? If McCain/Palin had won and McCain had then died, what do *you* think would have happened to the country under a Palin presidency?

3. In the Christian Nation, authoritarian control is possible largely because web-linked cameras are everywhere and all reading, writing, and other communication are digital --- making privacy or uncensored expression virtually impossible. The technology for this exists now. Does this worry you? Do you think it is a real threat?

4. Greg seems obsessed by the similarities between what happened in Germany in the 1930 s and in America in the period leading up to the Holy War --- mainly economic depression and a shock to national confidence. Do you find the similarities credible? Has something about the world changed since the twentieth century that now makes a populist embrace of fascist-type totalitarianism impossible? Or could it happen again?

5. What do you make of the relationship between Greg and Sanjay?

6. The author says that the public events occurring before election night 2008 are all historically accurate --- such as legislation introduced in Congress seeking to end separation of church and state and allowing churches to use tax- exempt contributions for political activity, the channeling of billions of federal dollars to evangelical organizations, foreign policy decisions being influenced by evangelical beliefs regarding the "end times," a federal ban on vital stem cell research for religious reasons, and U.S. troops being subjected to proselytization by evangelical chaplains. How many of these things were you aware of? If you didn't know about these events, why do you think that is?

7. Do you believe that Greg's memory of what happened is reliable? What parts of his story do you think might be suspect?

8. The long-standing agenda of the Christian right is finally realized with the adoption of "The Blessing." When you read the text of "The Blessing" (pp. 180-85), how much of it do you agree with or disagree with? What about your friends or family who are conservative Christians --- how many of these things do they think should be laws binding on all of us, whatever our religion? Have you ever discussed it with them?

9. Greg writes the memoir in a cabin overlooking a lake. He seems attracted by both water and stone, seeing ripples and reflections in the water. How does this setting affect him, and how does it affect your experience of the story?

10. At the end, Greg is looking out at the Hudson River, and Adam tells him that the Hudson is tidal, a river that flows both ways. Adam says that twice a day a hidden tide comes from the ocean and causes the river to flow upstream. What do you think he means? When Greg says he now understands, what do you think he means?

11. What do you think will happen next? Does the Free Minds movement have a chance? Does Greg have what it takes to be a leader?

Author Bio

Critical Praise

"Could a Sarah Palin presidency spark a faith-based civil war in America? You betcha, according to Rich's debut novel. . . [Rich] shrewdly shows how a few legal measures, a bad recession and a terrorist attack can unravel the liberties many take for granted. In that regard, it's an inheritor to Sinclair Lewis' 1935 novel, IT CAN'T HAPPEN HERE . . . Dystopian, wonkish fun for the Maddow set."

? *Kirkus Reviews*

"In 2029, Greg sits at a simple typewriter, the last vestige of technology not under the government's watchful eyes, to record the series of events that led to the creation of an American theocracy. The systematic transformation is forbidding in its plausibility as each step toward authoritarian rule is heavily documented by Rich's expert legal explanations. The story is given a note of warmth by threads of heroism and friendship. Read as a cautionary tale or a terrifying what-if, this dystopian alternate reality makes riveting, provocative reading."

? *Booklist*

"This riveting novel should join Sinclair Lewis's IT CAN'T HAPPEN IN HERE as an American classic. Rich uses actual proposed and enacted laws to build his fictitious account of 21st century America's descent into theocracy. As Rich so vividly shows, our present politics could lead to his dystopian CHRISTIAN NATION unless all who cherish freedom redouble their commitment to tolerance and democracy. Please, read this book and then pass it on to six other people, making it into a chain letter for liberty."

? Nadine Strossen, Former President, American Civil Liberties Union

"Fred Rich's gripping novel reminds us of two important truths, all too easily forgotten until it is too late: bad economic times create the conditions for extreme political change, and revolutions are achieved by small groups of dedicated activists, often before the rest of society knows what has happened. The current sorry state of our institutions of government—with deadlock and polarized politics in Washington, and our campaign finance system the captive of special interests seeking government favors—makes our democracy all the more vulnerable. Both Republicans and Democrats should read this book."

? Trevor Potter, Former Chairman, Federal Election Commission

"The scariest thing about CHRISTIAN NATION is that it's so plausible. No violent revolution, no blood in the streets, is necessary for Americans to lose their freedoms ? just a failure to defend the liberties that we often take for granted. As Frederic Rich reminds us in this chilling tale, the Religious Right has said what they will do. It's up to us to make sure they don't ever get the chance to do it. Remember, it CAN happen here."

? The Rev. Barry W. Lynn, Executive Director, Americans United for Separation of Church and State

"While others have provided academic and political analysis of some of the dangers at the intersections of religion and

politics in America, Mr. Rich's narrative brings these issues into relational and personal view. His is a compelling and timely parable for our time."

? Rev. Dr. Robert Allan Hill, Professor, New Testament and Pastoral Theology, Boston University

"Rich's CHRISTIAN NATION is more than a 'what if?' as the 'theocratic program' unfolds our usual 'So what??' regarding fundamentalism of any variety becomes the real danger. Pay attention. What's at stake is the heart and soul of American democracy. Philosopher and lawyer Rich has it right: we were not founded as a CHRISTIAN NATION, but fundamentalists ready to take on anything secular and progressive see us as the enemy who deserve to be vanquished."

? The Very Reverend Dr. James A. Kowalski, Dean, The Cathedral Church of Saint John the Divine

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