



The Perils of Christian Nationalism

“Our Christian faith is too expansive to be defined by any national identity—even a nation as beloved as America—and our embrace of American values of equality and inclusion are too profound to privilege any religion, even one as beloved as Christianity.”

— Bishop W. Darin Moore, Presiding Prelate, Mid-Atlantic Episcopal District of the AME Zion Church

“Christian nationalism is the single biggest threat to religious freedom in America.”

— Amanda Tyler , Executive Director, Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Freedom

America’s Promise: Freedom of Religion

The founders ensured our freedom of religion in the First Amendment of the Constitution. They declared that our government cannot establish a religion, and that every religion can be freely exercised (practiced). The First Amendment says that all religions are equal; the government has no favorites. Regardless of where people worship—in a cathedral, mosque, synagogue, church or temple—all religions enjoy the same status and protection in the eyes of the government.

Christian Nationalism is a movement whose followers advocate a particular brand of Christianity, which they believe is superior to other religions.

Key Beliefs of Christian Nationalists

- America is God’s chosen nation.
- America was established as a Christian nation.
- Christianity is woven into the fabric of America.
- Governments should make laws to keep America Christian.
- Christianity should be privileged above other religions.
- Christian symbols should be dominant in public places.

A small minority of Christians, mostly white, hold these beliefs. Some of them decry the waning influence of their views of Christianity in American life and what they see as the increasing persecution of Christians. And some fear being outnumbered by non-white people. Christian nationalism gives extremist groups a license for bigotry and violence. Some politicians exploit its sentiments for political gain. And for others, it is a strong heartfelt conviction.

Transforming and Fighting

Christian nationalists want to transform society by infusing their values and policies into all levels of government. This vision energizes some politicians, who believe they are called—even anointed by God—to promote Christian nationalism. They say that the separation of church and state is an old myth. In their mind, church and state blend together.

Christian nationalists have a crusading mentality. Believing that God is by their side, they feel empowered to fight a cosmic battle between Good and Evil. This sense of Christian superiority may incite some to use violence in the name of God.

Christian Nationalism Threatens Religious Freedom by

- Eroding the principle of the separation of church and state.
- Defying the First Amendment (establishment and free exercise clauses).
- Treating non-Christian religions and their members as second-class.
- Restricting the rights of non-Christian religions.
- Threatening to impose Christian nationalist policies on all U.S. citizens.
- Overturning America’s promise of religious pluralism, justice, and equality.

Which Jesus?

Christian nationalists prize power, domination, and exclusion. Their American-made Jesus is militant, hard nosed, and domineering. He’s a Jesus who carries a sword and attacks his foes. This movement distorts the biblical Jesus and flips the core values of Christian faith upside down. The Jesus of the Gospels rejected nationalism. He refused to retaliate when beaten and nailed to a cross. He preached love for enemies. He blessed peacemakers and urged his followers to love their neighbors as their selves. He emphatically replaced domination with service to others. Jesus invited everyone to the table: Jews and non-Jews, prostitutes and tax collectors, outcasts and religious leaders. All were welcome. Jesus established a global kingdom that goes beyond national boundaries. The God of Jesus has no favorite nation. His sun shines on the evil and the good; his rain falls on the just and unjust. So to whom do we pledge our allegiance? To the “Jesus” of Christian nationalism, or the Jesus of the Gospels?

Protecting America’s Promise

The cost of silence compels us to speak out. We deplore Christian nationalism. Our understanding of Jesus calls us to stand strong for the country we love and for the faith we cherish. We applaud America’s promise to protect religious freedom—so that every faith is treated with dignity and equality.

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Resources:
Statement by prominent national evangelical leaders: “Say ‘No’ to Christian Nationalism”
Statement by Christians Against Christian Nationalism: Christians Against Christian Nationalism statement
Lecture by Professor Greg Carey, Lancaster Theological Seminary: “The Dangers of Christian Nationalism”

