



Faith . Freedom . **For All.**

Testimony of Amanda Tyler,
On behalf of BJC (Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty)

Before the
House Oversight Committee's Subcommittee on Civil Rights and Civil Liberties

Hearing on Confronting White Supremacy (Part 7):
The Evolution of Anti-Democratic Extremist Groups and the Ongoing Threat to Democracy

December 13, 2022

I. Introduction

Good morning. I am Amanda Tyler, executive director of Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty (BJC) and lead organizer of the Christians Against Christian Nationalism campaign. As a faithful Christian and patriotic American, I am honored to be here this morning to offer testimony about the connection between Christian nationalism and white supremacy, why Christian nationalism must be addressed as part of our efforts to confront racism, and why Christians have a special responsibility to address the harms of Christian nationalism, which co-opts Christian imagery and language for something that is not part of our faith.

I am grateful for the leadership of Chair Raskin and Ranking Member Mace in drawing attention to Christian nationalism and reinforcing foundational constitutional principles supporting religious freedom for all. Ranking Member Mace was one of two Republican Members of Congress who submitted a statement to Religion News Service in response to Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene's announcement that the Republican party should become the party of Christian nationalism. Ranking Member Mace helpfully stated: "Our founders designed a nation that explicitly maintains the separation of Church and State, something which should continue to be a guiding principle of our Republic."¹

BJC

For 86 years, BJC has worked to defend and extend God-given faith freedom for all, bringing a uniquely Baptist witness to the principles that religion must be freely exercised, and not be

¹ Jack Jenkins, "Republicans keep mostly mum on calls to make GOP 'party of Christian nationalism'", Religion News Service (Aug. 12, 2022); <https://religionnews.com/2022/08/12/amid-calls-to-become-the-party-of-christian-nationalism-little-republican-pushback/>

advanced or inhibited by the government.² BJC is composed of 15 Baptist organizations and supported by thousands of individuals and Baptist churches across the country. BJC is the only faith-based organization in D.C. that focuses exclusively on legal and policy matters relating to religious freedom and the institutional separation of church and state.

BJC has a consistent record of supporting both of the First Amendment's religion clauses — No Establishment and Free Exercise. BJC chaired the Coalition for the Free Exercise of Religion that pushed for passage of the Religious Freedom Restoration Act of 1993 and the Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act of 2000. Our commitment to religious freedom stems from the historical experiences of early Baptists, who suffered the pain of persecution that resulted from religious fervor coupled with the coercive power of the state.

Christians Against Christian Nationalism

In July 2019, BJC launched Christians Against Christian Nationalism, an ecumenical grassroots campaign of Christians across the United States to oppose the rise of Christian nationalism and its threat to our faith and country.³ “Christian nationalism” as a term was not widely used in 2019 but its influence was felt in the rising violence at houses of worship: Mother Emanuel AME Church in Charleston, South Carolina (2015), Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania (2018); two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand (2019); and Chabad of Poway near San Diego, California (2019). Something in addition to racism or white supremacy appeared to be motivating these attacks, and we knew the religious freedom community needed to respond. The ability to gather with like-minded believers for corporate worship in a church, mosque, or synagogue is the most basic level of religious freedom in a pluralistic democracy. Christian nationalism is a threat to this foundation of religious freedom.

We named the campaign “Christians Against Christian Nationalism” because it was important that the Christian community unequivocally name and oppose this damaging ideology. It is also just as important to say what we are for. Therefore, the core component of the campaign is a statement of principles, and we invite all Americans who profess Christianity to sign it. These unifying principles are:

- People of all faiths and none have the right and responsibility to engage constructively in the public square.
- Patriotism does not require us to minimize our religious convictions.
- One's religious affiliation, or lack thereof, should be irrelevant to one's standing in the civic community.
- Government should not prefer one religion over another or religion over nonreligion.
- Religious instruction is best left to our houses of worship, other religious institutions and families.

² Website of BJC (Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty): <https://bjconline.org/>

³ Website of Christians Against Christian Nationalism: <https://www.christiansagainstchristiannationalism.org/>

- America's historic commitment to religious pluralism enables faith communities to live in civic harmony with one another without sacrificing our theological convictions.
- Conflating religious authority with political authority is idolatrous and often leads to oppression of minority and other marginalized groups as well as the spiritual impoverishment of religion.
- We must stand up to and speak out against Christian nationalism, especially when it inspires acts of violence and intimidation—including vandalism, bomb threats, arson, hate crimes, and attacks on houses of worship—against religious communities at home and abroad.

Our growing grassroots network of more than 30,000 people reflect the vast diversity of Christianity in the United States. We have signers from:

- every congressional district
- rural, urban, and suburban communities
- conservatives, moderates, and progressives
- clergy and lay members
- more than 70 national denominations and hundreds of state and local Christian organizations including Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant (Mainline, Evangelical, and Historically Black).

By demonstrating common ground across the broad Christian family, Christians Against Christian Nationalism serves as a resource for those combating the damaging ideology and those engaging in civil dialogue.

II. What is Christian nationalism?

Religious nationalism is not unique to the United States or Christianity, as I will discuss later in this testimony. But, the expression of religious nationalism in this country is Christian nationalism, and it is harming the foundation of our constitutional system, as well as the health and vitality of the Christian faith. To oppose Christian nationalism is not to oppose Christianity. In fact, a growing number of Christians feel a religious imperative to stand against Christian nationalism.

Christian nationalism is a political ideology and cultural framework that seeks to fuse American and Christian identities. It suggests that “real” Americans are Christians and that “true” Christians hold a particular set of political beliefs. Christian nationalism seeks to create a society where this narrow subset of Americans are privileged in law. In reality, the Gospel is not limited by national borders. A cursory examination of American history reveals that people of many different religious backgrounds have shaped the character of our country.

The “Christian” in Christian nationalism is more about ethno-national identity than religion. Christian nationalism is a gross distortion of the Christian faith I hold dear. Christian nationalism uses the language, symbols, and imagery of Christianity – in fact, it may look and sound like Christianity to the casual observer. However, closer examination reveals that it is using the

veneer of Christianity to point not to Jesus the Christ but to a political figure, party, or ideology. Christian nationalism seeks to manipulate religious devotion into giving unquestioning moral support for its political goals.

Christian nationalism is not patriotism. Patriotism is a healthy love of country that is expressed in countless ways, including military service, voting, running for office, teaching in our country's public schools, wearing an American flag lapel pin, volunteering in the community, and protesting policies with which one disagrees. There are thousands of ways to be patriotic that never even approach the line of nationalism. Nationalism is an allegiance to country that demands supremacy over all other allegiances, including one's faith, family, or friends. When one's patriotism requires one to sacrifice religious convictions, it is not healthy patriotism but rather destructive nationalism.

The myth of a "Christian nation"

Christian nationalism needs a carefully curated, cherry-picked version of American history in order to thrive. While there is no single version of the "Christian nation" myth, its telling is something like this:

The United States was founded as a Christian nation. It is based on Christian principles and has a special role to play in God's plan for humanity. If our leadership or national values stray from traditional Christianity, then God will withdraw his blessings from the country.

The Christian nation myth must downplay or ignore the role of Indigenous communities, Black Americans, immigrant populations, religious minorities, secular Americans, and all others who undercut the narrative that the U.S. is special because it was founded by and for white Christians.⁴ A telling of U.S. history through the lens of the "Christian nation" myth starts with the European "discovery" of North America and omits the Indigenous civilizations that already inhabited the land. It idolizes the Puritans' quest for religious freedom but obscures the religious persecution they perpetrated against those who followed them. It exalts Lexington and Concord but demonizes the Nat Turner Rebellion.

The myth of a Christian nation is more than just bad history; it undermines and contradicts the U.S. Constitution. When the Constitution was written, most of the existing state constitutions or colonial charters contained some form of a religious test in order to hold public office. The tests ranged from affirming a belief in Christianity (Maryland) to affirming particular doctrines like the Trinity (Delaware) or even blatantly limiting public office to Protestants (Georgia). It was a common belief that the civil government could and should enforce morality through requiring church attendance, statement of doctrinal belief, or financial support for churches. The "no religious test" clause of Article VI of the U.S. Constitution was a radical departure from accepted norms. The attendees of the constitutional convention were aware of religious tests that tied

⁴ See also Jennifer Hawks, "Hiding in Plain Sight: Christian Nationalism's Threat to Faith Freedom for All." *Canopy Forum* (July 7, 2022); <https://canopyforum.org/2022/07/07/hiding-in-plain-sight-christian-nationalisms-threat-to-faith-freedom-for-all/>

one's religious standing to political leadership or even citizenship. In the ratifying debates, Article VI was a source of tension because it could mean that someone other than a Protestant Christian could hold public office.⁵ Our founding generation was well aware that there was religious diversity in America that would only increase over time. In rejecting any religious test for public office, our founding generation forged a new path in which one's civic duties would be independent from one's religious responsibilities. Those who wanted a "Christian nation" lost the debate with Article VI. We should not allow Christian nationalism to rewrite the Constitutional text and thwart one of the truly revolutionary aspects of the Constitution that laid the foundation for the U.S. being a faith freedom nation.

III. Christian nationalism's role in bolstering, supporting and justifying white supremacy

Christian nationalism often overlaps with and provides cover for white supremacy and racial subjugation. It creates and perpetuates a sense of cultural belonging that is limited to certain people associated with the founding of the United States, namely native-born white Christians. Christian nationalism operates much like racism in that it is pervasive, though sometimes overlooked or subtle, touching nearly every aspect of our culture. Over the more than three years of the Christians Against Christian Nationalism campaign, the only place in the statement that has received multiple, sustained attacks has been calling out the connection between Christian nationalism and racism.

Christian nationalism is window dressing for white supremacy that makes racism seem like an acceptable choice. Since the language of Christian nationalism is more coded than explicit racism, it flies under the radar and is harder to root out. Christian nationalism is often expressed in ways that do not threaten physical safety. In civil settings, we see the influence of Christian nationalism when the government co-opts Christian symbols and language to reinforce the power of the state. When Christian language and symbols point to Jesus and his Gospel of love, we are most likely dealing with an expression of Christianity. However, when that language or those symbols, usually accompanied by appeals to order and conformity, points the audience to the American flag or compels political unity, we are in the territory of Christian nationalism.

According to multiple academic studies using large, nationally representative surveys, Americans who embrace Christian nationalism are more likely to:

- Approve of authoritarian tactics like demanding people show respect for national symbols and traditions
- Fear and distrust religious minorities, including Muslims, Atheists, and Jewish people
- Condone police violence toward Black Americans and distrust accounts of racial inequality in the criminal justice system
- Believe racial inequality is due to the personal shortcomings of minority groups

⁵ Jennifer Hawks, "How the Constitution's original religious freedom guarantee almost didn't happen," Baptist News Global (Sept. 17, 2021); <https://baptistnews.com/article/how-the-constitutions-original-religious-freedom-guarantee-almost-didnt-happen/#.Y5Usn3bMI2x>

- Report being “very uncomfortable” with both interracial marriage and transracial adoption
- Hold anti-immigrant views
- Fear refugees
- Oppose scientists and science education in schools
- Believe that men are better suited for all leadership roles while women are better suited to care for children and the home⁶

The spread of Christian nationalism has very real policy implications for local, state, and federal government.

A University of Maryland Critical Issues poll regarding the constitutionality of declaring the U.S. a “Christian nation” found interesting data when considering the race of the respondents. White respondents who said that whites have faced more discrimination than other groups were most likely to embrace Christian nationalism. According to Politico, “Roughly 59 percent of all Americans who say white people have been discriminated against a lot more in the past five years favor declaring the U.S. a Christian nation, compared to 38 percent of all Americans. White Republicans who said white people have been more discriminated against also favored a Christian nation (65 percent) by a slightly larger percentage than all Republicans (63 percent).”⁷

Research also shows that Americans who hold strongly to a myth about the United States’ Christian heritage tend “to draw rigid boundaries around ethnic and national group membership.”⁸ These boundaries tend to exclude Muslims as a group⁹ and tend to be less supportive of interracial family relationships.¹⁰ In these ethnic boundaries, prejudice and perceived threats are used to justify harsher treatment and excessive force against racial minorities. “Analyses of 2017 data show that adherence to Christian nationalism predicts that Americans will be more likely to believe that police treat African Americans the same as whites and that police shoot Black Americans more often because they are more violent.”¹¹ The result

⁶ Andrew Whitehead and Samuel Perry, *Taking America Back for God: Christian Nationalism in the United States* (Oxford University Press, 2020).

⁷ Stella Rouse and Shibley Telhami, “Most Republicans Support Declaring the United States a Christian Nation”, Politico (Sept. 21, 2022); <https://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2022/09/21/most-republicans-support-declaring-the-united-states-a-christian-nation-00057736>

⁸ Penny Edgell and Eric Tranby. “Shared Visions? Diversity and Cultural Membership in American Life.” *Social Problems* 57: 175–204 (2010).

⁹ Stephen M. Merino “Religious Diversity in a ‘Christian Nation’: The Effects of Theological Exclusivity and Interreligious Contact on the Acceptance of Religious Diversity.” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 49: 231–46 (2010).

¹⁰ Samuel L. Perry, and Andrew L. Whitehead. “Christian Nationalism and White Racial Boundaries: Examining Whites’ Opposition to Interracial Marriage.” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 38: 1671–89. ———. 2015b. “Christian Nationalism, Racial Separatism, and Family Formation: Attitudes Toward Transracial Adoption as a Test Case.” *Race and Social Problems* 7: 123–34 (2015).

¹¹ Samuel L. Perry, Andrew L. Whitehead, and Joshua T. Davis, “God’s Country in Black and Blue: How Christian Nationalism Shapes Americans’ Views about Police (Mis)treatment of Blacks” *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity* 2019, Vol. 5”(1) 130–146; <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/2332649218790983>.

is an unwillingness to acknowledge police discrimination and an increase in victim-blaming. These ideas cater to the overtly racist idea that there is an inherent violence in Blackness that necessitates a violent response.

In its most dangerous form, Christian nationalism inspires acts of violence and intimidation—including vandalism, bomb threats, arson, hate crimes, and attacks on houses of worship—against religious communities at home and abroad. It also threatens the physical safety of Americans in their communities and halls of political power.

Violence against houses of worship: Mother Emanuel AME Church, Charleston, SC (2015)

As a Baptist and constitutional attorney who specializes in the religion clauses of the First Amendment, I became a leader in the fight against Christian nationalism because of my increasing alarm about the violence it inspires at our country's houses of worship. All Americans should be safe when gathering for a corporate worship service with fellow believers.

In a society where mass shootings are almost commonplace, the massacre at Mother Emanuel AME Church in Charleston, South Carolina, on June 17, 2015, shocked the American consciousness: A young white man traveled several hours to Charleston, sat through Bible study and prayer with the congregation, and then proceeded to murder the Rev. Clementa Pinckney, Sharonda Coleman-Singleton, Cynthia Hurd, Susie Jackson, Ethel Lance, Depayne Middleton-Doctor, Tywanza Sanders, the Rev. Daniel Simmons, and Myra Thompson.

I do not think anyone will soon forget hearing President Barack Obama lead the congregation in “Amazing Grace” at the funeral or the calls of forgiveness from so many survivors and family of the deceased. What has been obscured is how the shooter Dylann Roof’s view of Christianity is inextricably tied to his racism. In June 2015, Roof was a member in good standing of a Christian church. His Christian faith was not “just incidental to, but constitutive of, his white supremacist worldview.”¹² The journal he kept while in prison is full of Christian imagery and language, including his critique of mainstream Christianity: “But Christianity doesn’t have to be this weak, feeble, cowardly religion. There is plenty of evidence to indicate that Christianity can be a warrior’s religion.”¹³

Violence in our communities: Tops Supermarket, Buffalo, NY (2022)

One of the mass shootings of 2022 was the indiscriminate killing of neighbors at a local supermarket on May 14, 2022. It is perhaps the best example of the word “Christian” in Christian nationalism being about identity, not religion. The fatalities of this rampage were Celestine Chaney, Roberta A. Drury, Andre Mackniel, Katherine Massey, Margus D. Morrison, Heyward Patterson, Aaron Salter Jr., Geraldine Talley, Ruth Whitfield, and Pearl Young.

¹² Robert P. Jones, “Saving our churches from Dylann Roof’s white Jesus,” *Baptist New Global* (October 4, 2021); <https://baptistnews.com/article/saving-our-churches-from-dylann-roofs-white-jesus/#.Y5aRZ3bMI2x>.

¹³ Prison journal of Dylann Roof: <https://www.uscourts.gov/courts/scd/cases/2-15-472/exhibits/GX500.pdf>

The shooter, Payton Gendron, makes clear in his manifesto that he is not a Christian but that he tries to “live out Christian values.”¹⁴ The preservation of whiteness was his motivation, and a central aspect of white culture for him is the Christian religion. For Gendron, living out “Christian values” is completely compatible with his racism, antisemitism, and the indiscriminate killing of people just out and about running normal, everyday errands. There’s no struggle with the work of following the example or teachings of Jesus. Sociologist and Christian nationalism researcher Samuel Perry described Gendron’s worldview as: it’s just “about culture and Christian values, whatever that means. And it’s connected to Whiteness and nationality and what we want to see in our society.”¹⁵

Christian nationalism is the best explanation for this disconnect. Gendron is a stark example of how “Christian values” can bless the actions of white supremacy and the ideology of “The Great Replacement Theory.” One of the most recent books on Christian nationalism, *The Flag and the Cross: White Christian nationalism and the threat to American democracy* by Philip Gorski and Samuel Perry, reveals some polling data that backs up this disconnect. In a recent survey, more than 15% of those who checked the box as “Christian” and nearly 19% of those who specifically claimed to be “born-again” or “evangelical” also said they belonged to a non-Christian religion or were secular. Like Gendron, the respondents wanted the label of Christianity but not necessarily the underlying belief in the resurrected Christ or other core beliefs and practices of Christianity.

Political violence: U.S. Capitol, Washington, DC (2021)

Sometimes the obvious needs to be stated: Christian nationalism is anti-democratic and a threat to our constitutional republic. Like so many Americans, I was horrified by the attack on the Capitol on January 6, 2021. One aspect of the insurrection that has not gotten much attention is the role of Christian nationalism in uniting the rioters and justifying the violence. It was disorienting to see the seat of American democracy under attack by people brandishing Christian imagery and language while perpetuating violence. Christian crosses and religious iconography were ubiquitous throughout the mob. The rioters built impromptu gallows and signed them with phrases like “Amen,” “God Bless the USA,” and “In God We Trust.” One attacker said a Christian prayer from the Senate dais, asking for God’s blessing on their actions.

BJC worked with the Freedom From Religion Foundation and scholars Anthea Butler, Samuel Perry, Andrew Seidel, Katherine Stewart, Jemar Tisby, and Andrew Whitehead to produce the most complete report to date on the role of Christian nationalism in the Capitol insurrection.¹⁶ While it was not the sole cause or explanation, Christian nationalism played a role in the events leading up to January 6 and provided a unifying ideology for many of the disparate groups on

¹⁴ Tyler Huckabee, “What Role Did White Christian Nationalism Play in the Buffalo Massacre?” Relevant Magazine (May 17, 2022); <https://relevantmagazine.com/current/nation/what-role-did-white-christian-nationalism-play-in-the-buffalo-massacre/>.

¹⁵ *Id.*

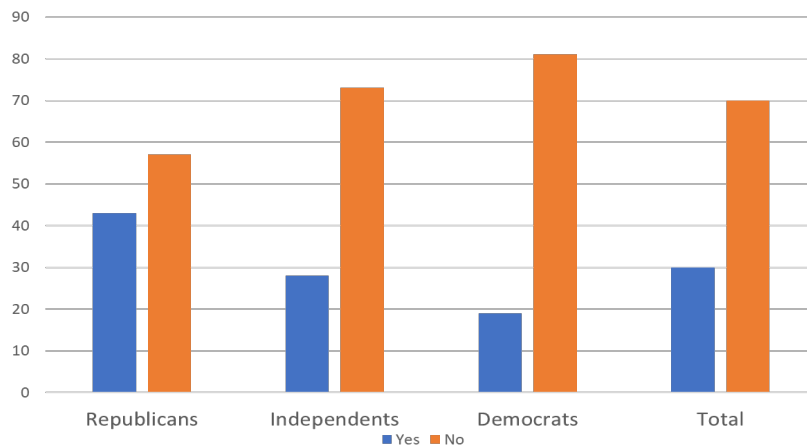
¹⁶ *Christian Nationalism and the January 6, 2021, Insurrection*. Washington, D.C./Madison, Wis.: Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty/Freedom from Religion Foundation (February 9, 2022). Available online at <https://bjconline.org/jan6report/>.

January 6. Imbuing the violence with religious significance provided another layer for self-justification of their indefensible actions.

IV. Scholastic research on Christian nationalism

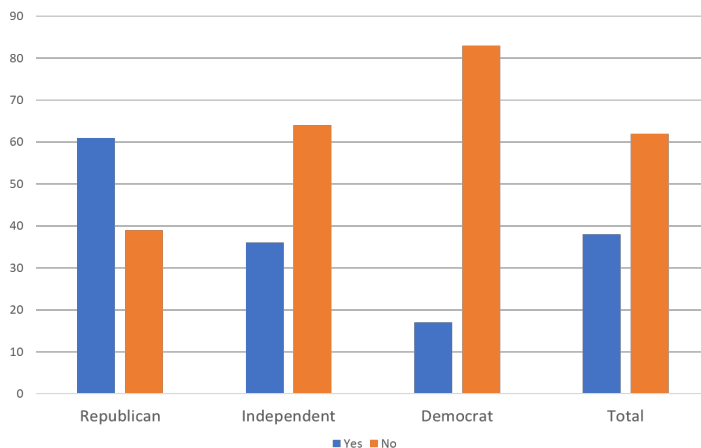
A 2022 Critical Issues poll by the University of Maryland suggests how the “Christian nation” myth and Christian nationalism undermine the Constitution.¹⁷ Participants were asked:

“Do you think the U.S. Constitution would or would not allow the U.S. government to declare the United States a Christian nation?”



The constitutionality question was followed up with:

“Would you favor or oppose the United States officially declaring the United States to be a Christian nation?”

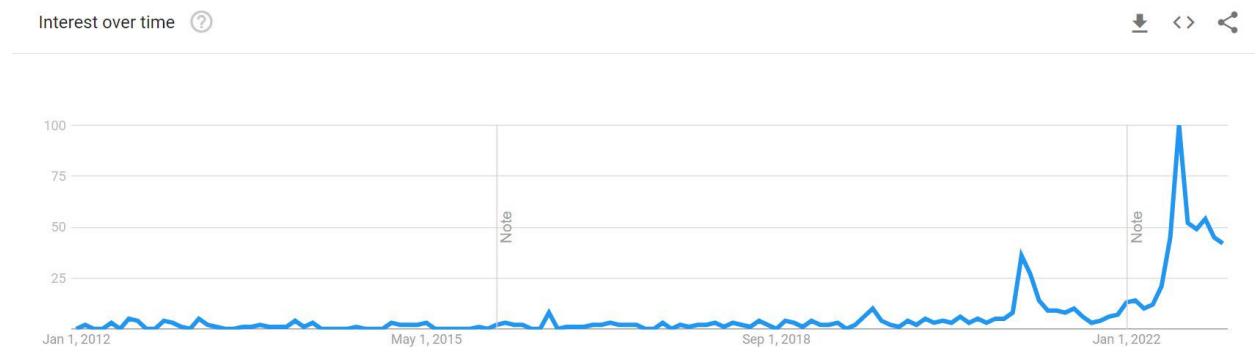


¹⁷ Shibley Telhami and Stella Rouse, “American Public Attitudes on Race, Ethnicity, and Religion, Critical Issues Poll,” University of Maryland; <https://criticalissues.umd.edu/sites/criticalissues.umd.edu/files/American%20Attitudes%20on%20Race%2CEthnicity%2CReligion.pdf>

A large majority of all Americans (70%) said that the U.S. Constitution would not allow a Christian nation declaration, and 62% of Americans would oppose the declaration. While both are resounding majorities, it is striking that having previously said that the declaration would be unconstitutional (57%), a majority of GOP voters (61%) would still support the declaration. Looking at the age of the respondents, the poll found more support for declaring the U.S. a Christian nation among the Silent and Baby Boomer generations and less support, even among young Republicans, for the declaration.¹⁸

Christian nationalism's influence within culture

Christian nationalism is not new but is currently receiving more attention than it has in years past. A Google trend of searches for Christian nationalism since 2012 shows some interest over the years, with 2022 outpacing the previous 9 years combined.¹⁹ The three peaks in the graph below are January 2021, July 2022, and October 2022. The most likely cause for these spikes in interest were the attack on the U.S. Capitol on January 6, 2021, the declaration over the summer by Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene that she is a Christian nationalist (and that we should be a nation of Christian nationalists),²⁰ and politicians in the midterm elections using Christian nationalism as part of their 2022 campaign strategy.



Two of the leading academic scholars of Christian nationalism are Samuel Perry and Andrew Whitehead, co-authors of *Taking Back America for God: Christian nationalism in the United States* (2020). Their research has led them to categorize 4 responses to Christian nationalism in the United States:

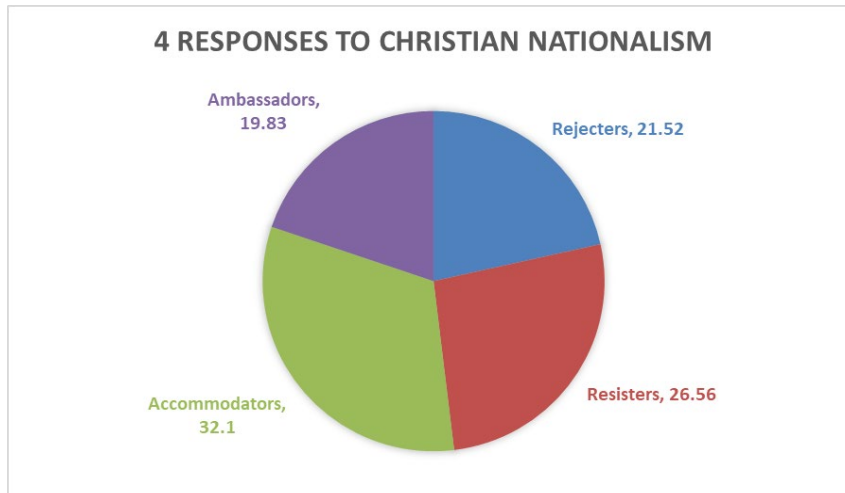
¹⁸ Stella Rouse and Shibley Telhami, "Most Republicans Support Declaring the United States a Christian Nation," Politico (September 21, 2022);

<https://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2022/09/21/most-republicans-support-declaring-the-united-states-a-christian-nation-00057736>

¹⁹ <https://trends.google.com/trends/explore?date=2012-01-01%202022-12-10&geo=US&q=christian%20nationalism>

²⁰ Jack Jenkins, "Republicans keep mostly mum on calls to make GOP 'party of Christian nationalism,'" Religion News Service (August 12, 2022);

<https://religionnews.com/2022/08/12/amid-calls-to-become-the-party-of-christian-nationalism-little-republican-pushback/>



Their research is a good reminder that Christian nationalism is not a diagnosis. It is better understood as an ideology that exerts influence measured on a scale. We have all been influenced to some degree by Christian nationalism. The smallest category of that influence, designated “Ambassadors” by the researchers, are those who have fully embraced the ideology and are just 19.83% of the population. The opposite of Ambassadors are Rejecters, or those who actively reject the ideology, which comes in at 21.52% of the population. As is true in much of American political life, most Americans are somewhere in the middle: Resisters are 26.56% and Accommodators are 32.1%.

An example of how these groups diverge in polling data is in their reaction to the prompt: How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements:

“The Federal government should declare the United States a Christian nation.”

“The success of the United States is part of God’s plan.”

“The federal government should advocate Christian values.”

Rejecters were those who most disagreed, while Ambassadors strongly agreed with the statements. Resisters and Accommodators fell somewhere in between.

V. Religious nationalism around the world

While the focus of today’s hearing is on domestic extremism, it’s also important to note that religious nationalism shows up in many countries around the world. It would be incomplete to think about Christian nationalism in the United States apart from the broader global rise of religious nationalism. Rising Hindu nationalism in India has led to extrajudicial violence against Muslims, Christians, and other minorities, and it threatens India’s future as a secular democracy.²¹ Perhaps the most jarring example of religious nationalism is the rising Buddhist nationalism in Myanmar and Sri Lanka, which commandeered a religion known for peace and

²¹Parth M.N., David Pierson, “Hindu nationalism is a threat to Muslims and India’s status as the world’s largest democracy,” Los Angeles Times (February 16, 2022); <https://www.latimes.com/world-nation/story/2022-02-16/india-religious-persecution>

pacifism into providing justification for the slaughter of Rohingya Muslims and a military coup.²² Patriarch Kirill continues to give moral legitimacy to Russian President Vladimir Putin and the invasion of Ukraine by consecrating Russian military equipment and equating a Russian death on the battlefield to a sacrifice that washes away all of one's sins.²³ At the start of the invasion, several Russian Orthodox churches under Kirill's leadership existed within Ukraine. In abandoning his Ukrainian members and describing the invasion as a holy war, Kirill has chosen Christian nationalism over Christianity.

VI. Conclusion

We applaud this Subcommittee's sustained work to confront white supremacy and investigate its myriad causes. Understanding the political ideology and cultural framework of Christian nationalism is imperative to both dismantling white supremacy and preserving religious freedom for all. Christianity does not unite Americans. Our belonging in American society must never depend on how we worship, what we believe or how we identify religiously. Each one of us must confront Christian nationalism for the destructive ideology it is and call out the damage it is causing our country.

We commend the attention of Congress and work of this Subcommittee on addressing Christian nationalism. Do not allow anyone to say that confronting Christian nationalism is somehow anti-Christian. All across this country, Christians are deeply alarmed by this ideology – especially the way it gives an illusion of respectability to white supremacy – and want to see our nation more fully ensure religious freedom for all.

Our country has let Christian nationalism fester for too long in the United States. Just like the great and powerful Oz didn't want anyone to look behind the curtain, Christian nationalism squashes dissent because it can't let anyone behind the curtain to see that its core is racism and white supremacy, not the robust religion of more than 2,000 years that calls for us to love God and love neighbor.

It is long past time to look behind the curtain of Christian nationalism and expose all of the harm it has perpetuated and justified.

²² Hannah Beech, "Buddhists Go to Battle: When Nationalism Overrides Pacifism," The New York Times (July 8, 2019); <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/08/world/asia/buddhism-militant-rise.html>

²³ Jack Jenkins, "Sacrifices on an Altar of Christian Nationalism, Word and Way," (September 27, 2022); <https://wordandway.org/2022/09/27/sacrifices-on-an-altar-of-christian-nationalism/>