
“I, Too, Am America”: On the Heretical Fusion of White + Christian + Nationalism and How It Separates All God’s Children

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I, too, sing America.

*I am the darker brother.
They send me to eat in the kitchen
When company comes,
But I laugh,
And eat well,
And grow strong.*

—Langston Hughes, “I, Too,” *The Weary Blues*

I was raised in the Holiness tradition in the South, attending Bibleway Holiness Church #2, where we identified as “pilgrims passing through” and “sojourners in a strange land.” Our otherworldly existence was emphasized at every meeting, where we were taught to remain “unstained” in pursuit of a holy and sanctified life through the power of the Holy Spirit. To this end, we often dressed in white. While the Black Church had been central to the success of the Civil Rights Movement, this kind of cultural agency, bodily autonomy, and advocacy did not go far down this dirt-paved-road community. Instead, our focus was behavior modification in preparation for the afterlife and, in the here and now, the pride of our spiritual authority because we were “living right.”

While hyper-focused on external appearance, the resistance to carnal impulses, and the avoidance of evil in the world, our lives were treated as transient. “Rapture ready,” we prepared for the return of Jesus the Christ by traveling light, wanting to take nothing of these “earthly treasures” with us. They would only slow us down, weigh us down in this life. The same was true of American politics. There was no talk of political involvement or human governance.

“As long as I’ve got King Jesus, I don’t need nobody else” was sung; sermons spoke to this sentiment with an emphasis on heaven and its rewards, a transcendent spirituality. The American government had been written off as “worldly” and “wicked” and, therefore, unsalvageable. While calling members to fast and pray, national catastrophes only confirmed this bias and the conviction that we do not get involved in worldly affairs. There was no mention of being called “for such a time as this” (Esther 4:14) as our scripture readings largely reenforced eschatology. Consequently, we were encouraged to maintain our distance, so

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as not to be found on the wrong side of church history (Matt 25:31-46). Final judgment was central to the fear and shame that drove our faithfulness to Christian scripture and regular church attendance under leaders who embodied a kind of “merciless piety,” as named by James Baldwin in *The Amen Corner*.¹

With no library, grocery store, or playground for miles, we were impoverished both physically and mentally yet prided ourselves on being spiritually rich. This southern mystical framework also recreated “the disinherited” as chosen people. The church was quite literally all we had. We were “soldiers in the army of the Lord” and, in my family, part of the United States military.

Of the ten children from Eva Mae and John Thomas, half of my maternal aunts and uncles—four men and one woman—served in the United States military. My mother, Shirley Ann, would have made it six enlistees, but during her physical, she found out she was pregnant with me. She was given the option of leaving

1. James Baldwin, *The Amen Corner* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998), xvi.

African Americans embodied "we the people," though legally declared subhuman, economically objectified, and treated as personal property or nobodies (not a body). Denied personhood, hush harbors (secret places to worship their God on their own theological terms), slave rebellions, self-emancipation and abolitionism are evidence of the work of a people who still possessed inherent dignity and worth, or "somebodiness."

the baby with her mother, but she declined. "My mother didn't have this baby," she told me when retelling the story.

The recruiters had come to the school and, according to my mother, "They talked a good game." Won over, she and her siblings decided this was their career path after high school. "I'm going to the Marines because the Marines will make a man out of you," my late uncle Raymond said. For him, the military informed manhood through physical toughness, stoicism, violence, and hierarchal discipline. There were also opportunities for travel and financial stability; both were things the small town of Foley could not promise.

"Back then, it wasn't too much offered to nobody black. You gonna' get a steady paycheck. You gonna' learn a lot of different things," my mother explained. "At that time, there was nothing else to do. Nobody was thinking about going to college."²

Yet, I would not describe any of my mother's siblings as patriotic—at least not in the traditional or commercialized sense. There were no ardent declarations of love for America, no unapologetic defense of its governance, or deep discussions of allegiance to this soil. I never saw any of them with a weapon, except in old pictures taken overseas. Save old Army green t-shirts worn by Uncle John, I did not see any of them in military clothing, not even a hat, identifying them as veterans. I never heard Uncles John, Raymond, Sam, Roosevelt or Aunt Lynn recite the "Pledge of Allegiance," sing "God Bless America," wave an American flag, or hang one outside of their homes. Yet, official military photos of them all hung in my grandmother's home.

2. My experience of military recruitment is similarly detailed in "The Military Views Poor Kids as Fodder for Its Forever Wars," *The New Republic* (Jan 7, 2020), <https://newrepublic.com/article/156131/military-views-poor-kids-fodder-forever-wars>.

The Thomas family has never considered ourselves to be a military family. The grandchildren of Eva Mae and John Curtis were not expected to follow in the footsteps of their aunt and uncles. There was no healthy competition between branches of service. Uncle Raymond was a Marine; all the others enlisted in the Army. In fact, military service was not spoken of—at least not in terms of recruitment. Instead, when it was discussed, it was because one of them had returned home with "problems" related to their mental health, which were quickly turned over to Jesus. They just needed to pray and come back to church. All their children had been shaped by the church and half had chosen to serve their country. None of them put Christianity and nationalism together.

The double-consciousness of American patriotism

*Tomorrow,
I'll be at the table
When company comes.
Nobody'll dare
Say to me,
"Eat in the kitchen,"
Then.*

Africans and, later, African Americans embodied "we the people," though legally declared subhuman, economically objectified, and treated as personal property or nobodies (not a body).³ Denied personhood, hush harbors (secret places to worship their God on their own theological terms), slave rebellions, self-emancipation and abolitionism are evidence of the work of a people who still possessed inherent dignity and worth, or "somebodiness." With their own religious traditions and a spiritual sense of self which predated the European Transatlantic Slave Trade, they adapted American Christianity, making a way out of white supremacist interpretation. Punished by the hypocrisies, contradictions, and duplicity of citizens, African Americans fought for a reality they already knew to be true: "I am because we are" (*Ubuntu*).

Historically, African Americans have had to negotiate their national identity as African and American while being offered second-class citizenship and, in effect, living in two Americas. Despite being subjected to chattel slavery, the Black Codes, convict leasing, the rise of the Ku Klux Klan (to "restore" white-body supremacy), Jim and Jane Crow segregation, discriminatory policing, and mass incarceration, African Americans have demonstrated loyalty to the United States and the country's democracy project.

Crispus Attucks, who was formerly enslaved, went on to

3. "To be Nobody is to be vulnerable. ... To be Nobody is to be subject to State violence. ... To be Nobody is also to confront systemic forms of State violence. ... To be Nobody is to be abandoned by the State. ... To be Nobody is to be considered disposable. ... Without question, Nobodiness is largely indebted to race, as white supremacy is foundational to the American democratic experiment." Marc Lamont Hill, *Nobody: Casualties of America's War on the Vulnerable, from Ferguson to Flint and Beyond* (New York: Atria, 2016), xviii, xx, xxi.

become a sailor, dockworker, and patriot; the latter would lead to his death as the first casualty of the Boston Massacre and American Revolution. He is regarded as a martyr for America's independence and a clear-cut example of African American participation in the country's founding. Yet, Jabari Asim records:

Crispus Attucks' martyrdom may have afforded him the chance to serve as a 'new symbol of freedom,' but not for long. Once celebrated by John Hancock as belonging in 'the first rank of the men who dared,' Attucks was seldom discussed or remembered in the days following the American victory. White men were clearly disconcerted by the potential legacy of such a patriot. Memories of brave black men willing to seize their own destinies could have an undesirable effect on black morale. Not surprisingly, Attucks' courageous deed lapsed into obscurity while the image of black men as too inept to fight gained currency.⁴

Though initially celebrated, Attucks would be recreated as an instigator rather than a heroic patriot; later his sacrifice would be minimized, downplayed by narratives of European American patriotism.

During the Civil War, over 200,000 African Americans enlisted and fought for the Union Army and Navy to secure freedom, while facing unequal pay, discrimination, and risking re-enslavement or execution, if captured by the Confederacy. During World War I and II, more than one and a half million African Americans served in the military⁵ and saw their contributions as a pathway to equal citizenship.

Philip Dray explained the conflicting responses to the enlistment of African Americans during the war years:

At the time of the First World War, as the editor of a socialist weekly, *The Messenger*, he [Asa Philip Randolph] had advised black Americans not to fight for a country that would expect them to lay down their lives equally with whites but would not grant them equal rights. ... W.E.B. DuBois, who in a July 1917 editorial in *The Crisis* titled "Close Ranks" had argued that blacks would gain in self-respect and stature by participating in the American war effort. 'Let us while this war lasts forget our special grievances and close ranks shoulder to shoulder with our white fellow citizens and the allied nations that are fighting for democracy,' DuBois counseled. Many black Americans had 'closed ranks,' had fought and otherwise served, and had come away with nothing.⁶

Despite their systematic exclusion, this community [of African Americans] has consistently defended, expanded, and validated democratic principles through grassroots mobilization, legal challenges, and high voter turnout, becoming crucial safeguards of electoral integrity and civil rights.

Following both wars, African American veterans returned home and were met with racial terror after "the segregation of Negro [sic] soldiers in Negro units and in Jim Crow transportation facilities, and the traditional limitation of Negroes to few jobs other than mess attendants in the Navy."⁷ Refusing to submit to Jim Crow laws after fighting for democracy abroad, these soldiers were uniquely targeted, assaulted, and lynched in their uniforms.

The racialization of patriotism and the fight for equal belonging

Still, African Americans are often described as "the backbone of American democracy," having consistently fought to align the country's founding ideals of equality with their lived reality. Nikole Hannah-Jones emphatically stated: "Our democracy's founding ideals were false when they were written. Black Americans have fought to make them true."⁸ Despite their systematic exclusion, this community has consistently defended, expanded, and validated democratic principles through grassroots mobilization, legal challenges, and high voter turnout, becoming crucial safeguards of electoral integrity and civil rights.

A case in point: Section 1 of the 14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, ratified in 1868, reads: "All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside. No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws."

Reversing the Black Codes and overturning the Dred Scott v. Sanford (1857) ruling, where the U.S. Supreme Court ruled people who were enslaved were not U.S. citizens and consequently,

4. Jabari Asim, *The N Word: Who Can Say It, Who Shouldn't, and Why* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2007), 18.

5. Approximately 350,000 African Americans served in the U.S. military for World War I and more than one million in World War II.

6. Philip Dray, *At the Hands of Persons Unknown: The Lynching of Black America* (New York: The Modern Library, 2003), 364.

7. Allan D. Grimshaw, *Racial Violence in the United States* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1969), 146-147.

8. Nikole Hannah-Jones, "America Wasn't a Democracy, Until Black People Made It One," *The New York Times Magazine* (Aug 14, 2019), <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/08/14/magazine/black-history-american-democracy.html>.

could not seek protection from the federal government or the courts, this amendment is now a cornerstone for American civil rights, establishing birthright citizenship, equal protection under the law, and guaranteeing due process. But it also documents the African American experience of a two-faced country, a rationale for their love-hate relationship, and the evolution of the nation's patriotic identity.

However, despite their efforts and their sacrifice, patriotism in America remains racialized and linked to devotion to whiteness. Hegemonic patriotism is a domineering and conservative narrative that equates loyalty with unquestioning support for a narrowly defined, flawless, and culturally superior national identity, which mainly centers on heterosexual men racialized as white. African Americans and other minoritized groups are excluded and viewed as less than American. Consequently, "blind patriotism" to the country is expected. Reimagined as a Christian nation with divine favor, it is an idolatrous narrative. Those who are not members of this exclusionary identity, as defined by a specific race and religion, are expected to sing the nation's praises and be "grateful" to live in America. For African Americans, this is a white supremacist talking point and a racist trope, which dates to pro-slavery arguments and the "grateful slave" myth. Other forms of oppression should be seen as benevolence, since they are not chattel slavery.

The other option is to "go back to Africa" or "go back to your country." This directive reinforces the idea that "this is a white man's country." Exclusion is first expressed in language: illegal, alien, other, minority. American identity is defined as white, and white identity necessitates the false binary of white and people of color. Robert Jensen explained why this two-part racial dynamic is necessary:

White is not, by definition, the norm, the standard, the best. White is just white. But politically, white is not just white, of course. White is power. And using the term white/non-white reminds us of that. What do people of color have in common? That is, what makes the category 'people of color' make sense? The only commonality is that the people in that category are on the subordinated side of white supremacy. Nothing intrinsically links people of indigenous, African, Latino, and Asian descent in the United States except their common experience of being targeted, abused, and victimized—albeit in different ways at different times—by white supremacist society. Take the experience away and the category of 'people of color' vanishes. ... [N]othing links them except the experience of oppression. And the group perpetuating that oppression is white, another socially created category defined by power.⁹

Racialized identity groups human beings in bunches and places them in color-coded categories as part of "the racial contract,"¹⁰

9. Robert Jensen, *The Heart of Whiteness: Confronting Race, Racism, and White Privilege* (San Francisco: City Lights, 2005), 2-3.

10. Charles W. Mills, *The Racial Contract* (Ithaca: Cornell

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which facilitates dueling identities and realities (us vs. them, centered vs. marginalized, somebodies vs. nobodies).

Equating patriotism with white Christian nationalism, "a cultural framework—a collection of myths, traditions, symbols, narratives, and value systems—that idealizes and advocates a fusion of Christianity with American civic life,"¹¹ the language of love for country is used to justify racial bigotry and social hierarchies. German pastor and theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer warned, "[I]t is the great mistake of a false Protestant ethic to assume that loving Christ can be the same as loving one's native country. ... Jesus does not talk that way."¹² Still, the result is different interpretations of patriotism, with African Americans protesting for their right to equal citizenship while fighting against cultural erasure, and with European Americans fighting to maintain cultural, religious, and political dominance.

Ron Johnson, a Republican senator from Wisconsin, made this painfully clear on March 12, 2021, when he compared the January 6 insurrection and the Black Lives Matter protests of the previous year. About both events, he said: "Those were people that love this country, that truly respect law enforcement [and] would never do anything to break the law. Now, had the tables been turned and those were tens of thousands of Black Lives Matter and Antifa protesters, I might have been a little concerned." Despite Johnson's views and the fact that the insurrectionists had come to overturn the election, African Americans have been described as the "keepers of democracy." They have forced the country to live up to its constitutional promises, driven landmark legal battles,

University Press, 1997), 3, states: "But the peculiar contract to which I am referring, though based on the social contract tradition that has been central to Western political theory, is not a contract between everybody ('we the people'), but between just the people who count, the people who really are people ('we the white people'). So, it is a Racial Contract."

11. Andrew Whitehead and Samuel Perry, *Taking America Back for God: Christian Nationalism in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2022), 10.

12. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, ed. Geoffrey B. Kelly and John D. Godsey, trans. Barbara Green and Reinhard Krauss (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015), 114.

and are a dedicated voting block with a history of organized resistance, acting as a crucial check against authoritarian trends. For many African Americans, patriotism is not blind devotion to the country's leaders but demands social justice, reflective of a critical engagement with American history.

White Christian nationalism works to disempower communities racialized as black and brown because the goal is not democracy but a theocratic state—despite the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." Paul Miller asserts that nationalism is a kind of "internal imperialism: the rule by a cultural majority over cultural minorities under the ruler group's predominant language, culture, or religion."¹³ The goal is a "white Christian nation" with changes to the country's demographics viewed as a threat to their traditional power and religious and racialized hierarchy. Brian Kaylor and Beau Underwood argue: "This demographic shift shouldn't be underestimated... Worried that the demographics are destiny, some politicians and preachers today seek not a unifying civil religion but a polarizing and discriminatory Christian Nationalism."¹⁴

Those who espouse these views are dangerous to minoritized communities. The PRRI/ Brookings Christian Nationalism Survey found in 2023:

The new Christian nationalism survey makes clear that there is an underlying ideology of racism among the Christian nationalist movement that connects them to white nationalist groups who rely on old and new tropes to promote white supremacy. Americans who are supportive of Christian nationalism generally hold less favorable views of immigrants, racial and ethnic minorities, and are less likely to believe that racism remains a problem in American society. Among other findings, roughly 65% of white Christian nationalism sympathizers and adherents disagree that white supremacy is still a major problem in the U.S. today, twice as high as Americans overall in the survey. Similarly, 66% of white Christian nationalism sympathizers and 81% of adherents believe in replacement theory, the view that immigrants are 'invading our country and replacing our cultural and ethnic background.'¹⁵

White Christian nationalism is a minacious ideology and a threat to an ethnically diverse democracy. The ideology, which merges

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American identity with an extreme conservative Christian identity, views African Americans as less than American and, consequently, works toward voter suppression, political disempowerment, educational erasure, and structural discrimination with an ends-justify-the-means mentality.

White Christian nationalism challenges the concept of equal belonging in the United States, where national identity is tied to a racialized identity (that is, white) and practice of religion (that is, conservative Protestant Christianity). Michael W. Austin explains: "They want the government to promote a version of Christianity as the official culture of the United States."

That official culture is often referred to as *Anglo-Protestant culture*. ... In America, this includes commitments to individualism, individual rights, the rule of law, the English language, Protestant faith and values, the idea that the government has important responsibilities to fulfill to the governed, and the notion that we are to create a city on a hill or heaven on earth.¹⁶

This is not a new development, however. Robert P. Jones points to its influence already with the colonization of Turtle Island, which would later become America.¹⁷ The Doctrine of Discovery, which justified colonization to claim non-Christian lands and convert their inhabitants, is foundational for white Christian nationalism.¹⁸ It is another assertion of privilege and entitlement, both of which are associated with being American, but certainly are not Christlike.

13. Paul Miller, *The Religion of America: What's Wrong with Christian Nationalism* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2022), 75.

14. Brian Kaylor and Beau Underwood, *Baptizing America: How Mainline Protestants Helped Build Christian Nationalism* (Danvers: Chalice Press, 2024), 42, 43.

15. Gabriel R. Sanchez, Keon L. Gilbert, and Carly Bennett, "White Nationalism Remains Major Concern for Voters of Color," PRRI/ Brookings Christian Nationalism Survey (March 30, 2023), <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/white-nationalism-remains-major-concern-for-voters-of-color-and-appears-to-be-connected-ideologically-to-the-growing-christian-nationalism-movement/>.

16. Michael W. Austin, *American Christian Nationalism: Neither American Nor Christian* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2024), 9.

17. Robert P. Jones, "The Roots of Christian Nationalism Go Back Further Than You Think," *Time* (August 31, 2023), <https://time.com/6309657/us-christian-nationalism-columbus-essay/>.

18. Andrew Whitehead, "Undoing the Christian Nationalism of the Doctrine of Discovery," *Religion News Service* (May 8, 2023), <https://religionnews.com/2023/05/08/undoing-the-christian-nationalism-of-the-doctrine-of-discovery>.

On the heretical fusion and our baptized togetherness

White plus Christian: the treatment of these identities as synonymous can be traced back to the 17th century.¹⁹ The two terms came to be used interchangeably: "...towards the end of the seventeenth century, Protestant slave owners gradually replaced the term 'Christian' with the word 'white' in their law books and in their vernacular."²⁰ White plus Christian plus nationalist: the terms became a set way of being American and in some circles, Christian: "For God *and* country." But this abominable joining, this unholy alliance is the source of our confusion, our conflicts, and our current predicament.

In his essay, "Can White People Be Saved?" Reflections on the Relationship of Missions and Whiteness," Willie James Jennings concluded:

It is precisely this fusing together of Christianity with whiteness that constitutes the ground of many of our struggles today. The struggle against aggressive nationalism is the struggle against the fusion of Christianity and whiteness. The struggle against racism and white supremacy and some aspects of sexism and patriarchy is the struggle against this fusion. The struggle against the exploitation of the planet is bound up in the struggle of this joining. So many people today see these problems—of planetary exploitation, of racism, of sexism, of nationalism, and so forth— but they do not see the deeper problem of this fusion, which means they have not grasped the energy that drives many of our problems.²¹

Jennings goes to the root of our problems. This is not the difference between wheat and tares.²² Pull it up and separate them.

White Christian nationalism is heresy, and its lethal combination should be viewed as idolatry. One's religious identity does not include one's national identity. To be a Christian is not to be an American but to be Christlike. George Orwell noted that patriotism is a "devotion to a particular place and a particular way of life, which one believes to be the best in the world but has no desire to force on other people" and unlike nationalism, which "is inseparable from the desire for power. The abiding purpose of

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every nationalist is to secure more power and more prestige, not for himself but for the nation."²³ Therein lies the difference between America and the "kin-dom"²⁴ of God. It is the violent distance America's citizens create between each other to maintain power.

Christians, both lay people and leaders, should deny white Christian nationalism. White-body supremacy should be exorcised²⁵ in favor of the practice of discipleship as a way of following Jesus more closely. More than liturgical additions, this requires that we examine ourselves more closely, even with self-mortification. It will require what Jennings calls "an education in belonging" for life "after whiteness."²⁶ Jim Wallis says it plainly:

Some national figures, scholars, church leaders, culture watchers, and journalists have been urging us to confront a rising ideology that is rooted in America's original sin: the sin of white supremacy. The armed groups and individuals who are motivated by white supremacy are now judged to be the greatest domestic terrorist threat to our country's security today by many law enforcement authorities. That *old ideology* of white supremacy is now religiously undergirded by an *old heresy*—with a new name: white Christian nationalism. I believe that white Christian nationalism is the single greatest threat to democracy in America and to the integrity of the Christian witness.²⁷

23. George Orwell, "Notes on Nationalism," *Polemic* (1945), <https://www.orwellfoundation.com/the-orwell-foundation/orwell/essays-and-other-works/notes-on-nationalism/>.

24. "Kin-dom" is a word coined by the Franciscan nun Georgene Wilson, used to replace "kingdom," which has patriarchal and exclusively masculine implications.

25. James W. Perkins, *White Theology: Outing Supremacy in Modernity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 22, notes: "After centuries of operation, white supremacy in action in America has yet to be fully 'outed' and exorcised."

26. Willie James Jennings, *After Whiteness: An Education in Belonging* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2020), 11, continues: "The cultivation of belonging should be the goal of all education—not just any kind of belonging, but a profound creaturely belonging that performs the returning of the creature to the creator, and a returning to an intimate and erotic energy that drives life together with God."

27. Jim Wallis, *The False White Gospel: Rejecting Christian Nationalism, Reclaiming True Faith, and Refounding Democracy* (New

19. Winthrop D. Jordan, *The White Man's Burden: Historical Origins of Racism in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), 52, writes: "After about 1680, taking the colonies as a whole, a new term of self-identification appeared—white."

20. Katharine Gerber, *Christian Slavery: Conversion and Race in the Protestant Atlantic World* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018), 74. For additional documentation, see Ian Haney Lopez, *White by Law: The Legal Construction of Race* (New York: New York University Press, 2006).

21. Willie Jennings, "'Can White People Be Saved?' Reflections on the Relationship of Missions and Whiteness," in Love L. Sechrest, Johnny Ramirez-Johnson, and Amos Young, eds., *Can "White" People Be Saved? Triangulating Race, Theology, and Mission*, (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2018), 28.

22. Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43.

Christians who proclaim truth must not dabble with it. The only acceptable conclusion is that “racism and racial injustice have not receded from American life because they are, in good part, the *life-giving force of a dominant group’s religion*.”²⁸ White Christian nationalism must be publicly and faithfully rejected—no matter the face of it, and the same is true of “the religion of whiteness.”

White Christian nationalism should be treated as oppositional to one’s baptismal confession and identity. The work of regeneration and our togetherness is explained by the Apostle Paul to the churches at Colossae and again at Galatia:

As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek; there is no longer slave or free; there is no longer male and female, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus (Gal 3:27-28).

This “womb water” makes us next of kin and thus all God’s children. Consequently, either we are in the baptismal water or we are out. Walter Brueggemann names our predicament: “[T]he crisis in the U.S. church has almost nothing to do with being liberal or conservative; it has everything to do with giving up on the faith and discipline of our Christian baptism and settling for a common, generic U.S. identity that is part patriotism, part consumerism, part violence, and part affluence.”²⁹ White Christian nationalism is proof of a watered down gospel and the church’s need to return to baptism and its waters as reflection pool.

*Besides,
They’ll see how beautiful I am
And be ashamed—*

I, too, am America.

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York: St. Martin’s Essentials, 2024), 17.

28. Michael O. Emerson, *The Religion of Whiteness: How Racism Distorts Christian Faith* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2024), 1.

29. Walter Brueggemann, *A Way Other Than Our Own: Devotions for Lent* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2017), 3.