
Christian Nationalism¹

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I am pleased to contribute to this conversation about Christian nationalism.² I am a retired ELCA Lutheran pastor and anthropologist interested in the intersections between religion and culture.³ In the latter role I consider the ways religious groups and movements organize themselves, construct meaning, experience their surroundings, and change over time.⁴

Anthropology has been interested in religion since its inception. Today, research on religion necessitates focusing on specific movements and specific manifestations within each. In recent years anthropologies of Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, Wicca, Buddhism, Animism, Indigenous religions, and Christianity have been the subject of considerable attention. Among these, of course, are many variations. For example, what began as a general “Anthropology of Christianity” early in this century became more complex as researchers wrestled with the ways different theological systems engage within specific cultural settings, something readers of this journal will understand.⁵

My approach includes the following: First, I will refer to Christian movements rather than Christianity writ large to reflect its diversity. Second, there are different Christian nationalisms,

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“each suffused with different warranting assumptions and temporal orientations”⁶ such that Christian religious nationalism exists in different cultural, social, and ideological forms. Third, when a movement refers to itself as “Christian” I include it under the umbrella of Christian movements although some may argue otherwise. These parameters reflect some of the complexities anthropologists deal with today when researching and writing about religion.

My goal is to provide readers with an appreciation for the complexities inherent in Christian nationalism using social scientific research along with public news sources and reports, and some thoughts about engagement. My plan is to introduce Christian nationalism and its complexities, highlight some anthropological models that may help explain what it is by placing the current moment in context, and conclude with thoughts about the practical challenges and opportunities it presents going forward.

Christian nationalism as cultural phenomena

While most of the attention being given to Christian nationalism in the United States is given to what some refer to as White nationalism (more on that in a bit), some Black and Latinx Christian nationalists are also in favor of uniting Christianity with governmental ideals and policies. The result is that “*Christian nationalism’s*

1. An earlier version of this project appeared as a series in Ted Peters’ Voice of Public Theology May-June 2025.

2. The decision to use a lower case “n” rather than capitalize “nationalism” follows standards established in dictionaries as well as the protocols used by anthropologists.

3. Assuming few readers will have taken any anthropology courses, I should note that American anthropology, the study of humans (*anthropos* + *logy*) is comprised of four subdisciplines: biological/physical, linguistic anthropology, and socio-cultural anthropology, and archaeology. Unsurprisingly, these reflect the range of human experience over time, from early evolution and human variation to the material past, communication and meaning, and culture—specifically the ways social groups create and experience identity.

4. The primary data for cultural anthropologists comes from ethnographic research; spending time in and participating in the day-to-day activities of a specific community, observing, and interviewing community members and those they engage with. Sociologists, some of whom are cited here, research larger scale ideas and activities through questionnaires and polls. Today anthropologists and sociologists are adopting one another’s research methods, finding the two distinct approaches helpful in documenting movements such as Cn.

5. Frederick P. Lampe, “The Anthropology of Christianity: Context, Contestation, Rupture, and Continuity,” *Reviews in Anthropology* 39, no. 1 (2010).

6. Jon Bialecki, “Eschatology, Ethnicity, and Ethos” in Religion and Society: *Advances in Research* 8 (2017), 43.

effects diverge by race only when interests diverge by race.” Christian nationalist movements exist outside of the United States as well as within, each emerging in a specific moment in time and place in response to specific socio-cultural challenges and opportunities.

If nothing else, remember the phrase “context matters.” Movements like Christian nationalism reflect the interconnections between different social elements including, but not limited to, religion; stories of identity and origin; economic access; power; gender; race; the environment; and authority. The ways someone thinks about and experiences each of these informs and reflects their identity. Space does not allow me to go into depth on all of these social elements but will focus on some to establish my basic point.⁸

Religion is part of a cultural whole, interacting with stories of origin, gender, power, health, status, education, purity code, land, etc. Narratives explaining the first ancestors, why they were chosen, where they live, why, and the purpose they serve are some of what stories of origin address. Sharing these stories as a part of a larger social whole is not unique to Christian nationalism; each religious movement finds resonance in the stories, rules for proper behavior (purity codes), ritual practices, and symbols. When one group asserts its power, formally or informally, they seek to impose their way of thinking and being on others including stories, purity codes, rituals, and symbols.

One essential way of recognizing a group involves understanding the way it differentiates between itself and others, often through *We: They* or *Us: Them* dichotomies. Invoking the “we” infers there are others who are not a part of the movement’s ideas, ideals, or goals. People identified as “they” are outsiders and often considered different, dangerous, inferior, misguided, naïve, or simply wrong. This “otherness” reflects the ways people are othered based on their country of origin, the language they speak, their skin color, economic status, education, religious ideas and practices, and the ways they behave, for example.⁹

7. Brooklyn Walker et al., “Religion is Sometimes Raced: Christian Nationalism as In-Group Protection,” *Perspectives on Politics* (2025): 2, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592725102338>. Italics in the original.

8. University level courses in the Anthropology of Religion explore the ways religion interacts with some of the social elements highlighted here.

9. Christian movements have long used the collective “we,” *except when they do not*. For example, a creedal statement first developed in 325 CE at the Council of Nicea, modified and affirmed at the First Council of Constantinople in 381 CE (reaffirming the Nicene Creed), begins with “We believe.” The original Greek begins Πιστεύομεν and the Latin *Credimus*, translated as “We” (note, *pisteuomen* Πιστεύομεν signifies trust, *credimus* infers intellectual assent) Gary Brower, February 16, 2026; see Early Church Texts, “The Creed of Constantinople—381 (Nicene Creed),” Early Church Texts, updated 2026, 381, accessed February 17, 2026, https://earlychurch-texts.com/main/constantinople/creed_of_constantinople.shtml. Yet over time the emphasis shifted to a personal statement of faith with many replacing “we” with the first person “I.” The creed begins with “I believe” in the 1611 *Book of Common Prayer* and the 1851 *Book of Concord*. Today, some Christian movements retain the first person, others have returned to the collective “we believe.” I leave it to others to

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People subscribing to the “we” of Christian nationalist movements in the U.S. desire “a close fusion of a particular expression of Christianity with American civic life.”¹⁰ In doing so, they demand “government, at all levels, vigorously defend this ideology as central to our [U.S.] national identity, public policy, and social belonging.”¹¹ Where does this fusion of Christianity and the U.S. government come from?

Historian Philip Gorski writes: “The Deep Story runs like this. America was founded as a Christian nation. The founders were orthodox Christians. The founding documents were based on, quote, biblical principle or perhaps even divinely inspired. The United States has a special role to play in history ... [as the] chosen nation in order to carry out [God’s] mission.”¹² This story of origin informs early settlers to North America based on the Hebrew Bible’s account of the election of Israel together with Christian references to being chosen in fulfillment of the promises to Abraham.

While enroute to North America, Puritan John Winthrop is credited with preaching a sermon about the soon-to-be established colony as a “city on a hill.” Historian Daniel T. Rodgers describes this as an origin story, albeit not unique to the U.S.: “Dreams of founding a new and purer Israel circulated all across the early modern Atlantic. During the long nineteenth-century era of economic and imperial expansion, conviction that a nation’s people had been uniquely commissioned to lead God’s forces of good and civilization played a bedrock role in the patriotic cultures

discuss the creed’s purpose, use, why and what these changes mean. My point is to remind readers that Christian movements share a history of distinguishing between themselves and others.

10. Andrew L. Whitehead, “Five Elements of Christian Nationalism,” The Charles F. Kettering Foundation, updated September 11, 2025, accessed March 1, 2026, <https://kettering.org/five-elements-of-christian-nationalism/>.

11. Whitehead, “Five Elements of Christian Nationalism.”

12. Philip S. Gorski and Eliyahu Stern, *We the (Chosen) People: Christian Nationalism Now*, podcast audio, For the Life of the World, 58 min. 2025, <https://faith.yale.edu/media/the-chosen-people-christian-nationalism-now>.

far beyond the United States.”¹³ Nevertheless, this sermon serves as “a mission statement for the society that Winthrop and his fellow voyagers would build in their new world.”¹⁴

Those espousing Christian nationalism in the U.S. today caution that the nation’s covenantal relationship with God is in jeopardy due to unfaithfulness. As a city on a hill, the country must change direction and bear witness in order to retain God’s blessing, including reclaiming its place over things threatening its existence, such as gender diversity, non-Christian, people of non-northern European descent, descendants of the First Nations, and former slaves.

At the heart of this origin story is American exceptionalism and Manifest Destiny. The divine mandate to expand across and settle the North American continent is a part of this story, fusing Christianity with national identity. Just as European settlers brought “civilization” to the continent, instituting “coherent principles of both civil and religious life,”¹⁵ Christian nationalists are committed to fulfilling the covenantal mandate given by God. Yet to regard this origin story alone misses its place as a part of larger cultural whole.

Sociologists Andrew Whitehead and Samuel Perry refer to the “cultural framework” of Christian nationalism as “a collection of myths, traditions, symbols, narratives, and value systems” that fuse American civic life with Christianity.¹⁶ Within Christian nationalism, the symbols, value systems, traditions, and narratives reflect a way of being in the world that is God’s will. Those promoting Christian nationalism draw from two movements, those endorsing “Christian Statism” and those espousing “a conservative religious agenda for civil society.”¹⁷ The former reflects exclusivity to the majority population and intolerance for marginalized groups, while the latter reflects a socio-religious conservatism.

Contextual frameworks of Christian nationalism

Nationalist movements such as Christian nationalism are *imagined communities*. In a book by the same name, anthropologist and historian Benedict Anderson suggests nations and nationalist

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movements occur when a group of people share something in common when they might not otherwise affiliate with one another—a socially constructed community.¹⁸ The imagined communities associated with Christian nationalism find unity through shared origin stories, symbols, and traditions that separate them from others in the larger society.

Yet despite representing Christian nationalism as a dominant movement, adherents represent a minority of the U.S. population. An estimated 10% of the U.S. population consider themselves adherents to Christian nationalism, 20% are sympathizers, numbers that have remained constant since first polled in 2022.¹⁹ Not all white evangelicals subscribe to Christian nationalism nor are all people promoting its goals evangelical. However, people interested in defending a particular form of western culture find Christian nationalism a useful tool toward achieving their aim of reclaiming a white-centric nation.²⁰ For this reason, sociologist George Yancy suggests “the current phenomenon is *conservative identity politics*” rather than Christian nationalism.²¹ While there is truth in this assertion, I suggest it misrepresents the cultural whole. My commitments to understanding the ways different cultural elements intersect and interact finds me responding “yes but” in the same way I support Jon Bialecki’s assertion that this is a form of religious nationalism rooted in Christian ideology.²²

13. Daniel T. Rodgers, *As a City on a Hill: The Story of America’s Most Famous Lay Sermon* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 5.

14. Rodgers, *As a City on a Hill*, 17.

15. Abram C. Van Engen, *City on a Hill: A History of American Exceptionalism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020), 116.

16. Andrew L. Whitehead and Samuel L. Perry, *Taking America Back for God: Christian Nationalism in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 10. Religious movements include stories of identity and origin, notions of and interactions with the non-human realm, ethical and moral purity codes, specialists able to interact with entities beyond the human realm, and a collective sense of social cohesion.

17. Ruljian Li and Paul Froese, “The Duality of American Christian Nationalism: Religious Traditionalism versus Christian Statism,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 62, no. 4 (2023): 771, <https://doi.org/10.1111/jssr.12868>, no. 4 (2023)

18. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).

19. Editors, “Christian Nationalism Across All 50 States: Insights from PRRI’s 2024 American Values Atlas,” PRRI (Public Religion Research Institute), updated February 4, 2025, accessed May 20, 2025, <https://www.prri.org/research/christian-nationalism-across-all-50-states-insights-from-prris-2024-american-values-atlas/>.

20. Philip S. Gorski, Samuel L. Perry, and Jemar Tisby, *The Flag and the Cross: White Christian Nationalism and the Threat to American Democracy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2022), 8ff.

21. George Yancy, “It’s Not ‘Christian Nationalism.’ It’s Conservative Identity Politics,” *Christianity Today* (January 22, 2026).

22. Jon Bialecki, “Eschatology, Ethics, and Ethnos: Resentment and Christian Nationalism in the Anthropology of Christianity,” *Religion and Society* 8, no. 1 (2017), <https://doi.org/DOI:10.3167/>

While Christian nationalism dominates some news cycles, it is neither homogeneous nor restricted to the U.S. Anthropologists have found similar phenomena in Oceania, Africa, and Latin America. Naomi Haynes describes Christian nationalism in Zambia as “the broad but nevertheless explicit convergence of visions of national identity or destiny with narratives of Christian election or providence.”²³ Haynes points to the influences coming from “twentieth-century Christian Reconstructionism, and the more recent New Apostolic Reformation.”²⁴ Reconstruction theology (emerging from Armenian-American Calvinist, Rousas John Rushdoony’s work) calls “for the restoration of biblical—that is, primarily Old Testament—law, or ‘theonomy’.”

The New Apostolic Reformation’s vision is that of “creating a society in which evangelical Christian values predominate.”²⁵ Inspired by C. Peter Wagner (Fuller Seminary), the current movement emphasizes “the Seven Mountain Mandate,” a call for people of faith to dominate seven aspects of society: religion, education, media, family, arts and entertainment, business, and government. This domination does not necessarily result from increasing converts but rather “to have those who are converted operate at the tops of the cultural mountains from a biblical worldview ... It doesn’t matter if the majority of the culture is made up of Christians. It only matters who has the greatest influence over that cultural mountain.”²⁶ This argument reflects the ways access to power informs other cultural elements.

Christian nationalism’s current rise has links to people working in the White House administration. In a widely reported hidden-camera interview, Russell Vought self-identifies as a Christian nationalist. Now Director of the Office of Budget Management and reported architect of Project 2025, Vought describes his formation of the Center for Renewing America as “An organization that I helped turn into the death star ... I think you have to rehabilitate Christian Nationalism.”²⁷ One of the Executive Actions that came out of his team’s work is evident in a position paper titled Project Esther.

The project’s authors argue that challenges to Israel’s right to exist are similar to events in Persia in the mid-fourth century BCE. Project Esther’s subtitle is “A National Strategy to Combat

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Antisemitism.”²⁸ It provides a blueprint to ensure prosperity and security for supporters of Israel; people drawing attention to the plight of Muslims in general or Palestinians in particular vis-à-vis Israel should be considered a part of the Hamas Support Network and in direct conflict with American values, its citizens, and national interests. Project Esther’s conflation of people calling for the protection of Palestinians includes imploring Americans to stand up to those threatening Israel and its interests. The Project closes using words inscribed on the Holocaust Memorial and attributed to Martin Niemöller, “Then they came for me—and there was no one left to speak for me.”²⁹

Some Jewish bloggers and organizations quickly distanced themselves from Project Esther, including a response titled: “Project Esther Isn’t for Us—And It’s Not About Our Safety.” It states, “It’s a political weapon—used to silence dissent, target progressives, and push a far-right agenda that puts all of us at risk.”³⁰ Some Jewish organizations equated this (Project Esther’s embrace of Israel) as an example of Christian nationalism,³¹ releasing an “Open Letter from Jewish American Leaders” with calls for respecting free speech, due process, freedom of the press, and academic freedom, while cautioning against the exploitation of Jewish fears.³²

28. Heritage Foundation, “Project Esther: A National Strategy to Combat Antisemitism,” National Task Force to Combat Antisemitism, 2024, 2025, <https://www.heritage.org/progressivism/report/project-esther-national-strategy-combat-antisemitism>.

29. Harold Marcuse, “The Origin and Reception of Martin Niemöller’s Quotation ‘First they came for the communists,’” updated July 31, 2014, accessed April 26, 2025, <https://marcuse.faculty.history.ucsb.edu/projects/niem/articles/Marcuse2014NiemollerQuote147g-Web.pdf>. Niemöller’s words, etched on the Holocaust Memorial, are being used as a rallying cry by people resisting current Administration actions, including limiting open debate, shutting down diversity, equity, and inclusion programs, deportations and imprisonment of immigrants within the U.S. The Heritage Foundation is using the same words as a call to action in Project Esther.

30. Rabbi Sandra Lawson, “Project Esther Isn’t for Us — And It’s Not About Our Safety,” Substack, 2025, accessed April 26, 2025, https://open.substack.com/pub/rabbisandra/p/project-esther-isnt-for-us-and-its?r=22ihr2&utm_campaign=post&utm_medium=web.

31. See Myah Ward and Irie Sentner, “Trump’s pro-Palestinian activism crackdown closely mirrors a plan from the creators of Project 2025,” *Politico*, updated April 6, 2025, 2025, accessed April 26, 2025, <https://www.politico.com/news/2025/04/06/project-2025-project-esther-university-crackdown-plans-00272750>.

32. “Open Letter from Jewish American Leaders,” Jewish Leaders

arrrs.2017.080103.

23. Naomi Haynes, “Taking Dominion in a Christian Nation: North American Political Theology in an African Context,” *Pneuma* 43, no. 2 (2021): 215.

24. Haynes, “Taking Dominion in a Christian Nation” 219.

25. John Weaver, *The New Apostolic Reformation: History of a Modern Charismatic Movement* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2016), 146. More details on the emergence of the New Apostolic Reformation will follow when discussing the rise of the Moral Majority.

26. Os Hillman “How Christians Can Change Our Culture,” *The Christian Post*, 2013, accessed March 4, 2026, <https://www.christianpost.com/news/how-christians-can-change-our-culture.html>.

27. Climate Report, “Undercover in Project 2025,” (Social Media Video at 0:53/9:51), Centre for Climate Reporting, 2024, accessed May 2, 2025, <https://x.com/ClimateReport/status/1824068389796475049>.

Despite these disclaimers, Christian nationalism continues. Birthed in dominionism, proponents argue “that Christians should take moral, spiritual, and ecclesiastical control over society,”³³ echoing Genesis reports on the granting of dominion over “the birds of the air and over the fish of the sea, and over everything that moves upon the earth.”³⁴

Those committed to the notion of dominionism argue against “those who do not fit within the bounds of a Christian country due to their ascriptive characteristics or their ideology—certainly non-Christians, but also Democrats, people of color, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) individuals are to be controlled by the state, using violence if necessary.”³⁵ Establishing and maintaining God’s dominion are central elements of social transformations for some Christian nationalist movements.

In spite of the racialization of some Christian nationalism movements, black Protestants are sympathetic to its general goals, although a coalition of leaders are calling out its underlying racism.³⁶ Hispanic Protestant Americans are “more likely to hold Christian nationalist views (58%) than those who identify as nonwhite (43%). Hispanic Catholics, however, show the reverse. Non-white Hispanic Catholics are more likely to identify with Christian nationalism (36%) than white Hispanic Catholics (25%).”³⁷ These numbers reflect the complexities in focusing exclusively on race, racial identity, or ascription when describing social trends.

Christian nationalism unpacked

Christian nationalism is also an example of a *revitalization movement*, a phrase coined by Anthony Wallace. Wallace defines revitalization movements “as a deliberate, organized, conscious effort by members of a society to construct a more satisfying culture.”³⁸ He goes on to explain “the persons involved in the

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process of revitalization must perceive their culture, or some major areas of it ... unsatisfactory; and they must innovate not merely discrete items, but a new cultural system.”³⁹ As a revitalization movement, Christian nationalism seeks to restore the U.S. to its covenantal relationship with God in order to assume its role that it be a blessing to the nations.

Anthropologist Jon Bialecki found these calls for Christian revitalization twenty-five years ago when encountering large American flags, “God Bless America” banners, and sermons claiming America was a Christian nation that had lost its way in southern California in 2010.⁴⁰ Bialecki is not alone. Whitehead and Perry came across similar sentiments when researching *Taking Back America for God* a decade later.⁴¹ These ethnographic accounts mark a mid-way point in the rise of current calls for fusing Christianity with American society.

Current Christian nationalist movements were seeded a generation earlier. The 1960s rise of what Robert Bellah termed “American civil religion” and Jerry Falwell’s 1970s Moral Majority set the stage for current evangelical Christian engagement in the body politic. Bellah recognizes the presence of religious elements, including “a set of beliefs, symbols, and rituals” in public life that were used to legitimize political authority.⁴² Jerry Falwell’s call for civic engagement while preaching on the moral collapse of the U.S. was foundational in the rise of the Moral Majority. In *The Book of Jerry Falwell*, anthropologist Susan Harding notes Falwell’s preaching on the need for fundamentalist Christians to stop looking only to the future but instead to imagine and engage in political action today.⁴³ These two threads converge with others in advocating for a specific Christian approach to regulating women’s reproductive health, advocating for capital punishment,

for Democracy, updated May 8, 2025, accessed May 19, 2025, <https://jewishleadersfordemocracy.org>.

33. Keri Ladner, “The Quiet Rise of Christian Dominionism,” *The Christian Century* 139, no. 19 (2022).

34. Genesis 1:28b, NRSV, *The Holy Bible: The New Revised Standard Version* (New York: National Council of Churches, 1989).

35. Walker et al., “Religion is Sometimes Raced: Christian Nationalism as In-Group Protection,” 2.

36. Michael R. Fisher Jr., “Understanding Differences Between Black and White Christian Nationalism Adherents and Sympathizers,” PRRI (Public Religion Research Institute), updated July 3, 2024, accessed May 15, 2025, <https://www.prri.org/spotlight/understanding-differences-between-black-and-white-of-christian-nationalism-adherents-and-sympathizers/>.

37. Anita Huizar-Hernandez, “Christian Nationalism and Hispanic Americans: Unpacking the Data,” PRRI (Public Religion Research Institute), updated March 17, 2025, accessed May 20, 2025, <https://www.prri.org/spotlight/christian-nationalism-and-hispanic-americans-unpacking-the-data/>; see Aleja Hertzler-McCain, “Christian nationalism is growing among U.S. Hispanics. Scholars explain why,” Religious News Service, updated October 18, 2024, accessed May 20, 2025, <https://religionnews.com/2024/10/18/latino-christian-nationalism-is-on-the-rise-scholars-explain-why/>.

38. Anthony F.C. Wallace, “Revitalization Movements,” *American Anthropologist* 58 (1956): 265.

39. Wallace, “Revitalization Movements,” 265.

40. Bialecki, “Eschatology, Ethics, and Êthnos: Resentiment and Christian Nationalism in the Anthropology of Christianity.”

41. Whitehead and Perry, *Taking America Back for God*.

42. Robert N. Bellah, “Civil Religion in America,” *Daedalus* 96, no. 1 (1967): 4.

43. Susan Friend Harding, *The Book of Jerry Falwell: Fundamentalist Land Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

and changing educational policies as key elements for controlling the public square.

Around the time of the rise of the Moral Majority, the New Apostolic Reformation (NAR) issued a call for God's people to transform society.⁴⁴ Built by Bill Bright (Campus Crusade for Christ) and Lorren Cunningham's seven mountain mandate (7MM), the New Apostolic Reformation calls upon Christians to engage in what Wagner refers to as apostolic spheres. "Wagner's list of spheres embrace the home; church; schools; government and politics; media; arts, entertainment, and sports; commerce, science, and technology."⁴⁵ Christians are called upon to engage with and transform these spheres to reflect God's will and work.

Termed "the Dominion Mandate," Wagner proposes this reformation is a form of spiritual warfare with the goal of defeating the demonic forces thwarting God's reign and rule. This battle includes recognizing those chosen by God to do God's will and work. Sociologist Art Jipson writes "The NAR emphasizes that Christians should expect to see miraculous signs, where extraordinary events, such as Trump's survival of an assassination attempt, are interpreted to be explained only by divine or spiritual warfare."⁴⁶ Recognizing one as chosen by God to lead the spiritual war against demonic forces adds to the larger story of a salvific return.

While Antonio Gramsci is often invoked in calls to overthrow hegemonic systems suppressing marginalized ethnic, economic, and gendered social classes, his analysis is being used to call for social change by some within Christian nationalist groups. Conservative historian, John Fonte, writes Gramsci, "believed it was necessary first to delegitimize the dominant belief systems of the predominant group."⁴⁷ Doing so requires marginalized Christians overthrowing the hegemonic systems to claim they are being denied their voice and place in all spheres of civil society. "Thus, private life, the work place, religion, philosophy, art, and literature, and civil society, in general, are contested battlegrounds in the struggle to achieve societal transformation."⁴⁸

Evangelist James Kennedy and Tim LaHaye called for Christianity to play a larger role in shaping national policies amid

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anti-Christian persecution.⁴⁹ A recent executive order calling for the formation of a task force for eradicating anti-Christian bias tasks senior administrative cabinet officials to combat and reverse the use of governmental actions against Christians, offering examples such as the jailing of anti-abortion protestors praying and singing outside of clinics and those forcing "radical transgender ideology" as normative on people of faith.⁵⁰

The impact of conservative evangelical pastors on some current governmental leaders has been widely reported. Christian Bible studies and prayer services in the Pentagon and White House reflect this shift as well as the invocation of biblical language to justify military actions against enemies of God. Discussions about gender roles, including whether married women should be allowed to vote at all or, at the very least, be restricted in access to the voting booth continue within different Christian movements.

Believing the current president has been appointed by God to fight a spiritual war has been a continuing theme throughout the current administration. The use of a shofar, as an example of the weaving of eschatological underpinnings evident in what is portrayed as a spiritual war, is an important symbol for some Christian nationalists. Photos of people draped in American flags while blowing shofars are common, suggesting the shofar "plays a strong symbolic role ... where eschatology, battle, Jews, and the

44. C. Peter Wagner, *Churchquake* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1999); C. Peter Wagner, *The Church in the Workplace: How God's People Can Transform Society* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2006).

45. Irvin G. Chetty, "The New Apostolic Reformation and Christian Zionism," *Journal for the Study of Religion*, 27, no. 2 (2014): 299; citing Wagner, *The Church in the Workplace: How God's People Can Transform Society*, 113.

46. Art Jipson, "New Apostolic Reformation evangelicals see Trump as God's warrior in their battle to win America from satanic forces and Christianize it," Daily News Record, updated November 15, 2024, 2024, accessed April 25, 2025, https://www.dnronline.com/news/religion/new-apostolic-reformation-evangelicals-see-trump-as-god-s-warrior-in-their-battle-to-win/article_73882ce1-c6e3-5dce-bcd9-c68fd5228513.html.

47. John Fonte, "Why There is a Culture War: Gramsci and Tocqueville in America," Hoover Institution, updated December 1, 2000, accessed April 29, 2025, <https://www.hoover.org/research/why-there-culture-war>.

48. Fonte, "Why There is a Culture War."

49. Gorski, Perry, and Tisby, *The Flag and the Cross*; see D. James Kennedy and Jerry Newcombe, *What if America were a Christian Nation Again?* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2003); and Tim LaHaye, *Faith of Our Founding Fathers*, 1st ed. (Brentwood, TN: Wolgemunt & Hyatt, 1987).

50. After reminding readers of the necessity to protect the religious freedoms of Americans, the pronouncement specifies ending anti-Christian weaponization of government, so that people could be "free to practice their faith without fear of discrimination or retaliation by their government" Donald J. Trump, "Eradicating Anti-Christian Bias," (Executive Action), The White House, 2025, accessed May 12, 2025, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/02/eradicating-anti-christian-bias/>.

State of Israel come together.”⁵¹ Used for calling God’s army to war, the blowing of a shofar is “simultaneously biblical, eschatological, and very much of our moment.”⁵²

Engaging Christian nationalism

What happens if someone happens to disagree with the tenets of Christian nationalism? Is it possible to change people’s minds? Good question. Arguing against Christian nationalism’s theological premises may be helpful for people wondering about its viability but will likely make little difference to those promoting it. Fundamentally, more is at stake than the aberration of the separation of church and state.

Remembering that Christian nationalism and all of its variations are forms of religious nationalism, anthropologist Jon Bialecki argues those advocating for the fusing of a religious movement with nationalism are structuring their models using “symbols, places, rites, and events” by modifying or erasing historical moments and their meanings at the expense of people historically at the margins of power.⁵³ An effective counter to Christian nationalism is to reclaim the symbols, rites, places, and events with counter narratives. As fundamental and foundational social elements, pushing back against the current dominance of Christian nationalism and its ideological, religious, and social structures is important while recognizing most Americans may be open to other ways of understanding and expressing national identity.

In 2021, historian Timothy Snyder suggested some of the laws being passed restricting discussions of racial history in public arenas were evidence of a group declaring war on history.⁵⁴ David L. Blight argued the same shortly after an executive order was released calling for the need to reclaim history by using “objective facts” to deal with a “revisionist movement,” writing “the order is nothing less than a declaration of political war on the historians’ profession, our training and integrity...”⁵⁵ Reclaiming and acknowledging historical places, events, symbols, and rites is an important step toward re-grounding history rather than allowing others to revise it according to their desires.

People in power advocating for a reorganization of fundamental social norms are appealing to social fears. Sociologists Joseph O. Baker and Andrew L. Whitehead highlight these fears: fear of immigrants; fear of “non-Christian religious groups”; fear of being replaced by people of non-European descent; fear of

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globalism, socialism, and communism; and fear of gun control.⁵⁶ Those capitalizing on these fears and marshalling forces to bring about their vision of a Christian nation are currently in positions of authority. It is important to offer narratives by those celebrating social diversity and identity rather than fear.

Allowing Christian nationalism to define Christianity in general, as well as its place, norms, and values within the U.S. is problematic. Offering alternative symbols, events, rituals, and stories serves to constructively reframe what some argue is a dominant voice calling for religious nationalism. It is of value to publicly stand with those being marginalized and align in solidarity with sympathetic individuals and organizations. For those willing to do so, direct opposition through civil disobedience, lawsuits, public proclamations, and political engagement is another option. Others may choose to engage with neighbors, friends, and family members on matters of mutual interest, rather than shutting them out because they may disagree.

Rather than attacking Christian nationalism extremists, Rachel Lu calls for finding ways to work toward goals for the common good, entering into healthy conversation with and, when necessary, condemning it while embracing the many different religious voices already present now and in the future. “[T]he best antidote to Christian nationalism will not be a high and impenetrable ‘wall of separation’ between religion and public life, but rather a healthier and better-integrated public square in which people of all faiths and backgrounds can work together for common goals.”⁵⁷

51. Sarah Imhoff, “Shofar Blast,” *Uncivil Religion*, Part I. Christian Nationalism on January 6, Interpretive Essays, 2022, accessed April 26, 2025, <https://uncivilreligion.org/home/the-shofar-as-christian-battle-cry>.

52. Imhoff, “Shofar Blast.”

53. Bialecki, “Eschatology, Ethics, and Ethnos,” 46.

54. Timothy K. Snyder, “The War on History Is a War on Democracy,” (Essay), *The New York Times*, 2021, accessed May 12, 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/06/29/magazine/memory-laws.html>.

55. David L. Blight, “Trump Cannot Win His War on History,” (Opinion), *The New York Times*, 2025, accessed May 12, 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/03/31/opinion/trump-war-history.html>.

56. Joseph O. Baker and Andrew L. Whitehead, “Faith over fear? Christian nationalism and cultural fears in the United States,” *Nations and Nationalism*, (2024): 3ff, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1111/nana.13068>.

57. Rachel Lu, “The antidote to Christian nationalism,” *America: The Jesuit Review*, updated April 17, 2025, accessed April 25, 2025, https://www.americamagazine.org/politics-society/2025/04/17/christian-nationalism-public-square-250346?utm_source=piano&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=43381&pnespid=pKQ2VTgdKfWY0OPH_G3tD87RoAqsU5F5J.fs2rY2vwBmDZNz5a1kvKDn.Ivr4f9u416_er9T.

Conclusion

Understanding Christian nationalism as a social phenomenon includes accepting religion as interacting with and influenced by other social elements. An important first step is to recognize the challenge that comes with simplifying and essentializing Christian nationalism, its proponents, and the disparate ways it is embodied. There is no single Christian nationalism nor do those advocating for it agree on what it should look like. While the dominant discourse in the public domain advocates for white Christian nationalism, others promote religious nationalism based on their own social, ethnic, or racial identities.

Finding ways to engage with Christian nationalism is difficult for people looking to move past the current vitriol. What is particularly challenging are the many layers representing Christian nationalism and its many variations, from ideologically driven individuals instituting governmental policies to neighbors and family members, and everything in-between. Therefore, engagement must occur in different ways.

The challenge to constructively engage with various cultural movements includes recognizing that the social whole of one group is a construct of interconnected social elements. Those who understand the Gospel mandate to realize God's will and to work through reconciling racial, economic, and social differences are motivated by a very different understanding of Christ's life, death, and resurrection than those subscribing to Christian nationalism. Engagement is difficult with those publicly advocating for a fusing of Christianity with the nation-state, insofar as they have been preparing for an ideo-religious battle for a very long time. With access to foundational power structures, they are now firmly entrenched as they bring their vision to fruition. Publicly offering an alternative narrative invites relationships to emerge in the public arena. These may be tentative at first, but relationships may blossom and grow over time.

Focusing only on Christian nationalism ignores its complexities as a cultural phenomenon and risks missing the totality within which it exists. Allowing Christian nationalism to define Christianity's place, norms, and values within the U.S. is problematic. Offering alternative symbols, events, rituals, and stories serves to constructively reframe what some argue is a dominant voice calling for religious nationalism.

And so it is, as people of faith imbued with theological prowess find opportunities to engage, while remaining conscious of the complex systems within which each component is enmeshed.

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