
A Cruciform Eschatology is Not What Christian Nationalists Imagine

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A smart Lutheran pastor friendly to the then emerging trend of evangelical-charismatic Christianity once explained to me his dedication to a biblical hermeneutic framed in his John Nelson Darby-esque grammar. He justified it as a legitimate expression of a religious “language game.” With this he claimed he could subjectively have his postmodern cake and objectively eat it too. Readers may remember the term “language game” from the latter work of the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein. Wittgenstein’s work inspired George Lindbeck to use the language game concept to develop a systematic basis for narrative theology as capable of truth claims within a universe of plural language games.¹ My conversation partner not only justified his and his congregation’s biblical interpretation as sophisticated, being consonant with this latest style of theological method. He also interpreted it as “objectively so” for his particular community. Their imaging of scripture’s meaning *was* their reality even if dissonant with many or most other peoples’ worldviews.

Of course, Lindbeck’s proposal went further than the radical pluralism (“everyone has their own truth which is true as long as it’s sincere”) of lazier minds. He argued that speakers and seers of diverse language games still could see familiar patterns of language and referents in traditions quite other than their own. Indeed, on this point Lindbeck’s work inspired ecumenical and interfaith dialogue with very good results. Convergence and conjunction are arguably more prominent in ecumenical and interfaith relations today than before. Except for neo-evangelicalism. Its sophisticates may have imagined they could claim higher ground by referencing language game theory. But their game with its literalist apocalyptic grammar of our human future never cohered with the Great Tradition, nor with our scientific worldview, and not even with their own practical world view. I can see now that my conversation partner then in Orange County, California, anticipated where neo-evangelical conservatism was headed: to a game Christian nationalism forcefully intends to win. If not by the

1. Lindbeck and his colleague Hans Frei are regarded as founders of the once heralded “Yale School” genre of theology, correcting what they regarded as having grown impatient with the dead end of theological method as the exercise of objective referentiality. See George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine, Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Louisville: Westminster, 1984).

Convergence and conjunction in the relations of stated doctrine and worldviews are not characteristic of Christian nationalism. If the language (doctrine) of Christian nationalists intends to mirror even just their own reality, much more the objective world we all share, they do not recognize the incoherence between their doctrine and even their own worldview.

force of scholarly theological domination,² then by other means.

2. Academic justification by movements that now constitute Christian nationalism drew directly from the 3-volume work of the hyper-Reformed Rousas John Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Vallecito, CA: Chalcedon, 2012), first written and published in 1973. His work became the backbone for more popularized texts to advance the cause, chief among them being Bill Johnson and Lance Wallnau’s *Invading Babylon: The Seven Mountain Mandate* (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 2013). Wallnau today is an authoritative figure in Christian nationalism as a preacher, writer, and strategist, fronting for the New Apostolic Reformation movement, and a preferred consultant to right wing political figures. For the cultural historical context that accompanied the rise of Christian nationalism, see Kristin Kobes Du Mez, *Jesus and John Wayne, How White Evangelicals Corrupted a Faith and Fractured a Nation* (New York: Liveright, 2021). For insight into the emotive and theological drivers and a parsing of Christian nationalism, see Matthew D. Taylor, *The Violent Take It by Force: The Christian Movement that Is Threatening Our Democracy* (Minneapolis: Broadleaf Books, 2025). Many more fine resources are available to illumine the development, theology, and praxis of Christian nationalism. For definitional clarity, I refer to Samuel Perry and Andrew Whitehead, *Taking America Back for God: Christian Nationalism in the United States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020). They define Christian nationalism as a cultural framework fusing American identity with a conservative form of Christianity. It is an ideology that pushes for government to ensure the nation’s Christian identity by removing the separation of church and state and privileging white nativism. Angela Denker rightly traces the heretofore

Convergence and conjunction in the relations of stated doctrine and worldviews are not characteristic of Christian nationalism. If the language (doctrine) of Christian nationalists intends to mirror even just their own reality, much more the objective world we all share, they do not recognize the incoherence between their doctrine and even their own worldview. Critics of literalistic religion will say that this is nothing new; that “anti-intellectual fundamentalists” have always insisted on a stochastic six-day creation of the earth and a universe that is only 5000 years old. Yet the scriptural literalists simultaneously learn quantum computer programming, measure the distance to Alpha Centauri in light years, and write their algorithms to direct cultural evolution toward their favored financial interest. And these are those who subscribe to and seek to impose theocratic Dominionism on all of society’s sectors.

Incoherences in the Christian nationalist language game are not unique to Christian nationalists. All of us Christians live with incoherence. We speak of God Emmanuel and yet confess in the future tense that Christ will come to judge us and raise us. We “smarter” ones speak with informed scientific appreciation about time’s endless arrow that will either have all the universe dissipate into the loneliest disparateness of all matter or fuse all that is into an unimaginably fiery hellscape only to blow up again. Yet we long for the descent of a promised new heavenly city. We know there is no longer a three-story universe, and that no scriptural warrant exists for a burning hell such as the medievals imagined it. Yet we generally generous orthodox Christians, if honest, still privately wish that on our enemies while the New Fundamentalists explicitly promise it. It would be easy for us to throw up our hands in despair that evangelicalism has always argued literal direct reference where there never has been; worse easy for us not to care.³

But we do and should care, especially about theological categories that, when wrongly construed, would place an unrecognized commitment to practical atheism at the center of our convictions. It may be that the greatest incoherence of Christian nationalist language and the reality it pretends to reference involves eschatology and the role of apocalyptic speech. Most Christians have yet to chart what qualifies as an “adequate” eschatology. And most Christians, along with most others, now think of apocalyptic language in conventional terms that function entirely contrary to biblical intent. Despite our common misunderstanding and misuse, though, Christians generally have believed that whatever our *ultimate and purposeful* “end” is, it will come only by God’s gracious will. The appropriate apocalyptic speech about that end, then, will not terrorize human beings, but herald the disclosure

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of God’s gracious promises kept.

To the other very contrary, Christian nationalist eschatology and apocalyptic are wrested from God’s hands and subjected to a human stewardship that was never part of the Genesis deal. In that eschatology — and eschatology does capitulate ontology — God is not present. God is removed to eternity, which itself “waits” for us at the supposed terminus of *chronos* time’s arrow. Since God’s promises for the Christian nationalist mind at best are deferred by a flatlined eschatology for which the Christian nationalist mind chronically (as in *chronos*) and impatiently yearns, faith itself is redefined as the taking control of time’s arrow. The *eschaton* not only are predicted, they are hastened by self-righteous machinations, wholly inverting the priority of God’s grace into the “virtue” of violence in Christian nationalist apocalyptic. On this basis “prayer” in support of the war on Iran is uttered in a Pentagon worship service with violent words taken directly from Tarantino’s script for *Pulp Fiction*.⁴ Worse than being merely literal, Christian nationalists would hasten their preferred *eschaton* by imposing apocalypse now.

We have long suspected this. Christian nationalist eschatology and apocalypticism hit us with staggering clarity this past Easter 2026 when President Donald Trump and his Secretary of Defense, Pete Hegseth, together spoke the terms of negative apocalyptic to advance an eschatology of rank evil. The Secretary declared that the president’s choice of war against Iran was a holy crusade, named American servicemembers (the preferred term to denote America’s military personnel) as Christ’s warriors (‘warriors’ being a distinctly non-preferred term in the military lexicon), and prayed for Christ’s guidance away from legality into lethality. Achieving the unimaginable, the President on Easter Sunday enlarged the

hidden ‘male’ privileging in CN. Cf. Denker, *Disciples of White Jesus: The Radicalization of American Boyhood* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2025).

3. And so, we’ve come to agree even instinctively with John Dominic Crossan. “My point, once again, is not that those ancient people told literal stories and we are now smart enough to take them symbolically, but they told them symbolically and we are now dumb enough to take them literally.” Crossan, with Richard G. Watts, *Who Is Jesus? Answers to Your Questions About the Historical Jesus* (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox, 1999).

4. Brian Kaylor, *A Public Witness*, “Hegseth Borrows Violent Prayer from ‘Pulp Fiction’ to Bless Iran War at April Pentagon Worship Service. Substack. April 15, 2026.

blasphemy by threatening to annihilate an “entire civilization” and then followed with a social media meme depicting himself as Christ clothed more like a wealthy Roman senator than as the itinerant and darker skinned “Emmanuel” of the people he was and is. It does not matter that the president withdrew the meme. The terms were put on the table, and the cat was out of the bag. Never has such language and imagery — such a religious conflation and conflagration of a speech act — been used by any American federal administration.

Secretary Hegseth employed distinctly religious eschatological language, as is his wont, being a distinctive Christian nationalist who follows the New Apostolic Reformation movement. To Hegseth’s unfettered sectarian speech patterns, the president added the apocalyptic scenarios — though so distinctly unbiblical — familiar to students of Charles Nelson Darby, Hal Lindsey, Tim LaHaye, and their burgeoned private school, home-schooling curricula, and digital platforms, all accessorized by Jack Chick comics. It has not yet dawned on the American public that having digested this vocabulary, like other “regular” language when spoken by the Executive Office of the United States, words spoken by POTUS for action by definition are administration policy. *Maybe* it was all deliberately hyperbolic as among the tactics of a purportedly proven deal maker; *maybe* it was the foolish speech of language-challenged lesser minds. But a certain normed behavior still holds. When the president speaks, people listen. And *this time* all the world caught *the point* that this president and his coterie were imposing dangerously devolved and classically heretical religious overtones on domestic and foreign policy. However hysterical commentators may judge the language to be, it is in fact in accord with the administration’s Christian nationalist script.⁵

Precising eschatology

We need to rehearse the defining elements of a generally traditional Christian eschatology and its befitting apocalyptic rhetoric. American Christians by and large have a thin eschatology. They use the term mostly as a shorthand for whatever happens at the end of human standard time (*chronos*). A fulsomely Christian eschatology, though, includes the divine promise of God’s eternity becoming fully manifest in creaturely time, the content and “when” of which we cannot as humans know. There is more to Christian eschatology than what simply happens after history’s end. Whatever the end, to describe that new beginning in eternity means to “have” or “construct” (as theology does) an eschatology on the basis of the risen Christ’s presence through the Holy Spirit and the biblical witness, to image life fully in God’s manifest reign. This means, especially, that the *eschata* are more than what temporally happens when God’s future is made present. The *eschata* are about the ultimate values that God has spoken into creation. Jesus’

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cautionary words against predicting “the” *eschaton* redirect us to interpret *eschata* as *ultimate* matters to which Christians are given and for which we are needed.

“Last” things are not then only or merely the details of *chronos* on which humans are to obsess. Nor are they a literal script that faithful Christians must follow for history to consummate kindly. The last things, yes, will be of a new creation, *creatio novum*. But we will know them as creatures in a way we do not know now; we will know them as creatures of the *creatio continua* wonderfully enfolded in the completed advent of the *creatio novum*. There and then the ultimate values that God has purposed in creation —the Gifts of the Spirit, grace, mercy, justice, The Good—True—Beautiful—themselves will be transvalued even higher in their realized perfection. Words, like those of Paul in 1 Corinthians 15 or those of John the Revelator’s “last” chapter, cannot predict with any precision, but surely do connote, the ecstasy that will greet time’s fulfillment in God’s manifest eternity. The words, also eschatological words, intimate that the fulfillment has begun; it is now *and* not yet. And so an apt Christian eschatology anticipates in the here and now, by its own speaking and acting, what will become by God’s promised gift. Eschatological imagination does not arbitrarily “make up” or invent willy nilly what we say will be. A properly Christian eschatological imagination is the Christian epistemology resourced by God, impossible to be humanly forced.

Two generations ago, Gerhard Forde named our recourse as American Christians to the constitutional separation of church and state as the sign of a failed eschatology. He intuited that if we had an apt eschatology, our political theology would be more robust than a simple muttering about church and state separation, as if that were all to be said about the meaning of the Two Kingdoms

5. See Project 2025, authored primarily by Christian Nationalist Russell Vought, now Director of Management and Budget. https://static.heritage.org/project2025/2025_MandateForLeadership_FULL.pdf.

doctrine.⁶ “Failed” is an interesting word choice. If eschatology failed, what would its success mean? What is not just eschatology, but “an” eschatology supposed to do?

An eschatology’s purpose is to help a person make sense of history and one’s place in it. “Making sense” includes discerning our human place in history as history proceeds. This is our human situation whether we seek religious framing for eschatology or not. All organic life is eschatological, which is to say merely that every living thing dies. Every living thing ends. That is the simplest and by itself meaningless fact of life. The “simplest” eschatology, then, would be literally a last word; a death certificate that reminds us of that about which we would rather not be reminded: that not even all humans, much more all organic matter, are remembered. If “nature” is but a name for a blind process that is “red in tooth and claw,” the basest eschatology merely marks a dispassionate and amoral fusion of life and death.

As soon as humans intuit that other humans share nature’s disregard, however, we set them apart as sociopaths. Our revulsion just shies from being universal (obviously), but its preponderance suggests strongly that a moral order and direction is indeed written into the fabric of humanity. We have this gnawing conviction, more than a hunch, that there is a purpose for our lives, for our very being. Such conviction aligns with Augustine’s anthropology: that we are restless until we rest in God. The restlessness signals that our lives are to have peace *now*, justice and love on earth now as in heaven. And the vision for justice-love now on earth cannot be sustained if it is merely temporal. An eschatology that only frames our lives in terms of a singular trajectory from A to B to Z, where eternity, if real, is only the fourth dimensional end of human *chronos* time, therefore cannot do.

An eschatological imagination that lurches only from one damned thing to and through the next to the next after that will not do. Because we have been awakened, because we *are* woke to an eschatological reality that is opaque to those who only know temporality (Paul’s point in Romans 13), we can and do live differently. Eschatological imagination adds dimensionality and purpose to our lives, as should any epistemology that has recognized in part God’s metaphysics. Eschatology is that part of Christian knowing and living where the accent is on the meaning of time and eternity for us now. And since it is God and God’s effects of ultimate purposefulness we are imagining (as in image-ing) with words, we can, do, and must write in poetry more than prose. Eschatology is the metaphysics of ultimate meaning for the present tense.

Again, an apt eschatology will be expansive. Since it is about ultimate values in the ultimacy of time’s flow in eternity, like Gregory of Nyssa’s eschatology of old or David Bentley Hart’s of today, eschatology may—or maybe must—be so expansive as to tell of a universalistic recapitulation of all the good, true, and beautiful, an *anakephalosis* of all things caught up and reconciled in

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Christ. An apt eschatology, in other words, announces an intimate relation between eternity and time, which relation is not eternity “after” time, a mistaken equivocation of eternity with infinity. The relation will be of human temporality’s enfoldment in eternity, and eternity the manifold of all times. If God is everywhere and all in all, as well as beyond time, as classical Christianity has always averred, then this is a fortuitous eschatology too, as it happens to coincide with natural science’s prosaic calculations of time atop time atop times in special and general relativity theory.

By contrast, there is the eschatology of the flat trajectory invented by biblical “literalists” rendering scripture (ironically by their own recourse to logical positivism in debt to Rushdoony) into a predictive sequencing of fanciful rapturous drama at the end of *chronos*. Oh, long and entertaining stories can be drawn out. They are the stuff of Christian nationalist eschatology. They are predictive and intend to be, notwithstanding the categorically different concept of eschatology to which Jesus, Paul, and John attest. Their greatest deficiency is that they construe eternity as apart from time; the only place where eternity meets time will be at this temporal time’s end. It is all as if we are riding, rodeo-like, the arcing and bucking entropic arrow of time that must eventually fall to the ground somewhere and sometime. It is difficult not to conclude that this de facto metaphysical commitment is deistic at its core, even practically atheist, as if the eternal God is not *in* the world now but waiting like an impatient father tapping his foot for humanity finally obediently to show up.

An apt eschatology sees and celebrates God in Christ in the world, and tangibly so in the neighbor. An apt eschatology recognizes amongst humankind now, even more for the sake of the world’s future, the *Christus Praesens* to whom Dietrich

6. Gerhard O. Forde, “Justification and This World,” in *Christian Dogmatics*, ed. Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 445–469.

Bonhoeffer was so committed and thus so ethically exemplary. The epistemic difference between an apt eschatology, then, and Christian nationalism's eschatology (however implicit it remains) may well be the human sighting of where the crucified and risen Christ abides. That will imply a further political point in theology, that Christ rules Christians directly with his love, hidden within the natural law of justice-love where people only "know" and live in the frame of temporality.

Precising apocalyptic rhetoric

How then is an apt eschatology, which is a distinctive epistemology, to be communicated? Here we broach the purpose of apocalyptic language. Journalists describe events as "apocalyptic" almost daily. Memes generated by AI, especially if they are political, routinely use apocalyptic hyper-dramatic imagery. So much amped-up, breathless apocalypticism all around! There are real grounds for apocalypticism. As a genre, it is widely received when fear and anxiety are rampant in the social order. Apocalyptic can help heal fear and anxiety in such times by leading people to understand what's going on "behind the curtain." Governing authorities, for their own selfish reasons, also may "create and curate" the hyper-dramatic apocalyptic as propaganda. In either case, the word and genre have travelled far from their original meaning. We have long passed the point when the wag would say, "I don't think that word means what you think it means."

The word "apocalypse" originally and simply means "revelation." It is a revelation of truth behind appearances. An apocalyptic event discloses the true meaning of a situation. As a literary form, apocalyptic literature uses dramatic, even bizarrely unconventional and intentionally symbolic terms, to make its point about the historical events at its time of writing. Apocalyptic literature is contemporaneous with its reading/hearing audience and directly addresses the audience's anxieties. The genre typically focuses on the clash of good and evil, when evil's threat seems overwhelming. Apocalyptic literature is never literal; its "code language" was understood by the intended audience and necessary to protect the audience from malevolent authorities. Thus, apocalyptic language never pretends to predict historical events in the far future. It could, of course, anticipate common human behavior, as is the main criterion for classical literature. But it is always firmly rooted in the time and space of its original readership with its primary concern being their comfort or correction. In that vein, apocalyptic, particularly apocalyptic that is extra-biblical, may be one or both of two types, negative and positive,⁷ the former as warning or even fearmongering; the latter as consolation.

Today the predicate "apocalyptic"⁸ almost always connotes

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unrestrained evil that evokes mass terror. As a literary and film genre today, apocalyptic is more dramatically nihilistic than even the most monstrous Tarantino film would depict. Yet the usual literalistic "Left Behind" narrative trivializes the coded biblical texts and ignores the actual life situation for which the original narrative was written. The negative apocalyptic popular reading today of the Book of Revelation's symbolism renders the text into tropes meant to frighten readers into faith, which means in our case today "faith" in a white Christian hegemony that will protect the reader from the wiles of anything the hegemony defines as evil. This negative understanding of "apocalyptic" is not essentially new. It has hermeneutical roots that in the British and American milieu trace back to the late nineteenth century with Darby's millennialism. What is new and definitively alien to the biblical intent of the genre, is the genre's fusion with a partisan political conviction. The apocalypse's features were updated with the young Billy Graham's calling for a "heaven-sent, Holy Ghost revival" after Russia threatened apocalypse with its successful test of its own atom bomb in 1949. Never mind that Americans already had inaugurated — but "righteously" — the new age of apocalyptic with the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Graham's version was not the only, though rather standard, version of political conservative apocalypticism. American Christians devoured many iterations of apocalypticism that have been scripted and sold since then.⁹ And so, this construal of negative apocalypticism became conventional.

Original biblical intention was always to trump the threat of evil, however, by symbolizing the fact of God's completed victory over the evil impelling the day's very bad news by really bad actors. And so biblical apocalyptic texts are never solely negative. Whenever negative apocalyptic terms occur, they are always met and transcended by God. Biblical apocalyptic serves the gospel. It

7. Ulrich H. J. Körtner, *The End of the World, A Theological Interpretation*, trans. Douglas W. Scott (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995).

8. While "apocalyptic" as a term is formally an adjective or predicate, it is common also to use it as a nominative shorthand for "apocalyptic literature" or "apocalyptic speech." Here I am using the term in that manner.

9. See Matthew Avery Sutton, *American Apocalypse: A History of Modern Evangelicalism* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014) 326-374. Of the many fine descriptions and assessments before and in addition to Sutton, I particularly recommend Julie Ingersoll, *Building God's Kingdom: Inside the World of Christian Reconstruction* (Oxford University Press, 2015), Chris Hedges, *American Fascists: The Christian Right and the War on America* (New York: Free Press, 2008), Fred Clarkson, *Eternal Hostility: The Struggle Between Theocracy and Democracy* (Monroe, ME: Common Courage Press, 1997), Jeff Sharlet, *The Undertow: Scenes from a Slow Civil War* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2023).

consoles. It does not monger fear. It communicates God's perfect love and so God's solidarity with the world, including God's preferential communion with the suffering and marginalized. Apocalyptic means to comfort God's people with that good news. It does not mean to instill fear, so as to conscript readers and hearers into crusading violence. As a literary genre, apocalyptic means to attract and encourage the reader during a period of extreme communal anxiety. Such attraction and encouragement does not mean, though, that Christians are removed by apocalyptic texts, being saved from or inured to the situation the texts address. By quelling fear, apocalyptic does mean to amplify faith. Apocalyptic for the Christian is like (and better than) Churchill's rallying his audience in dire wartime that when one is going through hell, one keeps going. Christians still experience evil. Apocalyptic consoles that the evil we do experience was overcome by the apocalyptic event of Christ's crucifixion wherein he too experienced evil. We do not deny the experience of disaster, but we do rely on the proven solidarity of cruciformed love to live through disaster *and* to redress its causes. "Christian faith does not call into question the apocalyptic experience of disaster, but rather consists precisely in enduring the tension between the confession to Jesus' fate as a salvific occurrence...and the apocalyptic experience of the world."¹⁰ This clearly differs from a Christian nationalist spin on apocalyptic as the call for "faithful" humans to perfect their performance of lethality.

Apocalyptic consoles and encourages because it discloses what is truly real behind all the purposeful deceptions humans construct to manipulate others, or for their "self-protection" to falsely represent ourselves to ourselves and others. What ultimately does apocalyptic disclose? It discloses God and God's point of view. Apocalyptic language may yet be indirect, a showing of God's backside, God masked in creation, or finally fully disclosed and unmasked on the cross. Even in this age of postmodernity, when no narratives are held to be universal, apocalyptic discloses the presence and will of the universal Universal: God. In sum, the point of apocalyptic is to reiterate the gospel. It is pastoral care in the key of drama, not threat as the promise of tragedy; comfort for the faithful, not fear-mongering of unbelievers and their conscription into a polity. More technically put, "apocalyptic is the spiritually charged imaginative and still reality referential language that bespeaks the revelation of the kingdom already come and coming more."¹¹

Apocalyptic language, then, is the rhetoric consonant with the Christian eschatology I described above. It reveals God in the joy and pain of the present tense, meaning to be positive, and therefore guided by the cross that is deep in suffering and yet simultaneously empty (only a truly eschatological metaphysics of God's eternity that holds all tenses in God's self can avail this). Human language, of course, has a mortal limit, but it has

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transcended, does transcend, and will transcend the limit when it understands its utterances from God not banally as literal, but always to offer the experienced relationship of the human to the justice of God in the Love of Christ now, in a messianic time that comes only finally, though blessedly often enough, by God's gracious movement again and again to us.

Christian and Christian nationalist "kingdom" language

One's eschatology and attendant apocalyptic language have consequential contemporary implications for public life. They imply a political theology and thus practical political public policy. When taken seriously, theology must be politically consequential. Faith is not faith if it is kept private. For how can one be private when one's life is publicly tested? Our primal prayer, that we are not led "into temptation," is a plea that our faith would not fail before the watchful eyes of a dubious testing public or be stifled by our own private worries. More abstractly, one's theology is always implied by the political platform on which one stands. As Carl Schmitt recognized, all politics reveal theological implications, if one has the courage to explore far enough the cultural-psychological drivers of politics.¹² On the other hand, all theology, being comprehensive and necessarily social, must have political consequences. We can and should analyze the theological drivers implied or hidden in political speech. This means that we should reflect carefully on what politics our theological commitments should shape.

I have argued above that a generally and generously orthodox Christian's view of one's purpose, and that of the world, comprehends (and cognizes) more than what may be extrapolated from personal and societal history. We know what God promises: that God already has in-formed history with God's eternity. We believe and, in that sense, "know" that God's eternity

10. Körtner, *The End of the World*, 259.

11. Larson, *Ubi Deus Dixit, Where God Has Spoken: The Lutheran Doctrine of Two Kingdoms* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2025), 6. Much of my reflection in this article is drawn from this book.

12. Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, translated by George Schwab (MIT Press, 1985).

will itself assume itself into creaturely time. We hold this to be a metaphysical truth and an implied ontology (obviously not here spelled out) of our *being* through Christ in the rule of God. This is a palpable spiritual reality — Christians have called it the Spiritual Kingdom — that overlaps with our own and others' lives in what is experienced as solely temporal reality. Our theological tradition has called this the Temporal Kingdom. In both cases "kingdom" has served as a powerful and oftentimes unhelpful word when unnuanced.

I allude, of course, to the Lutheran doctrine of Two Kingdoms. Its roots are in Augustine's own "macro" spiritual theology of the conflict between the reign of Christ (*regnum Christi*) and the hubristically ambitious reign of Satan (*regnum*). Luther, acknowledging the apocalyptic predication of Augustine's vision, transmuted the two-fold declension so as to make clearer the relationship of God's sovereignty in the spiritual "kingdom" under Christ to God's more indirect sovereignty via governing institutions in the temporal order. It was Luther's way of anticipating the distinction, without full separation, of the sacred and secular orders. Thus the Lutheran doctrine also has been named as "Two Realms" or "Two Reigns" or "Two Rules" and "Two Ways."¹³ I hold to "kingdoms" or "realms" not only for a conventional sake, but to underscore that there is a metaphysical basis, a "topography" as it were, that implies the two ways of knowing our place in the universe as discussed above.

What is crucial to understand is that the two kingdoms (or whatever we want to call them) are not separate metaphysical spaces standing side by side. The spiritual does encompass the temporal. But where individuals do not know or defy the spiritual, they are, for all practical purposes, at home in the purely temporal. The Christian really does "know" differently, knowing that God is at home with the solely temporal soul, even as that person does not know it. Further, because the eschatology of the Christian derives from the Theology of the Cross, the Christian, all the more, serves Christ and the neighbor *in* the neighbor. The Christian's *modus operandi* is thus, as for Christ, the "person for others: compassionate, selfless, and humble. A political theology of two kingdoms compels the Christian ethic of loving others as Christ loves us, which is a higher bar even than the secular realm's ethic that everyone knows as loving your neighbors "as you love yourself."

It figures, though, that the eschatological deficiency and negative, even malevolent, apocalyptic language norms of Christian nationalists mean for them that the "kingdom" comes not with the Christ of the cross, but as the militant god Mars in the guise of Jesus. This cannot stand. It is myth cosplaying as Christian.

13. Craig Nesson has been particularly effective in commending this as "two strategies," with which I agree as long as God's 'modality' of rule does not erase the real dimensional difference-in-relation between the spiritual and the secular, the eternal and the temporal. See his "Reappropriating Luther's Two Kingdoms," *Lutheran Quarterly* 19 (2005) 302-11; and *Free in Deed: The Heart of Lutheran Ethics* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2022), chap. 4.

Because the eschatology of the Christian derives from the Theology of the Cross, the Christian, all the more, serves Christ and the neighbor *in* the neighbor. The Christian's *modus operandi* is thus, as for Christ, the "person for others: compassionate, selfless, and humble. A political theology of two kingdoms compels the Christian ethic of loving others as Christ loves us, which is a higher bar even than the secular realm's ethic that everyone knows as loving your neighbors "as you love yourself."

It is an unrecognized eruption of a dark archetype of malevolence, the kind against which the Christian Carl Jung warned.¹⁴ Rather, the anti-myth, Christ alone, is the one who entered the most horrid depths of scorn and suffering, and there by love and not sword, transforms the very character of the still apparently flailing universe. He alone is the one, because he is risen, who still walks the Emmaus way of transformative compassion, patiently and sufferingly wooing eyes to be opened to his larger kingdom.

The kingdom imaged by Christian nationalism is not that. It instead is unitary and univocal in its false and yet strangely medieval metaphysic. It plagiarizes biblical poetry and reduces it to stipulative and legalistic prose. It prescribes a univocal vocabulary for every "true" Christian, exposing its self-righteousness even in what it allows to be said and seen. Insofar as the negatively apocalyptic terms of Christian nationalism image white male human power somehow supernaturally fueled by a distant God, Christian nationalism betrays its equally thin and unconsidered eschatology. Indeed and in deed, by the ironic apocalyptic caricature of the values Christian nationalism holds dearest in clenched jaw and fist, Christian nationalists reveal all that is contrary to Christ. Eschatology means something. By their ultimacies you shall know them.

14. See Carl G. Jung, *The Archetypes and The Collective Unconscious* (Collected Works of C.G. Jung. Vol. 9, Part 1, trans. R.F.C. Hull (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981).

Conclusion, for now

With this article I could do no more than sketch in outline the bad roots of so-called Christian nationalism. Given the ample and responsible description and analysis of Christian nationalism's use of the Bible and its Dominionist ambitions, I sought for deeper theological-confessional DNA. Because Christian nationalism feverishly denounces the political separation of church and state, striving instead to instantiate Dominionist principles in every sector of American society (and then also to global society; "to the universe and beyond!"), I suspected that its (coincidental or de facto unthought) eschatology, and also its habituated preference for apocalyptic speech and propaganda, could explain much, like a squishy root anticipates bad fruit. There is much, much more to be done to substantiate my suspicion. And I think there is enough now discerned to warrant more analysis and warning.

I barely have touched on the political theology that one's eschatology and attendant speech would require. I commend the doctrine of Two Kingdoms, notwithstanding that it has been so wrongly interpreted and employed. Inspired by an eschatology with the cross at its center, however, along with the positive apocalyptic speech that these times of authoritarian Christian nationalism require, I believe a retrieval of that Lutheran political theology is important. One could write a whole book and more on that. One could also act out and up, making "good trouble" as a Christian resistor against those who claim and manipulate scripture and the deposit of faith for their own, not the neighbor's ends.¹⁵

May we join together in our divinely con-scripted ultimate mission, even enjoying each other's company while we live for yet better things always to come! As they already have.

The anti-myth, Christ alone, is the one who entered the most horrid depths of scorn and suffering, and there by love and not sword, transforms the very character of the still apparently flailing universe. He alone is the one, because he is risen, who still walks the Emmaus way of transformative compassion, patiently and sufferingly wooing eyes to be opened to his larger kingdom.

15. For good advice on what to do to resist authoritarianism and, particularly, Christian nationalism, see Craig L. Nesson, "Theological Struggle against Authoritarianism: Calls for Confessing Church," *Dialog, A Journal of Theology* 65.2 (Summer 2026), 65-75.