

The first thing I can tell you is that Christian Nationalism is a huge topic. The second thing is that there is very little Christian about the Christian Nationalism movement.

We all know what “nationalism” is: identification with one's own nation and support for its interests, especially to the exclusion or detriment of the interests of other nations.

And we all think we know what “Christian” means: relating to or professing Christianity or its teachings.

But put them together and what have you got?

Christian nationalism has many roots, many threads, and many facets.....white supremacy, white privilege, ethnocentrism, xenophobia, and of course a fundamentalist interpretation of Christianity and the Bible as a source of religious, social, moral and even political authority....

To illustrate this, I want to read you a short story, written by Philip Gorski, a professor of Religion and Sociology at Yale,

*At first glance, [the protesters who gathered around the US Capitol on 6 January 2021](#) seemed to be a motley crew. [One observer](#) espied: “Preppy looking country club Republicans, well-dressed social conservatives, and white Evangelicals in Jesus caps ... standing shoulder to shoulder with QAnon cultists, Second Amendment cosplay commandos, and doughy, hardcore white nationalists.” The symbolism on display also seemed like apples and oranges.*

*One group erected a giant cross, another a wooden gallows. Someone in the crowd waved a “Jesus Saves” banner, while another sported a “Camp Auschwitz” hoodie.*

*On closer inspection, however, the picture gets murkier, the lines harder to draw. Christians waved Trump flags. The neo-fascist militia group known as the “Proud Boys” kneeled and prayed before plunging into the breach. Nor were such mixtures of Christian, nationalist, and white supremacist symbols unusual. One man, decked out as a cosplay crusader, clutched a large leather Bible to his chest with skeleton gloves. What looked like apples and oranges turned out to be a fruit cocktail: White Christian Nationalism.*

Does anyone recognize this flag? (Appeal to Heaven flag slide)

Or this one- available at Walmart for \$16.99- along with at least a dozen different variations on the theme of “An Appeal to Heaven”...

I’ll read you one definition of the phrase and you may see how it has been appropriated by Christian nationalists, taken from a website of the same name: [appealtoheaven.org](http://appealtoheaven.org)

*This inspirational phrase used by John Locke was emblazoned on George Washington’s Revolutionary War flag to remind those over whom it flew that after all other alternatives of seeking justice have been exhausted, only an “appeal to heaven” remains. Colonists who saw it were reminded to be wholly reliant upon heaven and the God Who reigns supreme. Their focus was Jesus Christ, and their concern was living by conviction without fear of a worldly cost.*

*Some flags are flown and emblems are worn to show what a person is — status symbols. The Appeal to Heaven flag is flown or worn to show who a person is — a man or woman who does not look to men or government for approval, but lives*

*by the principle of their convictions and appeals to the Almighty for protection, provision, and justice.*

*With that reality in mind, we are gathering a network of fellow believers serving Christ in public office to fellowship, encourage and serve one another in our common mission.*

So what is Christian Nationalism? Where to begin?

We could go back as far as Tacitus...gave us the template for a white Northern European tribe whom he considered to be a superior race- being endowed with strength, fierce independence, a strong moral code, and legendary bravery.

When Constantine embraced Christianity in 312- not only as an act of faith but also for political motives....

Or the Doctrine of Discovery....

Philip Gorski (who gave us the story about Jan 6<sup>th</sup>) traces white Christian nationalism in the United States to the late 1600s when the Pilgrims arrived. They believed that they were the heirs of the biblical Israelites.

They imagined themselves as a “chosen people,” and they came to see the “new world” as their “promised land.”

And as their relationship with the natives shifted from curiosity to hostility, they began to see the Indians as “Canaanites,” who had to be conquered.

Cotton Mather (Puritan clergyman and author) came to believe that the New World would be the central battlefield in the final struggle between good and evil. He placed himself and his brethren on the side of the good, and the Catholic

French and their native allies on the side of evil. He likened the Indians to demons and viewed the killing of Indians as a blood sacrifice to an angry God. It was war that welded Protestantism and Englishness together in the New World.

So, Gorski says, Christian nationalism is a story about America.

[slide on "Story"]

The "story" is a persistent and pervasive one....

This identification of wealth as a manifestation of God's favor is also seen in the alliance of business and the church that began in the early 1900's.

James Field was an American [Congregational](#) minister who was the co-founder and president of the conservative free-market organization Spiritual Mobilization. Nicknamed "The Apostle to Millionaires", Fifiel was instrumental in ushering in the "unholy alliance" of corporate-funded Christianity and Christian identity politics in the United States.<sup>[1]</sup>

Fifiel dismissed the many passages in the New Testament about wealth and poverty, and instead assured the elite that their worldly success was a sign of God's blessings.<sup>[1]</sup>

"Freedom under God" was a much used phrase by Fifiel and the organization. In 1940, Fifiel gave a speech to the [National Association of Manufacturers](#) at the [Waldorf Astoria New York](#) where he praised capitalism and business leaders, while denouncing [Franklin D. Roosevelt](#) and the [New Deal](#).

President Eisenhower, who had become very close to Billy Graham, passed legislation that added the line, "One Nation Under God" to the Pledge of Allegiance in 1954, and the line, "In God We Trust" to all paper currency in 1957.

So this is where we could go very quickly down the rabbit hole of the evolution of the Religious Right- Jerry Falwell, the Moral Majority, the Christian Coalition and Ralph Reed- a movement just starting to come into its own in the post-war period. But that's another story.

I will just do a quick detour into one of the more interesting things I learned while researching Christian Nationalism. Abortion was not always the rallying cry for the Religious Right that it has become.

It wasn't until 1979—a full six years after *Roe*—that evangelical leaders, at the behest of conservative activist Paul Weyrich, seized on abortion not for moral reasons, but as a rallying-cry to deny President Jimmy Carter a second term. Why? Because the anti-abortion crusade was more palatable than the religious right's real motive: protecting segregated schools.

Both before and for several years after *Roe*, evangelicals were overwhelmingly indifferent to the subject, which they considered a “Catholic issue.” In 1968, for instance, a symposium sponsored by the Christian Medical Society and *Christianity Today*, the flagship magazine of evangelicalism, refused to characterize abortion as sinful, citing “individual health, family welfare, and social responsibility” as justifications for ending a pregnancy. In 1971, delegates to the Southern Baptist Convention in St. Louis, Missouri, passed a resolution encouraging “Southern Baptists to work for legislation that will allow the possibility of abortion under such conditions as rape, incest, clear evidence of severe fetal deformity, and carefully ascertained evidence of the likelihood of damage to the emotional, mental, and physical health of the mother.” The convention, hardly a redoubt of liberal values, reaffirmed that position in 1974, one year after *Roe*, and again in 1976.

When the *Roe* decision was handed down, W. A. Criswell, the Southern Baptist Convention's former president and pastor of First Baptist Church in Dallas, Texas—also one of the most famous fundamentalists of the 20th century—was pleased: “I have always felt that it was only after a child was born and had a life separate from its mother that it became an individual person,” he said, “and it has always, therefore, seemed to me that what is best for the mother and for the future should be allowed.”

What really set off conservatives were legal challenges- like the Supreme Court ruling that banned school prayer in 1963 and a suit brought by some Black parents (referred to as Negro Federal taxpayers) in Mississippi in 1970 challenging the tax-exempt status of segregated private schools. This challenge grew to include Bob Jones University which in 1975 did not admit Black students. When the school's appeal finally reached the Supreme Court in 1982, the Reagan administration announced that it planned to argue in defense of Bob Jones University and its racial policies. A public outcry forced the administration to reconsider; Reagan backpedaled by saying that the legislature should determine such matters, not the courts. The Supreme Court's decision in the case, handed down on May 24, 1983, ruled against Bob Jones University in an 8-to-1 decision. Three years later Reagan elevated the sole dissenter, William Rehnquist, to chief justice of the Supreme Court.

Barry Goldwater's 1964 campaign brought many evangelicals into active politicking; what some Republicans considered extremism was defeated for the moment, but the religious right retained a foothold within the party that has been steadily enlarged. A battle over sex education in Anaheim, Calif., diligently reported on here, conveys the passions of a period when many were preaching that America was becoming a swamp of immorality. (Language sound familiar?)

By 1980, even though Carter had sought, both as governor of Georgia and as president, to reduce the incidence of abortion, his refusal to seek a constitutional amendment outlawing it was viewed by politically conservative evangelicals as an unpardonable sin. Never mind the fact that his Republican opponent that year, Ronald Reagan, had signed into law, as governor of California in 1967, the most liberal abortion bill in the country. When Reagan addressed a rally of 10,000 evangelicals at Reunion Arena in Dallas in August 1980, he excoriated the “unconstitutional regulatory agenda” directed by the IRS “against independent schools,” but he made no mention of abortion. Nevertheless, leaders of the religious right hammered away at the issue, persuading many evangelicals to make support for a constitutional amendment outlawing abortion a litmus test for their votes.

After the election results came in, Falwell, never shy to claim credit, was fond of quoting a Harris poll that suggested Carter would have won the popular vote by a margin of 1 percent had it not been for the machinations of the religious right. “I knew that we would have some impact on the national elections,” Falwell said, “but I had no idea that it would be this great.” [The Real Origins of the Religious Right - POLITICO Magazine](#)

Fresh Air interview with Prof. Bradley Onishi  
*for War*

2/29/2024 author of *Preparing*

[Tracing the rise of Christian nationalism, from Trump to the Ala. Supreme Court : NPR](#)

- New Apostolic Reformation – founded by C. Peter Wagner in the mid-1990’s. It’s fundamental principle is that Christian people should be privileged as a result of the founding of this country by and for Christians chosen by God

- That mission is endangered by the growing presence of non-whites, non-Christians, and non-Americans on American soil (Replacement theory). White Christians have a mandate to “take back the country,” *their* country, for God by any means necessary (hence the Appeal to God)
- Called to “spiritual warfare” because of the corrupting influence of demonic forces afflicting not only politicians but all aspects of society ie arts, the media, etc
- Seven Mountain mandate
- This goes against the traditional call to evangelize- it is a call to colonize the world for God, again by any means necessary
- Trump seen as sent by God as someone who can get the job done (se appointment of SCOTUS judges, repeal of Roe)
- Seen not only as acceptable despite his flaws but as anointed by God
- Other conservatives from Reagan on have not been “tough enough”, too soft on those who aren’t committed to CN
- Remember Trump urging his followers to “fight like hell or else we won’t have a country”, “taking back our country” is a recurrent theme
- Make America Great Again is really a return to the Divine intention
- Trump “God Made Trump” video on Truth Social; God needed someone to go into the den of vipers, someone strong, not afraid of the wolves
- Trump not only is brutal enough and enough of a bully to stand up to the demonic forces in this country and abroad, he also promises to punish those who have taken this country in the wrong direction (many WN symbols visible on Jan 6<sup>th</sup> incl the Appeal to Heaven flag)
- In 2023, [Mike Johnson \(R LA\)](#), [Christian Nationalist](#) newly elected [Speaker of the United States House of Representatives](#), hung the [Appeal to Heaven flag](#) outside his Congressional office, which [The New Republic](#)<sup>[23]</sup> and [National Public Radio](#)<sup>[24]</sup> associated with the movement.



- In Rob Reiner's new movement, Marjorie Taylor Greene is shown in an interview saying, "I'm a Christian Nationalist. I have nothing to be ashamed of because that's what most Americans are."

WCN is what linguist [George Lakoff](#) calls a "frame." A frame is like a bare-bones movie script. It "has roles (like a cast of characters), relations between the roles, and scenarios carried out by those playing the roles." Like a movie, it can be made and remade, with new actors and modified scenarios. But WCN is not just a story. It is also a political vision. Violence and racial purity are central to that vision. As [Samuel Perry and Andrew Whitehead](#) have shown, white Christian nationalists tend to favor a strong military and capital punishment and oppose gun control. WCN is thus strongly correlated with opposition to interracial marriage, non-white immigration, and affirmative action.

Trumpism is, among other things, the latest version of the WCN frame. Echoing the promised land story, Trump says he will "take back the country" from the outsiders and invaders who have taken control—immigrants and secularists, Muslims and Mexicans—and then restore it to its rightful owners: "real" (that is, white, Christian) Americans. Echoing the end times story, Trump paints the world in terms of us and them, good and evil, and hints at violent struggles to come. The first such struggle took place on January 6, 2021. It will not, I fear, be the last. Philip Gorski, [White Christian Nationalism: The Deep Story Behind the Capitol Insurrection \(georgetown.edu\)](#)

- SHOW SLIDE OF MAP

[New survey finds pockets of support for Christian nationalism across the country \(religionnews.com\)](#)

Researchers later note that, overall, nearly 4 in 10 residents of red states express support for Christian nationalism.

**So what can we do to counter Christian nationalism and to “de-radicalize” those who believe in the cultural framework that privileges primarily white Christians in American civic life?**

In January 2021, the head of the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty joined the heads of two of the largest mainline Protestant denominations in the United States — Bishop Michael Curry of the Episcopal Church and Bishop Elizabeth Eaton of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America- for a panel discussion “[Democracy and Faith Under Siege: Responding to Christian Nationalism](#),” hosted by Christians Against Christian Nationalism, a BJC initiative.

Here's what they had to say:

- “Christian nationalism is not new, but the frequency of violent acts inspired by Christian nationalism and a resurgence in attempts to legislate and govern from a position infused with Christian nationalism has been on a dramatic uptick in recent years,” said Amanda Tyler, executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty, or BJC.
- “We believe that Christians bear a special responsibility to understand and to root out Christian nationalism.”
- It’s important for Christians to push back against that idea that White, native-born Americans have special privilege because it impacts everything from people’s attitudes toward racism to their behaviors regarding the COVID-19 pandemic. The majority of evangelical Protestants, he said, may not be overtly Christian nationalist in their beliefs, but they accommodate that attitude — and it’s not just evangelicals, according to his research.
- “As we think of Christian nationalism and how to face it, we have to be attuned to the fact that within Christian religious traditions,

Christian nationalism is prevalent and is a part of the people that worship with us,” he said.

- One good first step for Christians is to learn more about Christian nationalism — and why it conflicts with Christianity (Whitehead’s book as a good place to start).

Curry pointed to the famous words of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.: “Darkness cannot drive out darkness, only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate, only love can do that.” That means Christians should offer a positive alternative to Christian nationalism, he said. “We must counter these negative perversions of Christianity and of our humanity. We must counter them with an affirmative, positive way of being Christian,” he said. “Christianity must recenter itself on the teachings, the example and the spirit of Jesus of Nazareth.”

- The presiding bishop of the Episcopal Church also suggested Christians rebuild relationships across differences of politics, race and religion.

“Everybody who knows somebody who’s different than they are, get to know them, spend some time with them, let that become a personal value for your life. Then maybe we can begin to chip away,” he said.

“Everybody won’t get on board, but somebody will.”

Holding people accountable for what they say they value including constitutional rights and freedoms, as well as biblical instruction to love one’s neighbor. “You find out what people value, you hold them accountable to that and you do not back down.”

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