

## Brave Church/Hard Topics, 10/27 Christian Nationalism Pt 1 - Background

This is the chat log of the discussion. Names and identifiable information have been removed for privacy.

Slides mentioned in discussion topics refer to the BC-HT Christian Nationalism Pt1 10-27-2022.pdf file linked from the [Brave Church-Hard Topics web page](#).

Additional information added after the discussion are identified with “**NOTE:**”

### What does the term Christian Nationalism mean to you? [Slide 5]

**NOTE:** We tried something new – asking folks to put their reactions on Whiteboard (Zoom function). There were some bugs, but it may be something we'll try again. A picture of the responses is pasted below.

#### What images does CN invoke?

Political prayer  
breakfasts

Not in line with the  
gospels

an attempt to control other  
people through specific  
"Christian" precepts

An excuse to use the Bible to  
support your unique beliefs.

Christianity involved  
in politics (Jerry  
Falwell, Pat  
Robertson)

self-enclosed oxymoron

Afraid of change - reaction  
to changing demographics

#### What emotions does CN invoke?

Focus on power, control

Some on the right deny  
being Christian  
nationalists

### Initial comments/reactions on the background information [Slides 8-34]

Comment on slide 32: The "war on Christmas" that pops up every year (whether there's an actual 'war' or not) plays into a sense of persecution

You haven't overwhelmed me... you depressed me

One of our founding principles is the separation of church and state.

We often hear the Christian right refer to the Declaration of Independence, which acknowledges our Divine Creator. However, there's not one word about God in the Constitution, which is the basis of our government.

**NOTE:** In the Confronting Christian Nationalism series (Vote Common Good), Amanda Tyler (Christians Against Christian Nationalism website) notes the Constitution only has two references to religion: Article VI says no religious test for public office; 1st Amendment prohibits Congress from making laws establishing a religion. [Video Eight - Amanda Tyler provides historical and legal arguments against the myth of America being founded as a Christian nation](#)

We were not founded as a Christian nation.

Yet our criminal code is based on Christian principles.

My sense is our laws reflect more of the OT laws than Christian "principles"

Also reflect Magna Carta, Hammurabi's code, other Mesopotamian sources

Regarding the Constitution - based on several codes of law: Hammurabi, 10 Commandments, Romans 12, others up to Napoleon's code.

**NOTE:** I didn't capture the full list of codes here. However, the point is that our laws are based on a number of sources, including but not exclusively laws found in the Bible.

Responding to comment 'we were not founded as a Christian nation': At the beginning of 19th century, those same founding fathers participated in protestant religious services in capitol building every Sunday

### **Discussion Questions [Slide 35]: Can you merge Christian and American Identities? What kind of Christians? What kind of Americans?**

Thought we were founded on the idea of religious freedom.

But when our ancestors came here religious freedom was still Christian based.

The separate colonies separated from one another based on differences in religion (actually, different denominations of Christianity). 0 found as different religions.

Most of the founders were Christians, but went out of way not to favor any specific religion.

Responding to founding father comment: there was a lot of bigotry as America grew from first founding. Any wave of immigrants that came later - weren't here first, weren't American.

Passing laws, edicts did little to erase that bigotry they were intended to address.

We as a nation still actively discriminate against people who don't look like us, even with laws against discrimination.

If we really are a non-Christian nation, then what are we?

**NOTE:** There are nuances in terminology. Saying the US is not a specifically Christian nation does not mean that the US is a non-Christian nation. Instead, it means that the US does not favor Christianity above other faiths/religions.

The founders might have been mostly Christian, but various brands. Willing to 'fine-tune' Christianity to fit what they believed.

Founding fathers were educated, 'post-enlightenment.' Some considered themselves deists. Christianity was their affiliation.

What do you think about the central claim of Diana Butler Bass's essay: "Both of these things are true: America is not a Christian nation. And the United States was shaped by Protestantism." That's another view of this nation's founding that doesn't insist on an exclusive/privileged tie to Christianity.

1st Jewish synagogue in RI in late 1790s

Rise of anti-Catholicism and anti-popism in middle/late 19th century.

Varieties of Christianity further confuse the issue.

The persecuted Protestant founders did not want others to be prosecuted - separation of church and state.

**Clarity on the name "Christian nationalism." This is a new term. Is there any national association of Christian nationalists? Or is this a term in which folks who don't fall in these categories use to label them?**

Tend to think of the terminology of CN similar to Zionists (Jews who think of the primacy of Israel)

There is a linkage between CN and Christian Zionists

CN is more a term used by sociologists and the press. No actual CN party (yet). A highly negative term.

It is more about a collection of ideologies, beliefs.

Thinking of the January 6 party - some would call themselves "Christian", some "nationalists" but they don't necessarily fit either.

They don't seem to be representing the majority of what Americans are.

Current CN term - a sociologists' attempt to define. Current definition based on Baylor Religious Study (2007, 2017) of people who identify (or not identify) as religious.

Every group has to have a label so we know whether or not we should associate with them.

The Baylor studies base their designation on responses to key Qs:

- The federal government should declare the United States a Christian nation [CN strongly agree]
- The federal government should advocate Christian value [CN strongly agree]
- The federal government should enforce strict separation of church and state [CN strongly disagree]
- The federal government should allow the display of religious symbols in public spaces [CN strongly agree]
- The success of the United States is part of God's plan [CN strongly agree]
- The federal government should allow prayer in public schools [CN strongly agree]

**NOTE:** You can find the complete set of survey questions for multiple years here:

<https://www.baylor.edu/baylorreligionsurvey/index.php?id=942306>

Key belief: America was, is, and should be a Christian nation.

Georgetown U had a Peace/Justice forum last night w/ Rev. Michael Curry (Bishop of Episcopal Church), Jim Wallis (founder of Center on Faith and Justice), Amana Tyler (Baptist Joint Committee, Christians Against Christian Nationalism), and Samuel Perry (co-author of Taking America Back for God). They made a point that CN is now becoming an identity and we are starting to see individuals say they are CN.

**NOTE:** You can read about the event here – [White Christian Nationalism: What it is, and how it threatens our democracy](#) – and view the video of the event here: <https://youtu.be/U6L5QXTgErl>

The Zionist view comes out of a premillennial, apocalyptic view that it is our responsibility to make God's will happen.

I am a Christian and a nationalist, but am not a Christian Nationalist.

Prayer in school - anyone can pray in school at any time; the issue is public prayer in school.

**Coming out of CN is that America should be Christian implies that Christians are privileged. What do you think about that? How does that impact your relationship with others?**

This country was founded on Christian principles or religious freedom. Why is there so much controversy now? I thought the purpose was to accept the rights of others in their beliefs.

Those religions that came here seeking freedom were all Christian-based. Because of that focus of the founders, it was assumed everyone was going to be Christian.

Pastor Ben's sermon on Sunday - we're privileged, then our cup is overflowing and we should be sharing. Bothers me when we say we're Christian but want to exclude some other group for some reason.

Have a hard time with Christians who claim to be Christians and then act the way they act. Not what I read in the Bible.

How do we show we are Christians if not praying publicly?

Response: They'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love...

We all grow up in environments of people who surround us. Founding fathers the same.

Founding fathers were influenced by their environment, which was dominantly Christian.

Think of CN as a desire to impose a way of thinking, being on other people. The ability to control what other people are allowed to do.

We need to be able to articulate what it means to be a follower of Christ.

Rev. Curry said we counter with the Gospels.

We have different denominations because we have different interpretations of the same book. Maybe we are not so wedded to our own interpretation that we are unwilling to listen to someone else's interpretation, the way some radical people are to their particular interpretation.

If CN became a religion, we're looking at different interpretations of the same group. Many people interpret differently. When they find people who interpret things similarly, they form a group.

If this is national issue and a church issue, it would be nice to see more people from Grace joining us and people talking about it.

Response: I'm happy to have the people we have this evening here to talk about it.

How do you determine when an interpretation is valid?

Reply: Ah, that's a discussion all in itself.

**NOTE:** Stay tuned. We'll probably come back to this question, as well as how do we know what God's will is for this country, next week.

## Closing Comments

We'll add links to the books [listed Slide 36]... as well as a copy of tonight's slides, on the BC/HT web page

From lots of reading: If you start from the premise that America is a Christian nation, then all of the political outcomes make sense. More consistent than I thought. Also very scary.

**NOTE:** Someone shared these videos after the discussion ended: they reflect different ways that churches responded to a new pastor who came to them as a homeless person. The person asked how we at Grace would respond?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oGt8Lnhgrz8> [A homeless man walks into a church What he did next shocked everyone!]

<https://www.facebook.com/LightWorkersOfficial/videos/megachurch-pastor-poses-as-homeless-man-to-see-how-hed-be-treated/2128699907140630/> [Megachurch Pastor Poses as Homeless Man to See How He'd Be Treated]

**Next week:** We will contrast the central beliefs/principles of Christian nationalism with Christianity (as we see it in the Gospels). The following week (11/10): how do we engage with someone who adheres to Christian nationalism? What can we do as a church?