

Brave Church/Hard Topics, 11/10 Christian Nationalism Pt 3 – Engaging in conversations about Christian nationalism and responding to a Christian nationalist ideology

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 Conversations on Christian nationalism 11-10-2022.pdf file linked from the [Brave Church-Hard Topics web page](#).

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

NOTE 1: Why is Albert Einstein on Slide 2? It’s about his quote. We live in a divided time and when the things we try don’t work, maybe it is time to think differently (not try to solve problems with the same thinking that created them). The point is to approach the problems from a different angle, not getting stuck in a single mindset or getting frustrated because the same old thing isn't working.

NOTE 2: The prayer on slides 3-4 is an adaptation of the Prayer for Our Community in Richard Rohr’s daily meditation for 11/5/2022. It may not be for everyone or for every situation. If you find it worth trying, it is meant to be something you practice – not a one-off.

Comment on Slide 6 – What is working? What isn’t?

Investing in the long term may mean agreeing not talking politics so you can rebuild your original bonds.

Discussion on Engaging a friend or loved one [Slides 7-8]:

NOTE: You can view the short video by clicking on [Confronting Christian Nationalism Video 13](#) in the pdf file.

How do you determine whether another person is ready for a meaningful discussion about Christian nationalism? How do you determine if you are ready?

How do you move someone into a more meaningful conversation about what they believe and why they believe it?

If we are not going to change another’s way of thinking, what’s the purpose of engaging them in conversation?

You may think you're talking about CN but are talking about different things. Make sure you understand what you're talking about.

The person may not apply the term CN to themselves. They may not respond because they don’t think the term applies to them.

That’s true. For discussion, we should focus on the beliefs/ideology rather than to the terms.

Responding to the 3rd Q: You tend to become like your friends. **If you want to change someone's mind about something, start by befriending them.** Don't start with the argument. You'll change (the other and yourself) more by first befriending them.

NOTE: Great advice to remember! **Emphasis added.**

I’ve seen this happen in a lot of relationships. I have evolved/changed over the years because of the friends along the way. Ideas are infectious, communicated nonverbally in a mystical way. **Spend more time with people. The purpose isn't to change the way of thinking, although that may happen. Get to know people.**

Christian nationalism is a big topic that's difficult to address as a whole. It is best to 'chew on it in little bits and pieces' rather than the grand phenomena as a whole.

It's hard to know how to talk to someone or not. I've been in a 'debating relationship' with a very conservative Christian for a long time. Over time, each of us has changed our views a little bit, but not fundamentally. You can do that with some people, but not others.

The 3rd question seems to come from a biased view. Maybe you will change your mind. Maybe you won't change their mind today, but maybe the person's mind changes with a series of people, conversations over time. It's not a one-person, one-time thing.

The idea of developing relationships and seeing how people think about things makes a lot of sense.

In the book *Taking America Back for God*, the authors point out a whole continuum of responses to the tenets of Christian nationalism. They identify 4 levels with a continuum between. It is helpful to keep that in mind. Our minds evolve as they're exposed to new life experiences, people and that will take many shades.

NOTE: The 4 categories of US population based on acceptance/rejection of the ideological framework of Christian Nationalism in Whitehead and Perry:

- Rejectors (21.5% of Americans) – strongly resist government privileging Christian religion
- Resisters (26.6%) – also oppose government endorsement of Christian faith/values, but may be more comfortable with some public display of religious symbols
- Accommodators (32.1%) – generally endorse favoring Christian religion, believe U.S. was founded as a Christian nation
- Ambassadors (19.8%) – support legislation, rulings that privilege Christian religion, assert U.S. was founded, continues to be a Christian nation

We have to be humble about our ability to change people's minds about anything.

People pick up conspiracy theories, not necessarily because they're convinced by it, but because it is reinforced within the community. If you want to change people's views on CN, you have to go at it obliquely by befriending them.

CN is a sociologist's construct of the way groups of people behave and think, hooked with their backgrounds. Can never succeed in conversing in CN. Have to talk about something specific. Great topic for academic discussion. What we want to do is talk to people we meet about some distorted perspectives of things.

The main problem for people in the Ambassador section of CN [see NOTE above] is an underlying fear of loss.

People tend to look back with rose-colored glasses, thinking things were better back then. It is easier to believe things were better if you weren't affected by the issues of the day (civil rights, Vietnam).

If we're going to try to approach somebody about why they're in a bad situation, it is hard to change the mind of someone who has blamed somebody else for bad things happening. It will be hard to get them to see a different viewpoint.

Why are we trying to change these people's minds? I personally don't know anyone who identifies as a Christian nationalist. I'm not sure it's my job to change their mind.

In regard to trying to change someone's mind, history shows it doesn't work (ex: the inquisitions of Roman Catholic Church).

NOTE: Maybe history shows that **forcefully** trying to change people's mind doesn't work very well.

People like simplistic explanations; they don't want to hear complexities. It is easier to blame the party/entity in charge. Many will resent being told it is a complex problem requiring a complex answer.

The 'whole onion' all at once doesn't work. You need to focus on a specific issue.

We need to be careful that we don't fall into the trap of overgeneralizing/stereotyping. That's going down the line of failing to recognize the individual.

I'd love to hear others' responses to the question: why bother? is it my job to change other people's views on Christian nationalism?

I don't believe CN is a threat to democracy. A vast number of people have some of these feelings and maybe some of the country's founders did as well. There are more very far right people who are dangerous.

I don't believe CN per se is leading people to bring their guns out.

Whether we're talking about CN or some aspect that is undermining democracy, people can get caught up in views that can be pretty destructive, not only for themselves but for people around them. Try to move needle in direction where people are not being harmed as much.

We shouldn't consider the primary purpose of engaging another person in conversation is to change their mind/way of thinking. The primary purpose in engaging another person in conversation is to better understand their perspective on an issue. It's a give-and-take in which we recognize that each of us has something to contribute and something to learn. I like the earlier comment about befriending the other person. That's where we should start.

Slogan on bumper sticker: "God said it, I believe it, that settles it." Trying to trace back the idea around CN.

Q about why is a good question. CN is worth opposing because it is bad for both nationalism and Christianity. There are theological reasons - a damaging heresy. The Christmas stories = being counter-posed against the empire of the time. It is a question of tactics.

Discussion on a more collective approach [Slides 9-10]:

What does it mean to 'remake the conditions' in which Christian nationalism thrives?

How do we change the underlying culture?

What if Grace sought a partnership with a rural church?

One of the problems with CN ideology is majority rule. Christians have ruled as a majority for so long in this country and haven't had to experience what it is like to have another group's traditions forced on them. I grew up in a predominantly Christian community and our school that had an annual Christmas concert. All students, including Jewish students, were forced to sing in it. I didn't realize until a reunion how much they resented having to sing in the Christmas concert.

The big problem in many ways is that we stay within our own tribe (schools, neighborhoods, towns). Until we are willing to get out of those and experience new environments, will feed on our own beliefs. We do a little sharing with Palestinian youth, but that's small compared with the big problems they face. Maybe we could consider a student exchange of some type?

Living abroad is what it takes to understand another's perspective. We don't even understand each other's perspective. One hour a week conversations won't do much very fast.

What we've done with our exchange with the Muslim congregation was good. In talking with a rural church, we can get into traditional vs progressive issues, literal vs metaphoric interpretations of the Bible. But that maybe a good thing. We're too insular.

NOTE: Once again, we need to stay away from overgeneralizations.

We are insular in the DC area for a number of reasons. The work camp in Petersburg was great for my kids. Interacting with the Palestinian youth made an impact on my kids. We will have a hard time understanding other people's problems when we don't live through them. Not sure I see a value, even as a start, of a 1-2 hr/wk exchange with a rural church. What would be the approach? What would be the expected gain? It should not be about taking care of our poor neighbors.

We also have to bear in mind that there is a great divide (rural vs urban): differences in diversity, education levels, religious diversity. The kind of diversity we have here is unusual in the rest of country. Our experiences that have led us to where we are in our church are not the experiences of much of rural America (and vice versa).

We have a lack of comprehension because our experiences are so different.

Consider people who are insistent on the supremacy/primacy of White people or on making people follow a particular Christian perspective for rules. To what extent do they feel they don't have any impact over things going on in their lives? Is it possible they feel they are losing control of their lives?

The question about a potential partnership between Grace and a rural church is more of a what-if than some presupposed plan. It might be constructive if there was a true exchange of perspectives with the intent of building understanding, not "educating" the other. Sometimes (or often), working as partners in service opens more lines of conversation than getting together for the express purpose of having a conversation.

If we pursue such activity, we have to plan so that we don't come across as condescending.

It will be tricky to do it in a non-condescending, meaningful way for both. It will be a real commitment of church-to-church, to change young people, spend time in other communities. Noble idea, but hard to implement.

What can I do with them? What do I have energy for? Where is the energy and time going to come from?

Talking about CN: it's like we're talking about 'them'. We need to get more of a sense of who we are. Living as a part of a more progressive community (cult) is limiting in itself. Get a narrow perspective on being progressive.

I personally don't know any Christian nationalists. Do other people encounter CN on a regular basis? [NOTE: 4 others raised their hands]

Is it so hard to accept them as children of God?

We live in a different environment here. When our oldest got married, their friends didn't fit any particular mold. Some of our extended family who came from other states had problems relating to my kids' friends.

Discussion on Reclaiming Jesus [Slides 11-12]:

How do we "reclaim the Jesus who disturbs the peace" and embraces the poor/marginalized?

NOTE: This was a 10-minutes-left question that probably didn't get enough time for a good discussion.

We have to get out of our silos and be exposed to other perspectives. I have had a variety of exposures that have rubbed off on me. If not for that, I would be part of a very red state.

Jesus had dinner with the sinners. We should have dinner with the poor, marginalized. I'm not opposed to that. How do we get started?

The question is another topic for another group of sessions.

After my son died, we tried to reach out to his friends. Where do these young people go? Maybe we need to have a Friday night soup kitchen at Grace where these kids can hang out, eat. Maybe time to open church again as a gathering place.

How do we start? What do we do? We could start at Grace. Look around you - there are people in the church who are more marginalized than others. Have you tried to include them in group activities?

At Green Springs, when I encounter someone and ask if they're from Ethiopia, they blossom. This is a way to connect with them. Maybe we're looking too deep for connections rather than just looking for connections. We all have reasons for staying in our comfort zones.

Maybe we should befriend each other before we worry about befriending CNs?

The Heart-to-heart widows group – we have Grace, being widows in common. Meet monthly for lunch.

Where do we start? It's all about choices - that's why we came to Grace. Help the homeless, volunteer reading at Crestwood, volunteer at ECHO, trip to Honduras, go to Palestine. The list is endless, it is the choices we make. Grace is a place that gives endless opportunities.