



Study Purpose: to explore the variety of understandings of “Christian Nationalism”

- Identify how we were shaped by Christian Nationalism in our life journey
- Share how we now see it is manifest/used in church and culture today
- Explore a list of resources to help us expand our understanding

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IS AMERICA A CHRISTIAN NATION? – Some Observations

Many argue that somehow our nation and our governing document, the Constitution, were founded on Christian principles. Because each member of our armed forces takes an oath to support and defend the Constitution, it's important to understand its origin with respect to religion. Our founding fathers set up a government based on democratic principles, not religious principles. Our Constitution is secular. There is no mention of Christianity or any other religion.

There are however, two references to religion and both are exclusionary. Clause three article six in the body of the Constitution itself states very clearly that, *"no religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust."* The other reference is in the First Amendment that states, *"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof."*

Despite witnesses swearing on Bibles, spending millions of dollars each year on a military chaplain corps, the phrase "In God We Trust" appearing on our currency, and the United States Supreme Court opening its public sessions with the proclamation "God Save the United States and this Honorable Court," that same Court for forty years has - for the most part - successfully preserved the fiction that the Constitution requires an absolute separation between church and state. Our Constitution does mandate church-state separation with that famous first amendment injunction, *"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion."*

It is important to note several things:

1. The presidential oath of office, the only oath specified in the Constitution, does not contain the phrase "So help me, God" or show any requirement to swear on a bible.
2. The pledge of allegiance written in 1892 did not contain, "under god." until it was added by Congress in 1954.
3. Most significantly the 1797 Treaty with Tripoli, negotiated under President Washington, unanimously approved by the Senate and signed by President Adams, declares, "The government of the United States is not, in any sense, founded on the Christian religion."

The founding fathers, many who were religious gentlemen, created a secular government for very specific reasons:

- ♦ They were very conscious of the pitfalls the church-state alliances had fostered in Europe, the reasons for many to depart and forge a new path in the new world.
- ♦ They looked back to our early American colonial period where some colonies officially established churches and taxed all citizens to support them regardless of whether they were members of the church or not.

Among the many things that make this country unique are the liberties guaranteed in our Constitution, including religious freedom. Because we live in this pluralistic society set up by our founders, people of all faiths or no faith are welcome and we as Americans enjoy more religious freedom than any other people in the world. Simply stated, our founders understood two very simple and important things:

- ♦ That the separation of church and state would allow all faiths to flourish.
- ♦ That in matters of religion our government would be set up to remain neutral.



This guarantee of religious freedom is codified for the Armed Forces in Title 10, United States Code (USC), sections 3073, 3547, 5142, and 8067. Free exercise of religious freedom for military personnel is further detailed in Department of Defense Directive (DODD) 1300.17, "Accommodation of Religious Practices Within the Military Services," which describes the commander's responsibility to provide for religious accommodation.

LEAD-INS TO STUDY SESSION #1



Greetings NLR Retired Clergy: It was suggested we take on an understanding of “Christian Nationalism” and explore two current books, *Baptizing America* and *Sanctuary, being Christian in the wake of Trump*. I volunteered to plan the session and recruited Gene Hill, Dick Cunningham, and Jim Stevens to help, and Paul Allen compiled an extensive bibliography of resources.

You will receive four emails before our meeting. Team members will share their personal story of awareness of Christian Nationalism in their home church, during seminary, and then ministry. One resource will be highlighted for each session. We hope to come with a rich reservoir of personal experiences and shared reading.

MARVIN’S STORY

“I began my Christian journey at age 13 (1948). In VBS we pledged allegiance to the US flag and the Christian flag, sang “I’m in the Lord’s Army.” We included patriotic hymns in church services. At 21, I registered to vote as Republican (because ‘ALL’ Christians were!) Never at NCC nor Philips Seminary (1962) did I study anything about Christian Nationalism. My early Memorial Day, Labor Day, Independence Day and Thanksgiving sermons always had patriotic themes. That was my early influence! And, then there were the debates whether the American flag should be in the sanctuary, some minimal conversation about church and state, debates about the war in Viet Nam (1955-75), the nuclear arms race. The rise of the whole political Right then came on the scene (1980). Then followed a cascade of revolutions in American culture, testing Christian theology and fracturing what tenuous cultural unity we had. I woke one day up to the hard Right and the hard Left: and the divide continues to widen!”

What is the concept of Christian nationalism? — An AI Generated Overview

Christian nationalism is an ideology that promotes a political worldview based on the belief that the U.S. was founded as a Christian nation and should function as one, with laws and governance reflecting Christian values. Adherents argue that being Christian is crucial for being considered a “true” American and often seek to use government power to promote these values, which conflicts with the constitutional principle of separation of church and state and threatens the religious freedom of minority groups and non-religious individuals.

The concept of the U.S. as a “Christian nation” is a subject of ongoing debate and varying perspectives; while a majority of U.S. adults believe the founders intended the country to be Christian, a significant portion believes it is not and should not be a Christian nation today. Historically, Christianity was a dominant cultural and religious force at the time of the nation’s founding, but the Founders themselves held diverse religious views, including Deism and theistic rationalism. Today, while Christianity remains the largest religion, the religious landscape is diverse, and a growing number of Americans believe in separation of church and state.

Counter-arguments highlight that the founders’ beliefs were diverse, with some, like Thomas Jefferson, identifying as Deists. They also point to the lack of explicit religious references in the Constitution, which created a secular government rather than a religious one. The Constitution established a secular government structure, with the First Amendment’s Establishment Clause prohibiting a government-established religion.

No Religious Test: The Constitution also explicitly forbids any religious test for holding public office.

Treaty with Tripoli (1797): This treaty, signed by President John Adams, explicitly states that “the Government of the U. S. is not, in any sense, founded on the Christian religion.”

LEAD-INS TO STUDY SESSION #2

Session purpose: to explore the variety of understandings of “Christian Nationalism”



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In preparation for this session, four of us will each write a 150-word personal witness, how we understood “Christian Nationalism” in our church experience growing up, in college and seminary, and then in our ministry. Each witness will be emailed to all of retired clergy.

PRE-SESSION MAILING

Presenter – Gene Hill

What Is Christian Nationalism Anyway? (attached)

Paul D. Miller

An explainer on how the belief differs from other forms of nationalism, patriotism, and Christianity.

GENE’S STORY

We are all shaped by what has come before. Born in 1950, raised in the segregated South, and then “Going West Young Man” at age 18, I came from a very patriotic time, which was taken for granted in that place at that time. The deep Confederate beliefs still lingered in my first two decades, but it wasn’t until the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the ending of the Viet Nam War in 1975, and the beginning of the Reagan Era of the 1980s, that I began to really see the coming of the Great Divide. After Facebook arrived, it was confirmed that there were those who believed America was a Christian nation (from the very beginning), instead of a melting pot of many with dreams of a better life for all. I personally don’t believe that the forefathers of our country began America as “Christian,” although there were certainly those that acknowledged God and desired for God to lead us.

In the last 15-20 years, on social media, and in the news, I’ve seen Christian Nationalism evolve, apparently led now by MAGA. It has been very difficult to pastor then, as it is now, when most every church has a political aisle of divide. I have to be honest in saying that I didn’t even know who Charlie Kirk was before this last week, but I also didn’t know the names of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor until their untimely deaths. Even though I hold that love is the answer, I’m not sure how it is to come about, except to remind myself that it begins with me. I fear that we could be near implosion. As an active retired pastor, all I can do is to continue to love, listen, and to speak the truth in love.

In recent churches served, fear was alive and well. Fear that the Mexicans were going to cross the border and storm the streets of the Imperial Valley. Fear that the Muslims were coming into Southwest Idaho to work. Fear that liberalism – in politics and in churches – would destroy home, family, and life as it had become known. Fear to take the flags out of the sanctuary or even off the chancel (does that sound familiar). As the face Christian Nationalism head-on, may we ever be reminded that “Perfect love casteth out fear.”

LEAD-INS TO STUDY SESSION #1

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PRE-SESSION MAILING

Presenter – Dick Cunningham

DICK’S STORY

I was born into a community of faith – everyone was my aunt or uncle. Mom and Dad were surrounded by an expectant community – I belonged and was loved. Worship was ordered ritual - with classical music and choir. The pastor wore tails and taught a men’s class in a downtown movie theater.

In winter months church explored different countries’ dress, culture, dance, song with those who had been there. Missionaries not only told stories of Jesus they promoted healthcare, eye surgery, water engineering, farming techniques. As a HS senior I paid to go to a workcamp experience at Highpoint Christian Church in West Seattle. Three weeks of physical labor in the church - ate and bunked in the Highpoint Community Center. Listened to a young Black man tell of the death of his five-year-old son. The parents were not permitted to bury their son in Forest Lawn Cemetery. Simply stated “blacks not allowed.” Tears streamed down my face as I sat in disbelief.

The church was in the world - stories, parables, imagination – a lost coin, a buried treasure, the escape from Pharoh, a rich young ruler, the beatitudes and the last supper. A faith that does justice – stories climbed in by themselves - became a major theme – whether with mentally ill, or a high school student wounded in Viet Nam – dying 3 months later. Peace after war was why Ceasar was called the Prince of Peace. Jesus offered a much different model of Peace.

Dick Cunningham – A working idea about Christian Nationalism in 2025

Christian Nationalism is seemingly a new phrase which has been growing slowly over the past 50 years. It has been living, hidden below the surface of white supremacy. Some might connect this new phrase to an earlier time when the Crusades flourished in the Middle Ages to win over the pagan tribes in Northern Europe and reclaim the Holy Land from Muslim control between the 11th and 13th Centuries.

Ronald Reagan, 40th President of the U.S. during the 1980s, was reported to be a member of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). Reagan was a strong advocate of putting “America First” as a Christian nation. He did this by blending the populism America First with the trinity of the economy (trickle-down economics, militarism and Christian literalism). All three became building blocks used by white Christians. Often added to this mix was the violent scapegoating of anti-Judaism of the Christian Bible. We saw this more clearly in the chant by white men, mostly Christians, marching in 2017 in Charlottesville, VA and signaled the hateful merger of Christianity with fascism – in a word “Christofascism.” German Protestant Lutheran theologian Dorothee Soelle challenged the church and society by coining this term in the 1980’s.

With the demise of a strong the Republican party and the rise of the Making America Great Again (MAGA) party, Christian Nationalism now links together Christianity – biblical literalism with strong opposition to – abortion, anti-gay/lesbian, anti-same sex relationships or marriage, holding sacred 2nd amendment rights to carry and use guns, anti-empathy as a human response, and programs like “Diversity, Inclusion, and Equality” are seen as evil concepts under the guise of Christian Nationalism.

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PRE-SESSION MAILING

Presenter – Jim Stephens

What’s Wrong with Christian Nationalism?

Tony Robinson - July 30, 2023

My thoughts regarding Christian Nationalism – Jim Stephens

My experiences with this topic bring to mind what happened to my ministry during the Bicentennial of our country in 1975-76. I was a new pastor of the Christian Church in Anchorage, Alaska. I was privileged to be appointed by the Mayor to the Bicentennial Commission in the summer of 1975. On the commission I was part of the process of approving all the activities and events for the coming year. As the lone minister on the commission, I was given the duty of organizing the events for the 4th of July worship service.

Whatever was planned would have to meet the approval of the entire commission. It is not normal for the 4th of July to fall on a Sunday, but in this Bicentennial year that was the case.

In my thinking the service would need to be for the whole community, therefore it would need to be inclusive and ecumenical. So, in my plans I gathered a committee of ministers and church leaders who I was familiar with, nondenominational to mainline church leaders including the Black churches as well as the Native churches. From this group we were able to put together a great service which had the support of the commission. We were even able to utilize the Long Island Youth Orchestra that was in Anchorage for the weekend. Everyone on the committee and commission approved of the plans.

Then I began to receive notices and suggestions from our national church leaders, guidance that the idea of having worship services on the 4th would not be in the best interest of the church. Warnings and suggestions were coming out of the Consultation on Church Union (now Churches Uniting in Christ), and other likeminded organizations. The concept of Civil Religion was tied into any July 4 service.

Civil Religion was a new concept for me at the time.

Now, after watching and listening to the memorial service for Charlie Kirk, I have had a new realization of the impact that political leanings can have on a faith based religious organization. Being a conservative person I was drawn into the memorial service. But the more I listened and watched I became aware of the importance of keeping the lines unblurred.

SAMPLE SESSION PLAN #1 – 90 minutes

15 minutes – Total group check-in

Year you were ordained? Congregation? Anything unusual?
Announcements



5 minutes – Introduction: “Understanding Christian Nationalism”

Is America a Christian Nation? Some observations (Attachment 2)

20 minutes – A view of military chaplains in US history - Tom Yates, retired Army Chaplain

“Defense Secretary Hegseth tests Constitution in Pentagon worship services” (attachment 3)
Chronology of establishing US chaplaincy (attachment 4)

30 minutes – Breakout groups - basic resource: Baptizing America *

What is Christian Nationalism? (chapter 1)

What’s the difference between patriotism and Christian Nationalism?

Why has it become important in this period of time?

CN becomes a Christian idol and conflicts with the core tenets of the Christian faith, makes countries into idols, prevents faithful engagement by followers of Jesus in the public square. By devaluing people created in the image of God, it distorts relationship with neighbors – and thus with God. (chapter 2)

Prayer in public spaces: National/state houses, public memorials, national tragedies, Memorial Day, Veteran’s Day – Are there healthy ways to pray for the nation? (chapter 4)

In times of war the Bible is often used as justification for war. How do we push back against baptizing every war as a crusade for God? What about slogans: “one nation under God,” “in God we trust” (from Civil War) – is this a secular god? (chapter 6)

Authors note that churches are attracted to proximity to power. Churches welcome presidents (National City CC), state funerals, national events. Easy to be priests of the American culture. Nationalistic elements in worship/hymns/prayers, American flag. (chapters 7,8,9)

Living in the nation mainline protestant built: 1) threat of Christian Nationalism to American democracy. The rights and flourishing of some are privileged at the expense of others. 2) Christian nationalism is a threat to the church.

Consider the emergence of the Church of MAGA, which has embraced Trumpism. They write that “reducing religion to political tribalism makes Christian faith appear unprincipled and hypocritical. The attractiveness of its ideas and values becomes overshadowed by its misuse and abuse for political ends.” (p. 180)

Continued

SAMPLE SESSION PLAN #1 – 90 minutes, cont.

Breakout groups, continued

Six ways that Mainline Churches can move forward:

- 1) Learn Your Congregation's Story
- 2) Educate Your Church and Community
- 3) Preach a Prophetic Word
- 4) Stop Flying the Flag (before you run off and remove it, do some education first)
- 5) Pay attention to Language and Liturgy
- 6) Urge Institutional Responses and Repentance. (p. 184)

As you join the total group, see if you can agree on one important takeaway to share for the closing discussion. Identify someone to share it.

15 minutes – General discussion

Resources: (Attachments 5-6)

5 minutes – Closing and Yom Kippur prayer (attachment 7)

* Discussion questions from: *Baptizing America study guide*,
Ponderings on a Faith Journey, Robert D. Cornwall

DEFENSE SECRETARY HEGSETH TESTS CONSTITUTION IN PENTAGON WORSHIP SERVICES

(Religious News Service) — Speaking at a recent worship service at the Pentagon, Hegseth said the US needs to be “in prayer, on bended knee, recognizing the providence of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”

— Jack Jenkins, September 29, 2025

The day activist Charlie Kirk was shot and killed at a campus event in Utah, Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth paused while speaking to troops to say a short prayer for the felled conservative figure. Hegseth quickly published the full prayer to his official X account, but it was what he posted the next week — a heavily edited clip drawn from footage — that got the attention of his critics.

In the edited clip, Hegseth — who prefers the title “Secretary of War” — is briefly seen reciting the Lord’s Prayer as dramatic music swells. The Defense Secretary’s prayer then continues as a voice over and a montage begins: the screen is filled with images of fighter jets and missiles flying, paratroopers tumbling from planes, a waving American flag and finally Hegseth standing and saluting alongside President Donald Trump.



Sec. of Defense Pete Hegseth speaks to reporters at the Pentagon, July 2025, Washington DC. (AP/Julia Demaree Nikhinson, File)

Hegseth was even more explicit about his religious leanings at Kirk’s memorial the next day, when he declared that the U.S. is in the midst of a “spiritual war” and urged the roughly 60,000 in the audience and the millions watching at home to embrace Christ. “My charge to all of you: live worthy of Charlie Kirk’s sacrifice, and put Christ at the center of your life as he advocated for giving his,” Hegseth said.

Since narrowly being confirmed to his post in January, Hegseth has placed this kind of religious expression firmly at the heart of his leadership of the U.S. military. In addition to organizing a new worship service at the Pentagon, Hegseth’s religious fervor has taken hold at a Defense Department that has pushed social media messages that mix war preparations with Bible verses as well as official statements that forward a disputed, faith-focused version of U.S. history. All the while, in speeches and other appearances, Hegseth has said he hopes all Americans share his faith.

Even in an administration that has made defending religion a core concern, Hegseth has stood out by publicly advocating his own brand of conservative Christianity — one tied to Idaho pastor and avowed Christian nationalist Doug Wilson.

Critics are now raising concerns that Hegseth, by linking his religion to the most powerful fighting force on the planet, may be running afoul of the U.S. Constitution. “This is more the behavior of someone who is running an ultra-conservative Christian, Seven Mountain Mandate, muscular Christianity, spiritual warfare group,” said Rachel Laser, head of the group Americans United for the Separation of Church and State, referring to the Christian nationalist movement to gain control over seven key sectors of society — the “seven mountains” — including government. “Believers is now a proper noun — and it means Christian believers, essentially,” Griffith said, referring to the statement. “It is this way of really highlighting that kind of Christian sense of what we’re doing here in these worship services.”

Continued



A prayer service hosted by Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth, May 2025, at the Pentagon

The new Pentagon worship service was among the first indications that Hegseth planned to inject religion into his profile as secretary. The gathering has taken place in the middle of the workday and is billed as Hegseth's personal project: A sign that appears to have been posted in the Pentagon earlier in September described the event as "SecWar's Prayer Service," inscribing the words over a painting of St. Stephen being stoned to death.

Hegseth kicked off the first edition of the service by making clear his desire for a Christian country. "This is precisely where I need to be," Hegseth told attendees, "precisely where we need to be as a nation at this moment: in prayer, on bended knee, recognizing the providence of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."

Under his leadership, the Department of Defense — which, like Hegseth, has rebranded as the Department of War, a secondary name — has also shared at least three faith-themed videos. Like the Lord's Prayer clip, two of the videos featured a montage of images of the U.S. military. But instead of a voiceover, the clips slowly overlaid the footage with two Bible verses from the Bible's 18th Psalm and the Book of Joshua. One of the videos was captioned: "We Are One Nation Under God."

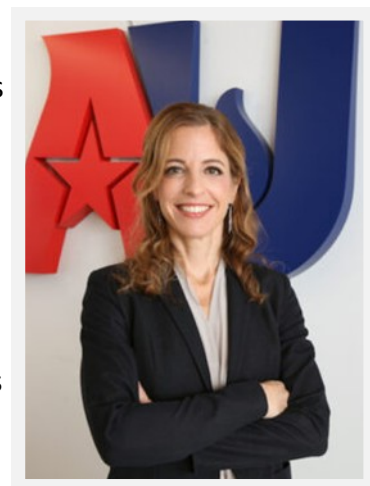
(The Defense Department is not the only Trump admin department to be putting out religious tweets: The Department of Homeland Security has its own recruiting videos that mix Bible verses and warlike images.)

Asked by Religion News Service earlier this year about the videos, Pentagon Press Secretary Kingsley Wilson said the clips were meant to celebrate what she described as the "Christian heritage from our great nation," adding that Hegseth, as "a proud Christian," is "among those who embrace it."

Laser said it's inappropriate for a government official to express a preference for any single religion while acting in their formal capacity. Hegseth, she argued, goes further by inviting his personal pastor, Brooks Potteiger, a Reformed evangelical Christian who leads Pilgrim Hill Reformed Fellowship in Tennessee, to lead the service.

The secretary, Laser said, is "implicitly coercing his staff or his direct reports" to "follow a religion that's not their own."

Hegseth, who bears tattoos of the Crusaders' Latin phrase "Deus Vult" ("God wills it") and "kafir" (an Arabic word often translated as "infidel"), belongs to the Communion of Reformed Evangelical Churches, a small denomination with a short and controversial history. Its co-founder, Doug Wilson, is a rising star on the right who advocates for a society in which non-Christians and even liberal Christians are barred from holding office. His writings have also been criticized as denigrating LGBTQ+ people and downplaying the atrocities of slavery, and he recently alleged "millions" of Muslim immigrants lack any "commitment to, or mechanism of, assimilation" into U.S. society.



Continued

In August, the secretary reposted a CNN interview with Wilson on his personal X account, which carries a Secretary of War badge. (The segment featured one of Wilson's co-pastors saying he opposed women voting, causing the Defense Department to have to clarify that Hegseth supports women's right to vote.) When Wilson established a new branch of his own church in Washington this summer, Hegseth was on hand at the inaugural service and has continued to attend.

In an email interview, Wilson called Hegseth's efforts, using biblical language for governing authorities, "a magistrate favoring faith over unbelief," but not "implicitly coercive." Wilson recounted a personal anecdote from boot camp when an officer told soldiers to bow their heads and pray, then added, "and you atheists need to study your shoe shine." A Navy veteran, Wilson said of Hegseth's religious appeals: "If I were still in the service, I would welcome it."



According to a 2019 congressional report, about 70% of active-duty service members consider themselves Christian, with about 20% identifying as Catholic, 18% Protestant and the rest claiming no specific denominational affiliation. About 24% listed no religious affiliation, slightly more than 2% said they were atheists or agnostics, 1.3% identified as Mormon and slightly less than 2% ascribed to Judaism, Islam and other religious traditions, according to the report.

Micah Schwartzman, a University of Virginia Law School professor who specializes in the religious exercise guarantees in the U.S. Constitution, said in an email interview that it is "disturbing that the military is being led under a banner of Christian nationalism." A military leader organizing worship services outside the context of military chaplaincies, he added, "should raise concerns about religious coercion."

"The Establishment Clause was meant to protect against this kind of pressure to demonstrate religious conformity," he wrote.

Other religious services are already available to Pentagon staffers, most of them organized by the Army chaplains assigned to the building. The chaplains hold regular services in the building's chapel, and, according to a publicly based Family Life Chaplain programs and support groups, small group religious studies, and ceremony support."

A spokesperson for the Catholic Archdiocese for the Military Services told RNS that Mass has long been celebrated at the Pentagon five times a week.

Only the first of Hegseth's Pentagon services, touted as monthly events, was livestreamed, and only one more service, led by evangelical pastor and former football player Jack Brewer, has been publicly announced.

Wilson, the Pentagon press secretary, didn't answer questions about how many services have been convened or who led them but sent a statement saying that the services were voluntary. The statement described them as "an opportunity for Believers to appeal to Heaven on behalf of our great nation and its warfighters."

Marie Griffith, a religion professor and former director of the John C. Danforth Center on Religion and Politics, said the language of the statement is noteworthy — particularly its capitalizing of the words believers and heaven. While the statement may be mimicking President Donald Trump's proclivity for errant capitalization, she said, it could also be taken as a clear preference for Christianity.

Continued

“Believers is now a proper noun — and it means Christian believers, essentially,” Griffith said, referring to the statement. “It is this way of really highlighting that kind of Christian sense of what we’re doing here in these worship services.”

In correspondence, the Pentagon press secretary has repeatedly insisted Hegseth’s religious moves are in keeping with a long American tradition established by George Washington, who she says “prayed for our cause at Valley Forge,” a story Hegseth also referred to in his speech at the inaugural Pentagon worship service.

But characterizing the United States as formed by a particular Christian heritage, critics say, is itself a hallmark of many proponents of Christian nationalism — especially since historians doubt the specific story of Washington praying at Valley Forge often forwarded by those who advocate for a Christian U.S.

Thomas A. Tweed, a professor of American studies and history at the University of Notre Dame and past president of the American Academy of Religion, said in an email that the prayer story was a “fabrication” by Mason Locke Weems, an early biographer of George Washington.



Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth praying with military

Similarly, Lindsay M. Chervinsky, executive director of the George Washington Presidential Library at Mount Vernon, said in an email that the account was further popularized by a painting of Washington praying in the woods. “There is no evidence that the specific event depicted in that painting ever occurred,” said Chervinsky, who noted that Weems “regularly fabricated facts to spin a good story.”

Some of Hegseth’s critics admitted the current Supreme Court hasn’t been receptive to the kind of Establishment Clause concerns raised by the defense secretary’s detractors. In an email, Elizabeth Platt, head of the Law, Rights & Religion Project at Union Seminary in New York, linked Hegseth to Christian nationalism but said the current conservative-leaning slate of justices are unlikely to side with those who find Hegseth’s faith activity unconstitutional.

“I think the reality is we’re not going to litigate our way out of the administration’s commitment to Christian Nationalism and violent religious rhetoric using the Establishment Clause,” Platt wrote in an email.

Hegseth, for his part, appears determined to continue leading the armed forces with Bible in hand, according to images tweeted out by conservative podcast host Mike Watkins, who attended the service earlier this month.

Watkins added a quote, which he attributed to Hegseth: “We are on the verge of a spiritual renaissance.”

CHRONOLOGY OF CHAPLAINS SERVING U.S. MILITARY

1775 - The Chaplain Corps was established when the Continental Congress authorized one ordained Chaplain, serving at the rank of Captain, for each regular regiment of the Continental Army

1846 - First Catholic chaplains served in the Mexican-American War

Sep 18, 1862 - Reverend Jacob Frankel, enlists in the Union Army to serve as the first Jewish US military chaplain. He served in a hospital. April 1863

1943 - Death of four chaplains (two Protestant, one Catholic, one Jewish) who helped save some of those aboard a World War II ship, turning over their lifejackets, praying, singing hymns before it sank. All four trained at Harvard University, then the site of the Army's chaplain training school, during a two-year wartime period.

1979 - First female chaplain commissioned

1993 - First Muslim chaplains were commissioned in the Army

2008 - First Buddhist Army chaplain named

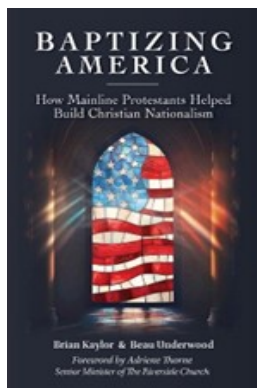
2011 - First Hindu chaplain commissioned

Several controversial questions about the chaplaincy remain unresolved. Issues include the fair representation of denominations and faiths in the chaplaincy, the place of proselytizing by chaplains, the tension between a chaplain's religious beliefs and military force in the prosecution of war, a chaplain's free speech rights, and the role of chaplains in combat. Regardless of how these issues are handled by military leaders and policymakers, the place of chaplains alongside America's men and women in uniform will remain indispensable.



CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM STUDY RESOURCES

September 2025



Baptizing America - \$17.59 - Chalice Press - Brian Kaylor & Beau Underwood, 2024

In the face of a rising threat to both church and democracy, *Baptizing America* provides an urgent examination and an enlightening critique exposing the dangerous undercurrents of Christian Nationalism.

chalicepress.com/products/baptizing-america

Baptizing America - Study Guide (free)

cdn.disciples.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/30170601/DNS-Baptizing-America.pdf

Sanctuary: Being Christian in the Wake of Trump - \$27.99 - Eerdmans - Heidi Neumark, January 2025

“Through the pages of this book, I invite you into various spaces of sanctuary—not as places of retreat, but for the deepened resistance, vision, and transformation that these days, and the gospel, require.”

eerdmans.com/9780802885685/sanctuary

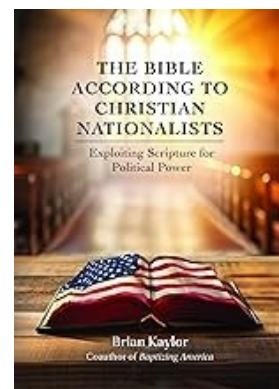
The Bible According to Christian Nationalists - \$15.99 - [Brian Kaylor](#), 2025

chalicepress.com/products/the-bible-according-to-christian-nationalists

Mundane History of White Christian Nationalism - A review by [Neil J. Young](#), Feb. 2023

A review of Bradley Onishi's book *Preparing for War: The Extremist History of White Christian Nationalism - and What Comes Next* (bradonishi.com/books)

“How so much of what often passes as regular—and unremarkable—features of American life and culture have also helped cultivate the context in which a radical white Christian nationalism could take hold.” arcmag.org/the-mundane-history-of-white-christian-nationalism



What is Christian nationalism, anyway? - Paul D. Miller, February 2021

The rise of Donald Trump on the backs of conservative Christian voters has led to a national debate over Christian nationalism and the role of religion in American culture. But few people agree on what Christian nationalism is.

Here's why Christian nationalists are pushing a 'sweeping legal redefinition of antisemitism' -

Alex Henderson - March 2025

The white supremacist Christian identity movement (which sees white Anglo Saxons as God's chosen people) is separate from Christian nationalism.

alternet.org/christian-nationalism-trump-antisemitism

What's Wrong with Christian Nationalism? - Tony Robinson, July 2023

What's wrong with Christian Nationalism, bottom line, is that we Americans do not live a country, or nation, with a religious or religion-based government. We live in a pluralistic democracy.

The Only Thing More Dangerous Than Authoritarianism - Tim Alberta, December 2023

The forces of Christian nationalism are now ascendant inside both the Church and the Republican Party.

Christian Nationalism Doesn't Just Threaten Our Nation - It Threatens Our Faith -

Compassionate Conservative Revival - February 2024

"Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's." Mk 12:17

The Christian Right and Left Share the Same Faith but Couldn't be More Different -

Ruth Terry - YES Magazine Solution Journalism

I didn't know Christians could be Democrats until I got to college. Though affiliated with the relatively conservative Christian Reformed Church, my school had a small but vocal minority of leftist professors and students.

Disciples Confronting Christian Nationalism - [Brian Kaylor & Beau Underwood, Word & Way](#), August 2023

James Garfield is the answer to a fascinating trivia question. In addition to serving as the 20th president of the United States, he was also an ordained minister in the religious movement that would become the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). That makes him the only occupant of the Oval Office to also be a member of the clergy. Founded in the early 1800s, the Disciples of Christ are the oldest denomination started on American soil. They [arose](#) on the American frontier and followed its advancement. Garfield's church evolved alongside the nation's development, prompting one historian to [label](#) it an "American original."

Given this background, the Disciples of Christ would appear to be an unlikely candidate for the denomination at the forefront of opposing Christian Nationalism. Yet, actions and events at its recent general assembly (July 29-Aug. 1) in Louisville, KY, placed it at the vanguard of organized religious bodies in the U.S. confronting this dangerous ideology.

At a moment when many Christians on the far (and not so far) right are seeking to gain and use political power to preserve a retrograde social order, the Disciples — as individuals, congregations, and a denomination — are opposing such efforts to conflate national and religious identities for partisan ends. Disciples pastors are [preaching against](#) Christian Nationalism, warning their congregations about the theological problems inherent to this way of thinking.

When the Disciples gathered recently for their biennial meeting, they adopted a resolution opposing Christian Nationalism that was sponsored by more than a dozen congregations. The General Assembly also featured workshops on how to counter Christian Nationalism's effects in their local contexts and featured a prominent scholar on Christian Nationalism.

This issue of *A Public Witness* takes you to Louisville to see how a denomination with deep American roots is witnessing against those advocating for a close alignment between God and country — messages that should resonate for small "d" disciples as well. But there's also more work needed to confront Christian Nationalism. So this issue will close with... spoiler alert... exciting news about a forthcoming effort from us to help all Christians interrogate their complicity in spreading this false gospel.

What Happened at General Assembly

During the Disciples General Assembly, hundreds of people participated in two workshops on Christian Nationalism. One of us (Beau) is a Disciples pastor and was one of the presenters for a workshop on "equipping Disciples to confront Christian Nationalism."

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After some definitional and theological work, the workshop focused on practical ways of responding to the threat Christian Nationalism poses to both church and society. Participants broke into small groups to reflect on three critical questions:

- ♦ What are the impacts of Christian Nationalism in your context?
- ♦ How aware is your congregation of Christian Nationalism and what are the biggest concerns?
- ♦ How can you imagine (your congregation) taking action to oppose Christian Nationalism, within your congregational life, within your community, and/or beyond?

And while that workshop was great (especially Beau's part of course), the other workshop on Christian Nationalism featured one of the top scholars on the topic. Andrew Whitehead is a professor of sociology at IUPUI and author of the forthcoming book [*American Idolatry: How Christian Nationalism Betrays the Gospel and Threatens the Church*](#) (which he [talked about](#) recently on our podcast *Dangerous Dogma*).

As he does in his new book, Whitehead didn't just present from a detached sociologist perspective. Along with presenting survey data, he told stories from his evangelical upbringing that included aspects he now sees in a different light.

"What I later came to recognize, study, and define as Christian Nationalism, was — and for many people still is — taken for granted," he said. "I didn't question the tenets of Christian Nationalism, and more importantly, how they differed from various expressions of the Christian faith."

Through his research unpacking the religious and political views of those espousing Christian Nationalism, Whitehead said he's come to see how the worldview is "detrimental to the church" and "contradicted those core aspects" he learned growing up in church, like loving your neighbors, caring for those who are less fortunate, and breaking down lines that divide peoples. And as he spoke to the gathering of a mainline Protestant denomination, he warned that his research shows 60% of mainline Protestants embrace or are sympathetic to Christian Nationalism.

"Christian Nationalism is not just a problem 'out there,' but is something that we have to take ownership of and educate ourselves about and resource our leaders in order to confront and oppose," Whitehead said. "Christian Nationalism betrays the gospel and threatens the church."

Afterward, Whitehead told us about how he "enjoyed my time at the Disciples assembly."

"It is so encouraging to see the denomination grappling with Christian Nationalism, committing to having the hard conversations, and equipping its clergy and congregations to respond to the current cultural and political moment," he added. "The church is setting a wonderful example!"

In addition to listening to presentations about Christian Nationalism, the delegates at the assembly passed [a resolution](#) denouncing this ideology as "a distortion of the Christian faith." (The official background material to support the resolution included links to *Word&Way* reports along with the work of Whitehead and others.)

The resolution notes Christian Nationalism promotes violence, authoritarianism, "White Supremacy, antisemitism (and other forms of religious bigotry), xenophobia, persecution and scapegoating of LGBTQ+ persons, misogyny, and ableism." But this dangerous ideology does this, the resolution points out, as it "appropriates the name of Jesus Christ and the language and imagery of scripture to promote this ideology, in direct contradiction to the gospel Jesus preached."

Continued

“Christian Nationalism runs counter to the very heart of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) identity by promoting division and stratification of the human family to the detriment of the unity and equality that our baptisms beget (Galatians 3:28) and the Lord’s Table celebrates (1 Corinthians 11:17-34),” the resolution reads

In addition to defining and critiquing Christian Nationalism, the resolution also commits the denomination, its leaders, and its congregations to work to counter this heretical ideology.

“The Church in all its expressions commits to educating ourselves and our constituencies about the societal and spiritual dangers of Christian Nationalism, how to talk about Christian Nationalism theologically, and how to counter it in both ecclesial and public life,” the resolution resolves. “The Church calls on its leaders and members to take every possible opportunity to speak out and act boldly against Christian Nationalism, ensuring that the love of God known to us in Jesus Christ may not be distorted by this ugly and false appropriation of our faith, but proclaimed with generosity and grace to all peoples, from our doorsteps to the ends of the earth.”

Beyond committing to learning about Christian Nationalism and working to counter it, the resolution also hinted at some needed introspection: “The Church in all its expressions will continue to prayerfully discern, confess, and repent of our own complicity with Christian Nationalism.”

To sign up for regular posts: [Disciples Confronting Christian Nationalism - Word&Way](https://disciplescuim.org/2022/09/22/christians-against-christian-nationalism)

disciplescuim.org/2022/09/22/christians-against-christian-nationalism

In 2022, Disciples preachers from across the U.S. spearheaded a grassroots initiative to challenge Christian Nationalism, preaching about the perils of this extreme ideology on World Communion Sunday. Many of these passionate preachers made a pledge to persistently teach and preach against Christian Nationalism. To aid our Disciples in comprehending the insidious nature of this ideology, we present the following resources:

[Preachers United Against Christian Nationalism](#) - Facebook event page for the 2022 initiative

A Policy Statement of the National Council of Churches, “[The Dangers of Christian Nationalism in the U.S.](#)”
Baptist Joint Committee: [Resources](#)

[Christians Against Christian Nationalism campaign](#) & [statement](#) - You’re encouraged to share w/ folks to sign

United Church of Christ campaign - “[Our Faith Our Vote](#)”

[United Church of Christ related training](#) - preparing for times when groups (i.e., White Nationalists) come to disrupt events

[Confronting White Supremacy in Our Time](#) - United Church of Christ, Just Peace Webinar

[Christian Nationalism is on the Ballot in 2022](#) - Interfaith Alliance Webinar, September 2022

[The Religion of American Greatness: What’s Wrong with Christian Nationalism](#) - Book, Paul D. Miller, 2022

[What’s God Got to Do With It? The Rise of Christian Nationalism in American Politics](#) - Podcast, The Argument, August 2022

Continued

[Angela Denker on White Christian Nationalism](#) - Podcast

[Christian Nationalism: A Crisis In The American Church by Jeffery Curtis Poor](#) - Blog, June 2022

[“The Christian Case for Pluralist Democracy”](#) - Sermon by Rebecca Littlejohn - based on Matthew 15:21-28; Matthew 26:47-56, September 2022

[Adam Kinzinger warns that some Christians now ‘equate Donald Trump with the person of Jesus Christ’ and calls out pastors who support Trumpism](#) - Insider, August 2022

[How White Christian Nationalists Seek to Transform America](#) - Podcast - The New Yorker, July 2022

[White Christian Nationalism - Not Secularism - Is Destroying America](#) - Sojourners, February 2019

[Most Republicans Support Declaring the United States a Christian Nation](#) - Politico, September 2022

[Taking American Back for God: Christian Nationalism in the United States](#) - Book, Whitehead and Perry, 2022

[The Religion of American Greatness: What’s Wrong with Christian Nationalism](#) - Book, Miller, 2022

Anti-Semitism Resources:

[A Very Brief Guide to Antisemitism](#) - Booklet, T’ura, 2022

[The Afterlife of Moses: Exile, Democracy, Renewal](#) - Book, Steinberg, 2022



“America is a Christian nation!”

Let's see what our Founding Fathers had to say:

Thomas Jefferson



“Christianity neither is, nor ever was a part of the common law.”

“Christianity is the most perverted system that ever shone on man.”

“Religions are all alike-founded upon fables and mythologies.”

John Adams



“The government of the United States of America is not, in any sense, founded on the Christian religion.”

“The United States is not a Christian nation any more than it is a Jewish or a Mohammedan nation.”

Thomas Paine



“Whenever we read the obscene stories, the voluptuous debaucheries, the cruel and torturous executions, the unrelenting vindictiveness with which more than half the Bible is filled, it would be more consistent that we called it the word of a demon than the word of God. It has served to corrupt and brutalize mankind.”

James Madison



“Religion and government will both exist in greater purity the less they are mixed together.”

“The purpose of separation of church and state is to keep forever from these shores the ceaseless strife that has soaked the soil of Europe with blood for centuries.”

Damn those pesky facts!

They really do get in the way of the Christian agenda, don't they?

The founding fathers held diverse religious views, ranging from devout Christians to deists, but no consensus exists that they intended to establish America as a Christian nation. While many saw religion as vital for public morality, documents like the Treaty of Tripoli explicitly stated the U.S. government was not founded on Christianity. Furthermore, the Constitution includes no Christian tenets and contains clauses for religious freedom and separation of church and state.

ONE DAY OUT OF THE FRAY – by William Kristol

Yesterday, at Yom Kippur services, we, like many congregations, read a prayer for our country. It's a slightly edited version of a prayer composed in 1927 by Professor [Louis Ginzberg](#), rector of the Jewish Theological Seminary, the flagship educational institution of the Conservative movement of American Judaism.

There had previously been a tradition of Jews offering a prayer for the well-being of the kings or rulers under whom they lived—often as a beleaguered minority dependent on a fearsome and unaccountable authority. But here in the United States, as George Washington [wrote](#) to the Newport, Rhode Island, Hebrew Congregation in 1790, “It is now as if it was by the indulgence of one class of people, that another enjoyed the exercise of their inherent natural rights.”

It seemed wrong to Ginzberg that Jews should continue to appeal, as it were, to a government of strangers for kindness. But it also seemed appropriate to pray for our country. For even though we were a free and democratic country, we could and would go wrong. We needed guidance. We needed to recognize that we needed guidance.

Here's the prayer we read together in synagogue:



Rabbi Stuart Federow holds the Mahzor where he will read prayers to lead the Congregation Shaar Hashalom in observance of Yom Kippur, the Jewish Day of Atonement. Photo by Mayra Beltran

Our God and God of our ancestors: We ask your blessings for our country—for its government, for its leaders and advisors, and for all who exercise just and rightful authority. Teach them insights from Your Torah, that they may administer all affairs of state fairly, that peace and security, happiness and prosperity, justice and freedom may forever abide in our midst.

Creator of all flesh, bless all the inhabitants of our country with Your spirit. May citizens of all races and creeds forge a common bond in true harmony, to banish hatred and bigotry, and to safeguard the ideals and free institutions that are the pride and glory of our country.

May this land, under Your providence, be an influence for good throughout the world, uniting all people in peace and freedom—helping them to fulfill the vision of Your prophet: “[Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they experience war anymore.](#)” And let us say: Amen.

I should note that this isn't a special prayer for the High Holy Days. It's read every Saturday at services, so it's familiar, and I can't say I particularly focused on it yesterday. I'd add that the name of our current president, or the names of any serving in his administration or in Congress or active in politics, weren't mentioned at services. So yesterday provided a welcome break from the news.

It was only this morning, when I was forced to catch up with the torrent of illegality and unconstitutionality that we are facing, and with the acts of injustice and cruelty that are being done in our name, that the prayer for our country came back to mind. One can't help but be struck that from the seas off Venezuela to the streets of Chicago, from the podium at the White House to the out-of-office voicemail messages at the Department of Education, the government we elected is not administering “affairs of state fairly, that peace and security, happiness and prosperity, justice and freedom may forever abide in our midst.” *Continued*

One also couldn't help but be struck that this failure isn't happening simply because of the wishes or orders of one man. Many, many individuals are acting to effectuate these injustices and abuses. Many others are supporting their efforts in various ways. Many more are going along. And many millions more are cheering them along.

Yom Kippur is the culmination of the "days of awe." It's a day that emphasizes our dependence on a higher power. But it's also a day that emphasizes our own responsibility, that we can and must try to do better. Its spirit seems to me, perhaps surprisingly, not that distant from John F. Kennedy's [remark](#) that "here on earth God's work must truly be our own."

It was good to have a day away from politics. But it's also good to get back in the arena, trying to do what one can "to safeguard the ideals and free institutions that are the pride and glory of our country."

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