
A Statement of Concern and Counsel on

‘Christian Nationalism’

Theology and Education Committee,
Christian Associates of Southwest Pennsylvania

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Jesus said, “My Kingdom is not of this world.”

John 18:36a NIV

Peter began to speak to [Cornelius’s household]: “I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.”

Acts 10:34-35 NRSV

A. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, many Americans, both Christians and non-Christians, have spoken and written of the dangers of “Christian Nationalism.” Others have embraced the term as expressing both their faith and their political views. Christians who love both Lord and country may fall into confusion and error as they seek to be both faithful disciples of Jesus Christ and responsible citizens of their Republic.

This Statement of Concern and Counsel will assess the phenomenon broadly termed “Christian Nationalism;” indicate its divergences from our shared Christian faith; distinguish it from patriotism and participation in politics by Christians; and offer guidance to the faithful as they express their citizenship as part of their life of discipleship.

B. HISTORICAL ROOTS OF CHRISTIANITY IN AMERICA

Each of the thirteen American colonies was chartered by different Christian groups upon differing principles of faith. The early laws and forms taken by colonial governments were strongly influenced by their founders' religious faith. To cite two examples, New Jersey's elected assembly was inspired by Presbyterians' elected presbyteries, and William Penn's Quaker government insisted on religious freedom in Pennsylvania. While there were exceptions, the people of the American colonies were broadly Protestant. Many colonial Christians had a living memory of state-sponsored religious persecution by European monarchies, informing their position in the War of Independence.

Following the War of Independence, the framers of the United States Constitution did not adopt a federal sectarian religious identity, leaving such questions to the states. Over the first fifty years of the independence of the United States, all the states disestablished official state religions, allowing Protestants, Catholics, Jews, and others the right of religious freedom, as guaranteed in the First Amendment to the Constitution.

Many American Christians of European descent, and the new nation they established, engaged in or benefitted from enslaving Africans, disinherit Native peoples, and oppressing later Asian and Latino immigrants, often justifying racist laws and actions with pseudo-theological rationales. Despite the oppression they experienced, many African Americans, Native Americans, Asian Americans, and Latinos developed deep Christian faith, combining eschatological hope with liberative work for social change.

Freedom of religion in the United States made America a fertile ground for evangelism, as religious communities shared their messages without government interference. Immigrants brought their own religious traditions which shared space with the already-existing churches. Utopian communities, new religions, and sects flourished.

The early twentieth century saw the peak of immigration to the United States. The experience of two world wars brought men and women of differing confessions together for what were accepted as noble, religious causes. The “social gospel,” the civil rights movement, the peace movement, and the ecumenical movement also brought Christians closer to each other.

The later twentieth and early twenty-first centuries have seen many changes in American life and the understanding of religious freedom. Examples include Supreme Court rulings on prayer in public school and the public posting of the Ten Commandments; and the rise of violence to achieve religious ends. Religious affiliation in the United States has become increasingly diverse with the immigration of those who practice other world religions, and a growing population who practice no religion. Debates about human sexuality have been especially divisive. Finally, the development of the internet and the rise of social media have given platforms to those who would have, in an earlier time, been consigned to the fringes of both religious and civil society.

C. AN ASSESSMENT OF “CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM”

“Christian Nationalism” is extremely difficult to define. It has neither “creed” nor “party platform.” The term is both used pejoratively and embraced wholeheartedly. Some labeled as “Christian Nationalists” hold views that are related to or even indistinguishable from opinions and attitudes expressed by a significant number of people throughout the history of the United States. Among these might be that:

1. The United States was founded upon “Biblical principles of government.”
2. A nation of citizens who live peacefully and honorably, according to the will of God as revealed in natural law and in Holy Scripture, will experience well-being, harmony, and plenty.
3. The United States, as a self-governing republic of free citizens, has a unique role in God’s providential plan for history.
4. The “separation of church and state” does not mean that only private religious opinions may be tolerated: people’s religious faith may legitimately inform their political opinions.
5. Those of religious belief should not find undue disadvantage in the public square, nor should they, on the basis of religion, be disqualified from positions of responsibility in government.

Among American Christians, there are disagreements about these matters and many others. Those who hold these and similar views should not reflexively be condemned as going beyond the pale of legitimate discourse, either as Christian disciples or as American citizens. This is especially true because people of Christian faith themselves differ in

their interpretations of Scripture and their understandings of God's providential trajectory for history.

However, there also exist among some who identify themselves as "Christian Nationalists" several significant misunderstandings and misuses of Christian doctrine and Holy Scripture that threaten the peace of the body politic and obscure our shared faith in Jesus Christ. While the most visible proponents of these may be political figures, or those with a media platform, many of these attitudes may be found among members of our own faith communities.

These misunderstandings and misuses include:

1. An analysis of our contemporary situation as a "Holy War" between Christianity and other religions or secular points of view, attempting to draw an explicit parallel between our times and the "end times" described in the Scriptures.
2. An identification of the United States of America with "the chosen nation" or the "community of God's people" identified in the Scriptures.
3. A sense of "persecution" which must be resisted by law, or force, if necessary.
4. A conscious or unconscious identification of Americans (and Christians) with those who share the racial characteristics or cultural outlook of white Europeans.
5. Identification of Jews, Muslims, and other non-Christians, as well as immigrants to the United States, as existential threats to American society, and a claim that only Christians are "true" Americans.

Such understandings and others like them conflict with the Gospel witness and may well endanger the civic order and the safety and security of the citizenry. They demand a response from those responsible for teaching the faithful and equipping them for the work of ministry.

D. A RESPONSE TO “CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM”

While interpretations differ, our faith communities have in common the understanding that governments have a role to play within God’s provision for the world: the maintenance of order, the promotion of peace, the defense of the weak, and the increase of the welfare of the people of the community. We also understand the love of country as a natural and proper impulse in human beings. In the United States, Christian faith communities have learned to live in a context of religious pluralism, sharing the public square with other Christian faith communities, with people of other religions, and with people of no religion.

With this as background, we offer the following responses to the above outlooks and understandings associated with “Christian Nationalism”:

1. The reading of our current situation as “Holy War”:

The Holy Scriptures contain the theme of the conflict between God/good and demonic/evil powers. However, it is important to properly identify the enemy:

“For our struggle is not against blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.”

Eph. 6:12 NRSVUE

Those who oppose us in the political community are not automatically assumed to be servants of evil. Regarding human opponents, Jesus taught his disciples, “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven” (Matt. 5:44-45a NRSVUE).

2. The identification of “the nation” of the Scriptures with the United States or with another nation-state:

“Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD, the people whom he has chosen as his heritage!”

Ps. 33/34:12 NRSVUE

The “nation” so identified is the ancient people of Israel, who understood themselves as the people whom the LORD rescued from Egypt and brought into the land of promise. Our Christian faith communities understand the Church of Christ to be the people of God “of every nation,” brought into being by the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, and adopts the term “the people of God” without excluding the ancient people of Israel (cf. 1 Peter 2:9-10).

Although, in God’s providence, new nation-states have come into being based upon ethnic, tribal, linguistic, cultural and religious characteristics, the word translated as “nation” in Psalm 33/34 and similar texts should not be applied to any contemporary nation-state, but only to the Church and the ancient people of Israel.

3. Christians are persecuted and must resist this persecution by violent means if necessary.

The risen Jesus commanded the apostles, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.”

Matt. 28:19 NRSVUE

Our communities have always understood the possibility of persecution whenever we bear witness to Jesus Christ. Jesus himself indicated that his followers would be persecuted as he was persecuted (Matt. 10:16-33).

However, Christians are not to hide from this persecution, nor are they to resist it, but instead accept it as conformity with Christ and the prophets of Israel: “Blessed are you when people revile you falsely and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you on my account” (Matt. 5:11 NRSVUE). They are to witness to Christ’s power and grace amid persecution. Christians should speak truthfully when their right to worship or to preach is infringed upon but also when the rights of non-Christians are infringed upon in similar ways. In this sense, they are to resist persecution, in defending the rights of others to practice their faith in safety and security and speaking about their own rights in service of the defense of everyone’s right to freedom of religious practice.

Christian faith communities differ on the right of Christians to participate in just wars, to serve in government, and to defend oneself from attack using violent means. However, those faith communities

which allow for these do not thereby endorse violence as a means of private revenge, vigilante justice, or security for one's tribe, race, or sect.

4. The confusion of Christian identity with racial or ethnic identity and/or national identity.

Peter tells those in Cornelius's house, *"God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him."*

Acts 10:34-35 NRSV

The Church is made up of those of every race, nation, tribe and language who confess Christ as Lord. Those who identify Christianity with certain racial, ethnic, or national characteristics or belongings are not thinking, speaking, or acting in accordance with Christian truth. This error may be propagated even when it is not expressly formulated. For it to be rejected, the opposite must be asserted consistently, regularly, and explicitly.

5. Identification of Jews, Muslims, and other non-Christians, as well as immigrants to the United States, as existential threats to American society, and the assertion that only Christians are "true" Americans.

Through much of history, Jews in majority-Christian societies have been persecuted as those who threaten the body politic. They have been slandered as the "other" in our midst, and accused of secretly controlling financial, legal, media, educational, and other structures of society. This unfounded accusation has, sadly, resurfaced in American life, often being spread through social media platforms and podcasts.

In addition, Muslims, Roman Catholics, and immigrants to the United States have also been feared as those who would, by their mere existence, destroy the unity and distinctive culture of the United States, and these narratives of fear have also been disseminated in recent times.

Our faith communities reject the false narratives which demonize religious and ethnic minorities and blame them for the problems that beset American society. As Christians and citizens, we are called to work with others in a culture of religious pluralism towards a society which fosters peace, freedom, order, justice, and good will. We are also called to work toward a society which enshrines in law the rights of all to personal and communal security and the right to worship freely and in safety.

E. COUNSEL

We offer this counsel to pastors, teachers, congregational leaders, and to all Christians as they seek to express their discipleship in the realm of citizenship.

1. Christians may and should:

- a. Become familiar with biblical and theological reflection on Christ's teachings as they pertain to nationhood, citizenship, and government. (Reflections from denominational bodies are linked in Appendix A.)
- b. Pray for their nation and for those who serve in government.
- c. Reflect upon Christian teaching as they vote and make judgments upon matters of civic debate.
- d. Exercise the rights of citizenship by participating in elections and standing for office. Many of our faith communities also view service in the armed forces and as agents of law enforcement as compatible with Christian discipleship.
- e. Where consistent within their Christian vocation, participate in the political process by openly supporting the candidate(s) of their choice.
- f. Where consistent with their Christian vocation, publicly state their conscience about issues facing the nation, state, and community.
- g. Become familiar with responses to persecution in Christian history, and with Jesus' teachings and example regarding the use of violence.

- h. Speak among themselves and with others in ways that respect the racial, national, and ethnic diversity within the Church.
- i. Work together with people of other religions and of no religion to foster a civic space that is orderly, peaceful, and respectful of all.

2. Christians should avoid:

- a. Reading Scripture in ways that obscure its historical, Trinitarian, theological, and ecclesiological contexts.
- b. Applying Scripture haphazardly to the contemporary or national situation or interpreting individual verses in a way that disregards the wider teaching of the Scripture.
- c. Understanding or depicting Christianity as a faith which is primarily associated with a national, ethnic, racial, or political identity.
- d. Advocating violent revolution or committing violent acts as a means of securing or restoring national identity or pursuing political or religious goals.
- e. Idolizing political figures or demonizing them as evil.

3. Christians should be cautious of:

- a. Any person or group in the political sphere who claims to speak for God.
- b. Using Christian symbols or the name of Jesus Christ to express a political party's point of view.
- c. Using the American flag or social and political symbols and slogans as identifying markers for their congregations or church bodies.
- d. Enjoining support for certain candidates, parties, and political positions as matters of faith. Christians may discern and discuss the reasons for their understandings without impugning the faith of those who disagree with them.

E. CONCLUSION: PATRIOTISM, NOT NATIONALISM

While we have expressed deep concern about “Christian Nationalism,” it should not be equated with “patriotism.” Patriotism is love of country, which includes the desire to serve, protect, and empower the people of one’s own nation. Properly exercised, patriotism serves people beyond the patriot’s nation. Christians are and may be patriots, never more so than when they are exercising their faith to benefit the nation into which they have been placed by God in his wisdom, grace, and providence. Nevertheless, the highest loyalty of any Christian is not to any nation but to our Lord Jesus Christ.

APPENDIX A: DENOMINATIONAL AND ECUMENICAL RESOURCES

Many national church bodies have offered their own resolutions, statements, and study documents on Christian nationalism and faithful citizenship. We encourage members of Southwest Pennsylvania churches to seek the guidance of their own church by consulting the relevant document on the list below.

American Baptist Churches USA, “American Baptist Policy Statement on Church and State,” *abc-usa.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/CHURCH-AND-STATE.pdf*

Board of Bishops, A.M.E. Zion Church, “Statement from the Board of Bishops of the A.M.E. Zion Church Regarding Endorsements of Political Candidates,” *amezion.org/2025/08/14/statement-from-the-board-of-bishops-of-the-a-m-e-zion-church-regarding-endorsements-of-political-candidates*

Baptist World Alliance, “Religious Nationalism,” *baptistworld.org/bwa-resolutions/religious-nationalism*

Bruderhof, “The Way of Peace,” *Foundations of Our Faith and Calling*, *bruderhof.com/foundations*

U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, “Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship,” *usccb.org/resources/forming-consciences-for-faithful-citizenship.pdf*

Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), “Calling the Church to Oppose Christian Nationalism,” *ga.disciples.org/resolutions/2023/ga-2341*

The Episcopal Church, “Resolution: Combat Rising Religious Nationalism,” *vbinder.net/resolutions/532*

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, “Faith and Civic Life: Seeking the Well-Being of All,” *cdn.elca.org/cdn/wp-content/uploads/Faith_and_Civic_Life_Seeking_the_Wellbeing_of_All_Social_Statement.pdf*

Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, “For the Life of the World: Toward a Social Ethos of the Orthodox Church,” section II (“The Church in the Public Sphere”), *www.goarch.org/social-ethos*

National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA, “The Dangers of Christian Nationalism in the United States,” *nationalcouncilofchurches.us/common-witness/the-dangers-of-christian-nationalism-in-the-united-states-a-policy-statement-of-the-national-council-of-churches*

Holy Synod of Bishops, Orthodox Church in America, “Statement on the Occasion of the 250th Anniversary of the United States of America,” *oca.org/holy-synod/statements/holy-synod/statement-on-the-occasion-of-the-250th-anniversary-of-the-united-states-of-america*

Presbyterian Church U.S.A., “On Taking Action to Repudiate Christian Nationalism and Affirm Our Faith Commitments,” *myga.pc-biz.org/search/3001414*

Progressive National Baptist Convention, “Progressive National Baptist Convention Calls for National Moral Response to White Christian Nationalism,” *pnbc.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Progressive-National-Baptist-Convention-Calls-for-National-Moral-Response-to-White-Christian-Nationalism.pdf*

The Salvation Army, “The Salvation Army and the State,” *salvationarmy.org/resources/international-positional-statement-salvation-army-and-state*

Council of Bishops, The United Methodist Church, “Beloved Community – An Antidote to Extremism,” *unitedmethodistbishops.org/files/cob+letter-statement++on+political+violence+and+authoritarianism+-+sept19.pdf*
See also: *Building Beloved Community*, Abingdon Press, 2025.

APPENDIX B: MEMBERS OF THE THEOLOGY & EDUCATION COMMITTEE

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- The Rev. Maurice C. Frontz III, *North American Lutheran Church*
- The Rev. Dr. John J. Lolla, Jr., *Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)*
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