

Christian Nationalism – Antithetical to the Gospel!

Greetings Holy, Healthy and Happy People of God!

No one can refute that the last few years in America and throughout the world, we have experienced despair, disillusionment, and disappointment, at unprecedented levels. As a result, many people have shifted their allegiance from God to humanity's desire to solve their own problems and direct their own will. God's people are in a season of transition, often referred to as Generation T, where every generation has felt the stronghold of trauma through the pandemic, racial strife, and violence. Following Jesus is always transitional as we live a life of the unexpected and the familiar, discomfort and comfort, the here but not yet, nestled between life-restraining and hope giving transitions.

Danger is lurking!

As followers of Jesus Christ, there are a plethora of areas and issues that could garner our attention, such as biblical illiteracy, lack of community engagement, poverty, homelessness, racial injustice, anti-intellectualism, racism, domestic and gun violence, gender identity and inclusion. One issue that is prominent and viewed as a dangerous and divisive framework is Christian Nationalism, especially when viewed as a movement which intertwines patriotism and religious identity, creating a complex and sometimes conflicting allegiance for believers. This is problematic because it distorts the gospel message, making it more about national pride than about the inclusive and transformative love of Jesus Christ.

One of the shifts in our contextual and theological landscape is the idea of Christian Nationalism, not as just a theological value in America, but as a theological subversion of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Christian Nationalist and Christians are in proximity to each other while both are often not well-informed about the effects of our democracy.

The Declaration, Constitution, and the Bill of Rights are not based on the Bible. Although four biblical themes do appear in the three primary founding documents, there are other themes, principles, and concepts that do not. This central claim in Christian-nation mythology is a counter claim to the intent of our country's founding documents. America is a country founded on the inclusion and rights of immigrants, and not as a Christian nation as often discussed. As the nation of multi-religious perspective, it is the fabric of that diversity that makes America great!

The impact of doing nothing!

Often the framing question in America worth pondering could be, "What's at stake if theologians, prophets, pastors, and priests, (remove comma) sit back and hope and trust that God will rescue us from this on-going nightmare of disbelief for some, while others are applauding that America needs to be a Christian nation?"

Worshiping or aligning with ideologies of Christian Nationalism can be futile or perceived as faithful to the gospel of Jesus Christ. What is Christian Nationalism? One definition I appreciate

comes from Andrew Whitehead and Samuel Perry. “Christian nationalism is a cultural framework that idealizes and advocates a fusion of Christianity with American civil life.”¹ Many religious scholars and sociologists describe Christian Nationalism as the belief that is defined as a Christian nation.

As proclaimers of the gospel, and preservers of goodness, the persisting acknowledgement and realignment of Christian ideas and values are essential. Christian Nationalism cannot be denied or go unacknowledged. The warning signs of white supremacy are pervasive and problematic and include in practice:

- √ The government should take steps to keep the Christian roots and identity intact in the American landscape.
- √ The government should advocate Christian values, perspectives, and pass laws and enact policies that reflect those values.
- √ The separation of church and state is not a formal law that should be followed.
- √ God’s plan is for the United States to be a successful nation based in Christian ideals.

Move beyond idol worship!

Christian nationalism is a disease, a pandemic in a sense, that is a distortion to the gospel of Jesus Christ. It attempts to dissolve the love ethic Jesus proclaimed and practiced. As Christians, we have an allegiance to God, not to a flag, a person, or a document. Patriotism has a role to play, but it is not the primary role, at best it is secondary. All of us should appreciate America. Being faithful to God is one thing but to be faithful to America at the cost of our reliance and dependence of God is hostile. Beware of idol worship! Christian nationalism is a political identity and not a theological movement. It aligns with superiority and the demonization of other people. We need to creating more intentional spaces for principled driven disciples, grounded in the grace of God, and leveraged by the love of Jesus Christ, while being guided by the Holy Spirit that invites diversity, inclusion, and equity that reflects biblical justice. Exodus offers a rationale perspective as to the danger of worshiping idols.

³you shall have no other gods before me. ⁴“You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above or that is on the earth beneath or that is in the water under the earth. ⁵ You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me ⁶but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments. Exodus 20:3-6 ²

One of the challenges and opportunities that face the church of Jesus Christ in America is an absence of discipleship culture which means a lack of discipleship making for the transformation of the world. Christian Nationalism is antithetical to the gospel of Jesus where love, unity and

¹ Andrew Whitehead and Samuel Perry, *Taking America Back for God: Christian Nationalism in the United States* (Oxford University Press, 2020).

² Exodus 20:3-6 New Revised Standard Version, Updated Version Edition

inclusion are core values. Instead, there is a deceptive narrative that proposes to reclaim America as a Christian nation, making America Great Again. However, I'd be curious to know, great for who? The on-going rhetoric and propaganda have garnered a population of people who feel threatened by the growing diversity and perspectives that may differ from where and how some people were socialized. Jesus calls us to follow him and release the old ways of being and doing. The Prophet Isaiah proclaimed, *"¹⁹ I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth; do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert."*³

Entering into this conversation of Christian Nationalism, not only takes courage, but also there must be a historical and theological framework to ensure a countercultural narrative to the belief that America must reclaim its Christian identity and ideologies. History teaches us that America was the home of the indigenous (Native Americans). With the invasion of Christopher Columbus and Europeans, claiming it as the New World, Native Americans were enslaved and stripped of their languages, cultures, names and traditions. In a sense, Christian Nationalism is taking us back to a colonized America where control and humiliation are the order of the day.

More forward by practicing love!

Hearing and living by the words of Jesus from Matthew's gospel could be one way of reconciling the division and disillusionment between Christian Nationalism and Christians. As Jesus was about to transition from earth for heaven, he gave his last will and testament, which remind us of Jesus' call and commissioning of the disciples in the gospel of Matthew, *¹⁸ And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ 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 ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."*⁴

The church's response to Christian Nationalism should be rooted in the teachings of Jesus Christ, who emphasized love, justice, and inclusion. The church must actively work to dismantle the ideologies that promote exclusion and superiority. This involves educating congregations about the historical and theological inaccuracies of Christian Nationalism and promoting a gospel-centered approach that respects and values all people equally.

Moreover, the church should engage in community outreach and biblical/social justice initiatives that reflect the inclusive nature of the gospel. By addressing issues such as poverty, racial injustice, and homelessness, the church can demonstrate the practical implications of Jesus' teachings. This not only counters the narrative of Christian Nationalism but also shows the world a more authentic representation of Christian faith.

Discipleship as a core value!

In addition, the church must foster a discipleship matters culture (put a comma here) more than political preferences and idolatry, that encourages believers to grow in their faith and understanding of the gospel. The church is not to align themselves with political allies, but rather

³ Isaiah 43:19, New Revised Standard Version, Updated Version Edition

⁴ Matthew 28:18-20, New Revised Standard Version, Updated Version Edition

to offer a countercultural option in the person of Jesus that builds relational truth and leads to unity of the body of Jesus Christ. The Great Commission debunks any legitimate formation of Christian Nationalism. Jesus sends out the disciples to recruit more disciples and not to promote any group of people over others. In essence, there are not borders or boundaries to spreading the gospel. National boundaries disappear when it comes to being part of the people of God.⁵ Simply put, we love God, love ourselves, and love our neighbors, regardless of race, class, gender or religious beliefs.

Our witness is still necessary! Jesus spent more time in the marketplace around tables than he did in the temple. What would happen if we invited those who vehemently disagreed with us into a conversation to listen and better understand our neighbor? As people of The Way, we must take risks and share the good and gracious news of Jesus Christ. It's our witness that brings people closer to Jesus, our service that connects Christ to others, and our compassion that leads us to do so. We have a broader witness than the divisive Christian nationalist perspective. Those buying into the ideology and theology are feeling abandoned and lonely. Let our witness of love show them differently.

Use words wisely and work toward unity! God is with us in this season. Our words will determine the viability of our witness. When our words connect to the hearts and minds of people, God's transformation happens which leads to unity. Although it is not in our control, our responsibility is in our unrelenting words of hope, healing and practicing love. America needs healing from the rhetoric of superiority and hatred toward others. Don't get distracted by the finger pointing, the misinformation or false claims, but seek first the kingdom of God and wait on God to intervene.

Finally, the church must remain vigilant in its commitment to the separation of church and state. This principle is essential to maintaining religious freedom and ensuring that the gospel message is not co-opted for political purposes. The church's primary allegiance is to God and the kingdom, not an earthly nation or political ideology. Any response to Christian Nationalism must be multifaceted, involving education, community engagement, discipleship, and a steadfast commitment to the philosophy, patterns and practices of Jesus Christ. By doing so, the church can be a powerful force for good in the world, reflecting the love and compassion of Jesus Christ. This is our time under God, let's not miss it!

⁵ April 9, 2018 / Dennis R. Edwards, Christian Nationalism is Anti-Gospel