



WHAT IS... WHITE CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM

DEFINITION:

TO GRASP THE FULL GRAVITY, examine the three component parts. According to Merriam-Webster (online) nationalism is “a sense of national consciousness exalting one nation above all others and placing primary emphasis on promotion of its culture and interests as opposed to those of other nations or supranational groups.” Nationalism can have a temporary positive role, such as a nation emerging from under an oppressive colonizing regime. Yet, when a specific religion and nationalism become intertwined eventually political decisions are based in that ideology, preferencing one religious group over another, even though both are a part one nation and may be of the same general ethnic or racial identity.

In the United States, however, nationalism has historically and systemically always meant and been white nationalism, deeply rooted in the Doctrine of Discovery, the idolatrous concept of Manifest Destiny, and the related systems that maintain white privilege. A Sojourners article explains Christian nationalism “as a constellation of beliefs — that the founding of the United States was ‘divinely inspired’ ... — that manifest in political goals.” The article highlights the work of sociologists Gorski and Perry, who “specifically identify ‘white Christian nationalism’ as the threat. Christian nationalist beliefs alongside white racial identity creates the political vision that seeks hegemonic power for white people.”

BIBLICAL/SPIRITUAL/THEOLOGICAL FRAMING OR REFERENCES:

AS NOTED PREVIOUSLY, white Christian nationalism is rooted in an idolatrous belief about human identity and value based on the socially constructed and oppressive concept of race. Yet, central in the Christian tradition is the understanding that all are created in the image of God, imago dei. And, while scripture is filled with examples of inter-tribal strife, ethnic and/or cultural cleansing, and tribal and religious nationalism, the core concept of God as love is embodied in the Christ Event. See John 1:1-14; 1 John 4:7-21.

EXAMPLE(S):

EXAMPLES OF WHITE CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM INCLUDE:

White Christian nationalism was on full display during the January 6, 2021 insurrection at the Capitol building in Washington, DC. Rioters carried crosses and Christian flags alongside confederate flags, QAnon conspiracy banners, and “Make American Great Again” placards. Members of the Proud Boys knelt and prayed as the Capitol was stormed. The America they envision is one controlled by and benefiting white citizens of the U.S. primarily. The Southern Poverty Law Center explains: “White Christian nationalism combines American exceptionalism... with the belief that God is the source of all American liberties and prosperity. This includes the belief that Americans are more valued in God’s eyes than people from other nations. What’s more, large segments of the U.S. population are seen as un-American. Some leaders of this movement uphold the racist idea that white Americans are the image of sacred Americanness.”



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REFLECTION:

QUESTION #1

When you overhear someone comment about the U.S. as a "Christian nation" or that "Prayer should be allowed in public schools again", what emotion does that evoke within you and why?

1

QUESTION #2

What are some of the dangers when all three component parts of the phrase white Christian nationalism come together as one ideology?

2

QUESTION #3

How might a small group engage a conversation on what white Christian nationalism looks like in your context, and what forms of response you might have available?

3

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

WHAT DOES 'WHITE CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM' EVEN MEAN, ANYWAY? (FROM SOJOURNERS)

<https://sojo.net/articles/what-does-white-christian-nationalism-even-mean-anyway>

UNDERSTANDING WHITE CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM (FROM YALE ISPS)

<https://isps.yale.edu/news/blog/2022/10/understanding-white-christian-nationalism>

DANGEROUS DEVOTION: CONGRESSIONAL HEARING EXAMINES THREAD OF WHITE CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM (FROM SOUTHERN POVERTY LAW CENTER)

<https://www.splcenter.org/news/2022/12/28/dangerous-devotion-congressional-hearing-examines-threat-white-christian-nationalism>

WHITE CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM: THE DEEP STORY BEHIND THE CAPITOL INSURRECTION (FROM BERKLEY CENTER FOR RELIGION, PEACE & WORLD AFFAIRS)

<https://berkleycenter.georgetown.edu/responses/white-christian-nationalism-the-deep-story-behind-the-capitol-insurrection>