

My Response to Christian Nationalism

By Bruce Hartman

This is an attempt to investigate, define and respond to the concept of Christian Nationalism from a Biblical perspective.

Many have been saying that for decades we have been facing a national moral decline. Some Christians have been becoming increasingly concerned over this. The reaction of some is to raise their voices in direct opposition to those who would destroy our country with ungodly claims, acts and behaviors. Those same people not only have been declaring outrage, but claim that all Christians need to rise up and loudly protest this moral decline. This paper will analyze that response and other responses and attempt to define from the Bible what our response should be. But, before I can do any of this, I need to fairly represent the Christian Nationalist viewpoint.

1. Christian Nationalism defined

Kidding! There is no definition of Christian Nationalism. Some people think that it's just being a Christian and being patriotic. On the other end, others use the label as a pejorative. They equate Christian Nationalism with Naziism.

1.1. Various takes

1.1.1. Freedom Forum

<https://www.freedomforum.org/what-is-christian-nationalism/>

People who study this generally define it as “the United States is a country defined by Christianity”. In practice, this means:

- The government should take steps to keep the country's Christian roots and identity intact.
- The government should advocate Christian values 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 U.S. to be a successful nation based in Christian ideals.

While the Constitution is looked upon favorably, Christian Nationalists would put the law of God above it. For example, where Christian Nationalism concepts would disagree with the constitution on the following points:

- Establishing one faith as the official national religion of the U.S. (First Amendment establishment clause).

- Stopping you from practicing your preferred religion or forcing you to practice any religion at all (First Amendment free exercise clause).
- Requiring a religious test or oath for an elected office (U.S. Constitution Article 6).
- Since all laws legislate morality, all laws should be based on Biblical precepts.

Other points of contention would be around blasphemy laws, required prayers in school, or Christian-only images in public places.

1.1.2. Stephen Wolfe

Stephen Wolfe published the Case for Christian Nationalism. Here is Wikipedia's summary of his book:

Wolfe approaches nationalism as becoming conscious of, and "being for", one's own "people-group". He argues that homogeneity within each people-group allows it to more properly pursue the good by ordering earthly life toward heavenly life, and that while a principal image of heavenly life can be found in Christian worship, only a Christian nation can provide a complete image. Wolfe argues for homogeneity by constructing a theological anthropology, positing that humans would have formed separate, culturally distinct communities, even if the fall of man had not occurred.

In addition, he argues that this should be accomplished through a "measured theocratic Caesarism", a Christian prince. Wolfe follows early Reformed thinkers, such as Francis Turretin, in assigning the government a role in suppressing outward displays of "false religion", but not a power to coerce the conscience or inward religion. The civil magistrate is tasked with wielding "formal civil power" for the public good. He also argues that Christian nationalism is compatible with the tradition of the American founding.

1.2. What Christian Nationalism is Not

The concept of Christian Nationalism gets mixed with a lot of other philosophies, and in fact, people with non-related views can tend to also advocate for similar things that Christian Nationalism does. Christian Nationalism is not:

- Race based. This is tricky because many people will mix their views of race with Christian Nationalism (more on that forthcoming).
- Having a particular view on immigration and immigrants in general, except in the case of keeping American culture pure of outside influences. Once again this is tricky for the same reason.
- It doesn't legislate what people think, but how they act.

- It doesn't necessarily care about what other countries do (except for a general desire for them to become Christian nations also). There are (or have been) various views on how the USA should act in the outside world.
- Everybody (who is reasonable) thinks that we should all actively advocate for the kinds of laws we should have and how we should commonly behave. This is not limited to Christian Nationalism, and this cannot be defined as Christian Nationalism.
- A politician who advocates Christian values is not a Christian Nationalist. Everyone advocates their own values.
- Christian Nationalism is not merely winning people to Christ. All Christians are expected to make disciples of all nations.
- The definition of patriotism is: "devoted love, support, and defense of one's country; national loyalty." The definition of nationalism is: "the policy or doctrine of asserting the interests of one's own nation viewed as separate from the interests of other nations or the common interests of all nations. In short, nationalism is a kind of excessive, aggressive patriotism." A person can be a Christian and a patriot. That does not make one who is both a Christian and a patriot a Christian Nationalist. Conflating patriotism and nationalism is rejected.

1.3. Some Implications of Christian Nationalism

Let's face it, any creation of laws is coercive. We don't have the freedom to just do whatever we feel like doing if it breaks the law. Yet, any society has the duty to create laws. And, as citizens of a voting republic, we all have a duty to make our opinions on what the laws should be known to lawmakers. That's basically how the system works. Lawmakers face pressure from voters to enact or eliminate laws. For the most part, they do what they think the people want (with some exceptions for various reasons). The types of laws our government enacts is dependent on us speaking up.

Because everyone is expected to do the above, I am rejecting that advocating for Christian principles in our laws defines Christian Nationalism.

Since advocating for the kind of government and laws one wants is the norm, practically, I think the question is about an attitude we have of what we would do if "our" voice wins the day. If you could see any law enacted that you would want, what would you enact? How are dissenting people (and their views) respected (or not)? Do we enact laws that everyone is OK with, or do we not need to concern ourselves with objections from "sinners"? When or how do we shut down dissenting voices?

2. My Response

You are about to see my innermost thoughts on the matter (and about life in general). I admit right up front that I'm not correct in all my opinions, and welcome thoughts on what I'm saying. I

also admit that some of the following thoughts might actually be offensive to some. What I ask is that you don't pull away, but engage in the parts you don't like. I promise I will consider what you say and let it shape my worldview - and possibly adjust wording for clarification or even change something based on your response. With that, here we go . . .

The term Christian Nationalism is being thrown around by people mostly on the left of the political spectrum. I am going to do my best to ignore the accusations, and just address what I think the issue is - plain old nationalism.

There is a definition of nationalism. Here is the definition from the Oxford dictionary:

"identification with one's own nation and support for its interests, especially to the exclusion or detriment of the interests of other nations."

It's tribalism. It's being for one's own perceived people group while having less regard or care for other people groups. Nationalists want to live among their own, without outside influence. The effect is a form of conformity to one's own group that draws ever tighter, until there is no difference in thinking or living from one person to another. Usually there is a leader who defines all the values that the group is to conform to.

Here's where the confusion lies: Christ followers do want to conform to a standard set by Christ. Christ followers do have a hierarchy of leaders who tell us how to do that. Christ followers do best when they live in a community of their own.

Here's the difference: Christ followers serve and love those outside their community - and are never afraid of them. Yes, we do hope that those outside our community join us in conforming to a set of values set by Christ. We want all the world to join us. Christ followers have no fear of how those outside our community affect us. If we are following Jesus, outsiders have no power over us and can't affect anything that is important to us. The only standard Christ followers have is the values clearly defined in the Bible (as opposed to those that are harder to understand and are disputed by God-fearing Biblical scholars). Outside of that we welcome different cultural norms, knowing that they will sometimes make us uncomfortable - but in the end they will challenge our cultural weaknesses and teach us to be better people.

Even though, on the surface, there are some similarities, I believe Christianity and nationalism are antithetical to each other. No Christ follower should be a nationalist. I believe that relatively few true Christ followers are full blown nationalists. However, some of us are being sucked in by false teaching. I will describe the various ways, what to watch for, and how to avoid the traps. Pay attention! If you see any of the following, mentally run the other way!

One final note: Terms are important! We need to be aware of what people mean when they use terms like "nationalist". Don't think that you can just reuse terms, change their implied meaning, not explain our definitions to others, and then get surprised that they misconstrue what we are saying.

With that in mind, I would recommend that all Christ followers ABHOR NATIONALISM. It's a loaded word that brings up the failures of the Christian church during the rise and rule of Hitler. Much of the "Christian" church was fully in support of Hitler, before, during and after his reign. Don't fall for the same types of traps, and please don't identify with that form of failed Christianity.

2.1. Political Soup

Of course, all Christians have a mandate to share Christ. That's not in question. Possibly, a little more controversial, I believe that we have a mandate as Americans to share our opinions in the marketplace of ideas. In the case of both, we should do so with humility and respect. With humility, because even though we have the Gospel as the truth in our lives, on just about any topic outside of the Gospel, we are as stupid and ignorant as the next person - believer or unbeliever. We just have so much to learn! With respect, because other people feel that they can share dissenting views with us - which invariably leads to us learning new things (and probably them too). Conceit, haughtiness, disrespect, or an attitude of "I've got to win" has no place in a Christ follower's life.

In fact, Christ followers are to have the opposite attitude of many social media celebrities and highly opinionated people - we are to be constantly self-evaluating, often discovering and repenting of the wrong attitudes that we have. We need to be especially careful to listen to other Christ followers who have different opinions than us and consider what they are saying. One might reply, "But what about shedding the light of truth in a dark world?" Firstly, that truth is strictly limited to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Secondly, that truth is expressed through the love we have for one another. Thirdly, it's a fact that no one is going to listen to you unless you listen to and consider them first. Finally, let's face it! We humans are incredibly ignorant and dumb. Anyone who follows the Biblical story can easily attest to that.

With that in mind, I would advise that we can do a few things to avoid sinking further into the depths of ignorance:

1. Carefully consider opposing points of view - especially if they come from Christians. I would suggest the opposite response: name calling (or even celebrating other people's name calling), is ignorant and is exactly the attitude Satan wants us to have.
2. Stop believing political pundits or so-called news people. If they display anything similar to name calling, disparaging, rabble rousing, engaging in ad hominem, or attempting to recruit you into a battle against people, turn them off immediately and stop listening to them.
3. Be wise. Most talking heads out there are trying to suck you in so that they can make money and garner attention for themselves. So, please stop supporting them by listening to them - and especially stop believing them! If you are really interested in what is going on in the world, attempt to find news sources that most people consider unbiased (that probably means that all sides will find much to disagree with).

4. Avoid getting on bandwagons. There is no team except team Jesus. Jesus is definitely not on your team! I'm talking to you Republican/Democrat/Libertarian/etc.
5. Seek out opinions of people from different cultures. They have a lot of insight into things we are blind to (and vice-versa).
6. If you find that any political media is making you anxious or angry at people, turn it off. Stop watching. Pundits are trying to suck you in by giving you things to be angry about. Some anger at the depravity of this world is OK, as long as we give it over to God and trust Him. But, the kind of anger and/or anxiety that the pundits are trying to generate in you is from Satan.

With that in mind, I certainly don't want to discourage people from having political positions or being involved politically. Work on someone's campaign, talk to other people about why you think one candidate is better. However, you mustn't join their team. Support them because you think they will do better things. Be ready to admit to the failings of those you advocate for.

2.2. Princess Xeno(phobia)

Nationalism promotes cultural purity. Christ followers promote God's purity alone.

Cultural purity is one of the most alarming things coming out of some of these Christian Nationalist movements. Personally, I hear a lot of this coming from anti-immigration advocates. This gets confusing though. I support enforcing our borders and vetting people coming in. But, I also desire contact with many immigrants from all over the world.

Christ followers will have a deep concern for immigrants. They will want to know what circumstances they are in, and have a desire to meet their needs. A Christ follower will not turn away from those in need, but look for the best way to serve them.

Put it this way, Jesus tells us in the Bible to invite strangers into our homes. We strive to make our home a sanctuary for other people, to both visit, and stay for a time. But, do I open up my home to 50 people at a time to come and live? Of course not! Everyone of our guests would suffer. Do I invite bad actors to come live in my home, or people who are a danger to my family? That's not helpful to anyone, and ruins the sanctuary we have dedicated for others' use. The same goes with our country. We should be welcoming strangers in - as many as can prosper. We should not invite more immigrants than that, or they will suffer. We should also vet everyone who comes in so that they don't make other guests miserable.

Here's the key: OUR CONSIDERATION IS BASED ON HOW OTHER PEOPLE WOULD PROSPER AND NOT OURSELVES. That's what Christ mandates.

Please pay attention to Matthew 25:41 - 45: "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. 42 For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, 43 I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit

me.’ 44 Then they also will answer, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to you?’ 45 Then he will answer them, saying, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.’”

Examine your own attitude! Don’t dare to not apply the above to immigrants (both documented and undocumented). If you have a general attitude of not welcoming strangers into our country, and especially refugees, because you don’t want them to mess things up for you here - you are not of Christ and need to repent. Please look at the warning from Jesus above. He will not hesitate to KICK YOUR ASS TO HELL!

Please don’t confuse the above admonition against xenophobia with those who have the opinion that we should care for immigrants and refugees in a better way than just blindly setting them loose in our country. Your reticence to our current system of immigration may very well be based on compassion. But, please be careful of your attitude. If you hear people talk about immigrants (documented or undocumented) somehow being lesser people or messing things up for “us”, please recognize this for what it is - the words of the anti-Christ.

2.3. Man up!

I have the impression that those who seem to advocate Christian Nationalism (or at least are accused of it) also advocate for men being more “man-like” and women being more “feminine”, and for men and women having certain roles (that they define based loosely on what they twist from the Bible).

God’s kingdom is backwards to this world. The meek lead, the gentle are strong, the least considered by the world are fit to lead in God’s kingdom. I bring this up to highlight what I think Paul is telling us when he says husbands should lead in the home and women are helpers.

In God’s kingdom, leaders are servants. When Paul is telling husbands to lead, he is telling us to be servants to our families. In the world, leaders boss other people around. In God’s kingdom, leaders listen and pay attention to others around them and serve them. God’s leaders don’t advocate for themselves. God’s leaders don’t make the decisions, they defer to others (such as their wives). God’s leaders do challenge others to live up to God’s standards, but they communicate the knowledge that they themselves constantly fall short themselves.

The helper role is not subservient to the leader role. In fact, it’s very likely that it’s more important. I believe from observation and data, that the helper, in general, is more capable, intelligent and has more endurance. Consider a single mom: Very few men can do all she can do. Additionally (and maybe I am guilty of generalizing), I believe that women, in general, are less selfish than men, making them more capable leaders than men.

Helpers speak up boldly when their husbands go the wrong way. Helpers protect their husbands, from others, and from themselves. Helpers ensure that right decisions are being

made. Of course, helpers do all of this in love, respect, meekness and gentleness - just like leaders do.

More food for thought: How many times in the Bible does God refer to Himself as our helper and/or the Biblical writers refer to God as their helper? (It's a lot, btw). Think about God's calling to women to be the helper in relation to how God views His own role.

So, why did God make men the "leaders" in marriage? It's because he chooses the weak. As long as we recognize this, give honor and respect to both God and our wives, and let the knowledge that we are weak humble us, we have a chance at being decent servants.

I don't even like to use the words "leader" and "helper" because it's abundantly misunderstood by our carnal minds. Perhaps the words "servant" and "administrator" would be better terms. Those more accurately reflect what I think God's roles for husbands and wives are.

I bring your attention to the fact that most Christ-following women seem to be rejecting the roles that certain Christian Nationalists are espousing for women. It's because, as women clearly see, those ideas lower women. God has both an important and elevated view of women, their role in the home, in their marriage, and in society. Listen men! Some of you think you are raising women up by putting them back in your "woman" box. But, you're not. You are actually trying to rob women of their high position in Christ. I'd advise women to meekly, gently and boldly speak up against this.

God has a very high calling for women - and it's proactive. It's proactive in society and proactive in marriage. A fool doesn't take to heart what his wife says to him. God has specifically put her in place as the main speaker to our lives.

Giving permission to (and even encouraging) men to be proud, aggressive, not listen to women, chest-pounders, fighters, or objectifiers of women is not of God. That's what Satan would like us to be. Stop listening to Satan!

A couple more points on this topic: Women don't have any role to play towards men outside of marriage to their husband. Even within marriage, women do not have specific duties in the household. If they are more gifted in an area, they should do that, whether handling the budget, planning vacations, or working outside the home to bring in money. Men don't have a role of protector. Both men and women are protecting the family and are supposed to have their spouse's back.

I admit, I'm not clear on what the outcome of the roles should look like in a marriage. But, I am pretty sure of this: American Evangelicals are talking out of their collective butts (see the above comment about humans in general being very ignorant). So, stop paying attention to what people say about roles. Divide up the duties equally, with each partner doing what they are strongest at. Pay no attention to cultural expectations, because they most likely come from Satan. Husbands, do you hear the command to love your wife? Good! Wives are supposed to

do that too. Wives, do you hear the command to respect your husband? Good! Husbands need to respect their wives. Let me ask you, what thing is a husband supposed to do for a wife that a husband is not supposed to do? What thing is a wife supposed to do that a husband shouldn't also do? I can't think of a single thing!

Given all of that, I believe that the Bible does outline roles for both husbands and wives. We need to use wisdom to determine what God is telling us - and we never will if we don't humble ourselves before God and listen to Him.

2.4. Powergrid

One primary thing Christian Nationalists advocate is that "we" need to (forcefully, if necessary) take back the power of governance from "them". I'm all for those being called by God running for office. But, one concern I have is when "angels of light" run for office and pull the wool over good intentioned people. (Remember what I said about humans being foolish and gullible).

The other concern I have is this: When "we" gain more power than "them", what laws do we pass that benefit "us" that might hurt "them" - even if "they" only perceive harm to themselves? Do we care? What do we do with the objectors ("them")?

Philippians 2:3 - 8 - Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. 4 Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. 5 Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, 6 who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

2 Timothy 2:24 - 26 - And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, 25 correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, 26 and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.

We are called to serve and care for others, to show others respect. So, if we have the power to stop people sinning against God, do we use that power? My opinion is that we shouldn't. Instead, we should seek to introduce sinners to Jesus and let Him change them from the inside-out.

I admit that making laws that legislate morality makes a nicer society, more free from crime, and makes everyone feel safer. Just look at Muslim countries. Their crime rate is a fraction of ours. Everyone in those countries feel so much safer than here in the United States (assuming that they are completely in line with the ruling party).

So why do I personally lean towards the libertarian idea that we should maximize personal freedom and minimize intrusive laws? Don't I care about the victims of crime? Don't I care that people sin against God and reap the grenade of consequences, exploding all over everybody nearby? Don't I care that God will be honored less?

I deeply care about all those things. I also think that the only solution is God changing people from the inside out. I admit that changing people from the outside-in does make for a safer society, and even trains people to act more morally. But, I'm just not interested in creating a better society. I'm only interested in the expansion of the kingdom of God. Those two are not the same, even if one has the veneer of the other. I'm not interested in outward appearances, only in people's hearts. I believe the only hope is God's transformation of people. Legislating outward behavior is at best a waste of time, and at worst a distraction from God's work within people. I reject the idea that external training in following God's law results in people coming to Christ.

Matthew 23:13 - 15 - 13 "But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut the kingdom of heaven in people's faces. For you neither enter yourselves nor allow those who would enter to go in. 15 Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel across sea and land to make a single proselyte, and when he becomes a proselyte, you make him twice as much a child of hell as yourselves."

That is what I think attempting to follow God's law is like without the internal transformation from God.

2.5. Conan, the Culture Warrior

Are you worried about the influence of Gay and Trans culture (or Liberals, or Republicans, or about anything else you think is evil)? Are you concerned about how much it's harming the children? Stop worrying! God is in control, so you don't have to be.

Our face towards those outside of the church is to make the glory of God known, through service, love, respectful conversation, etc. We don't need to confront their sin, except for the sin of rejecting Jesus. That really is the only thing that counts. Have you won anything if you convince someone that following your morals (or worse, joining your team) is the way, but they still end up in hell? Your only concern should be whether they are in Christ. Rather than confronting their sin, I should be telling people about how great and Holy God is, how much I don't measure up, how much I need to repent of my own sin, and how much Jesus saved me. Be an example of the kind of humble, repentant person that God wants.

As Christ followers, we need to focus our purity concerns on other Christ-followers within our local body. We can stop railing against the "Gays" and start repenting of our own greed, selfish ambition, materialism, and the myriad of other sins that we have forgotten about, or labeled as "OK". In our small groups, we can confess our sins to each other and be accountable to each other. So, when the outside world comes to Christ, they will see our example, and then do the same as us - Repent!

2.6. Conclusion

John 17:14 - I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.

John 18:36 - Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world."

I'm tempted to go along with those who want to help bring God's rule to this world. The problem is that God brings His rule to this world, not me. I need to let God do His work and just respond to His love and believe in Him.

The truth is that we are too foolish, too sinful, too full of our own ideas to take on this work. Humans are fundamentally incapable of ruling anything right now. If we are truly humbled by God's hand, perhaps then we can be of service to others. If we truly understand our own limitations, when we do get a position of power, we will always use that power in the lightest possible manner. When we esteem others higher than ourselves, we won't insist on our own warped ideas of how things should be.

We need to admit it: We really don't want things managed the way God wants them managed. We want to manage others according to our own selfish ambition. We love being in control! We want to be God, and want everyone else to worship us. God's ways are not our ways. That is why power corrupts us.

So, in conclusion, stop seeking power for yourself, or for your team. God has all the power, and He will wield it as He knows best. He doesn't need us to interfere with His plans. We just need to love others, admonish those within the faith, and personally follow Jesus' command - which is to believe in Him.

One final note: I still advocate for being involved in government where we can be. Although politics is by no means our mission, we can use it (like everything else) as a means to do our primary mission. If we can put God's love and message on display for others to see, awesome! If we use it to gather power unto our own team and bludgeon our opponents, Satan says, "Go Team!"

3. References

<https://www.freedomforum.org/what-is-christian-nationalism/>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Case_for_Christian_Nationalism