

MIDWESTERN BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

ADORNING THE GOSPEL OR STRIPPING IT BARE?:  
CASE STUDIES ILLUSTRATING THE DANGERS OF CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM

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## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Christian Nationalism (CN), as described by Stephen Wolfe, threatens to diminish the witness of the evangelical Gospel around the world. Wolfe’s political theory will be used as a window through which to view religious nationalism more broadly. As test cases, CN will be surveyed in the United States, Brazil, Ghana, Germany, Ukraine and Russia, and then compared with Hindu Nationalism in India, Islamic Nationalism in Iran, and Buddhist Nationalism in Bhutan. CN will then be viewed under the principles of the *Baptist Faith and Message 2000* (BFM) in an effort to formulate a theological solution from a Baptist vantage point.

## Defining Christian Nationalism

In discussing CN, it is imperative to rightly represent the movement; therefore, this paper will stay away from unhelpful generalizations in an effort to provide a reasoned focus upon the issues.<sup>2</sup> Stephen Wolfe’s *The Case for Christian Nationalism* has been chosen as the flagbearer for this discussion for two important reasons. First, his book provides a systematic presentation of CN which is clear, concise, and coherent. Second, Wolfe provides a mainstream voice within the evangelical tributary of the CN movement.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In February, our church received a routine update letter from India Evangelical Mission (IEM). The letter outlined how Hindu nationalism was an increasing threat to the ministry. Cathleen Fromm, a representative of IEM, further explained that “we have to be careful what information we give out to the general public (names, places, dates, etc.)...Last year IEM detected a no-conversion group that was following IEM on social media, so we had to block them” (Email exchange, June 10, 2024). This moved me to consider CN in the light of Christian persecution.

<sup>2</sup> Gillian Richards, “The Dog Whistle of ‘Christian Nationalism’,” *The Heritage Foundation* (May 9, 2023): <https://www.heritage.org/conservatism/commentary/the-dog-whistle-christian-nationalism>, argues that the lack of a standard definition for Christian nationalism “allows critics to bundle evils like white supremacy and racism with standard conservative views on marriage, family, and politics.”

<sup>3</sup> Wolfe’s book is published by Canon Press, the publishing arm of Christ Church, Moscow, Idaho, which promotes its own brand of CN. For example, see Heath Druzin, “Christian Nationalism Through Story of an Idaho Town,” *Idaho Capital Sun* (July 5, 2024): <https://idahocapitalsun.com/2024/07/05/new-extremely-american-podcast-tackles-christian-nationalism-through-story-of-an-idaho-town>, who writes, “Christ Church wants to make Moscow an explicitly Christian city, governed by Biblical principles. To accomplish this, they and their allies are buying up big swaths of real estate and opening businesses to increase their footprint and economic might.”

## Stephen Wolfe's Definition

Stephen Wolfe embraces the term *Christian Nationalism*, and his definition is usefully simple: “Christian nationalism is a totality of national action, consisting of civil laws and social customs, conducted by a Christian nation as a Christian nation, in order to procure for itself both earthly and heavenly good in Christ.”<sup>4</sup> He frames this as “nationalism modified by Christianity.”<sup>5</sup> This definition may not appear problematic, but the proverbial devil is in the details.

It is important to understand that Wolfe's CN is opposed to liberal democracies and the form of governments under which most Westerners reside, who enjoy various semblances of *liberty and justice for all*.<sup>6</sup> To bear this out, Wolfe explains that CN is a “species of nationalism”<sup>7</sup> whereby the government provides “civil direction in true religion,”<sup>8</sup> which is described within the confines of an established and officially sanctioned “pan-Protestant political community.”<sup>9</sup> While Wolfe does not believe that the church or its leaders should run the

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<sup>4</sup> Stephen Wolfe, *The Case for Christian Nationalism* (Moscow, ID: Canon, 2022), 9, 181.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 10. The formal cause of CN is *totality of national action*, which means the conduct expected of the people “for their overall, national good,” ranging from heroic sacrifice to the nurturing of children—the totality of life (12). The material cause of CN are the “rules of action” *consisting of civil laws and social customs* which “conduce to the nation's good” (13). The efficient cause of CN is the conscious awareness that these actions and customs are *conducted by a Christian nation as a Christian nation*, for “the entity that causes Christian nationalism is chiefly the people (14). Finally, the purpose of CN is *to procure for itself both earthly and heavenly good in Christ*, that is, to create an ideal environment for the “procurement of...the ‘complete good’— the goods of this life and of the life to come” (14-15). Therefore, as “Christ is essential for the complete good...only the Christian nation is a complete nation” (15).

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 342, strongly asserts that this universal notion of equality “ought to be deconstructed.”

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 10; he further states that “all that is essential to generic nationalism is true of Christian nationalism.”

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 181.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 217-18. Notably, he views himself as standing squarely within the Reformed politico-sacral traditions of the 16<sup>th</sup> - 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. As a Presbyterian he confesses that “paedobaptism is the position most natural to Christian nationalism” as it helps to socialize the citizens to a vital and pervasive cultural Christianity (217); therefore, “Presbyterian and Anglican models...better cohere with...closer church-state relation” (395-96). Wolfe is admittedly wary of Baptists, which have historically tended to advocate for “near absolute religious liberty,” as this undermines Christian civic culture and “creates problems for Christian nationalism” (217).

government, he affirms that a Christian nation and its magistrates would be obligated to foster a civic and cultural environment conducive to Christian virtue and duty. To be clear, this includes passing and enforcing laws governing church attendance, orthodoxy, public conversation, and even church building aesthetics, such as pulpit placement.<sup>10</sup>

Wolfe protests that modern secularists are like an Orwellian Big Brother watching over people and vying to control their lives. Yet, in a turn of irony, he offers the promise of Big Father in the form of state magistrates, who may investigate and interrogate one who missed church, cursed out loud, discussed contrary political views, or circulated minority religious beliefs. Wolfe claims that “civil authority should leave alone what the other spheres of life can effectively govern themselves,”<sup>11</sup> and yet he calls for a Christian Caesar,<sup>12</sup> “*a national god*”<sup>13</sup> touted as “the prince” and “first of his people,”<sup>14</sup> who concerns himself with the church attendance of his citizens and the pulpit aesthetics of his clergy.

### No Elephants to See Here: It's Just a Theory

One problem that stands like a fidgeting elephant in the corner is how Wolfe refuses to compare his Christian political theory within the framework of history. Since nationalism has led to well-documented atrocities, and since CN has not been immune from the temptations of such, it would be reasonable to defend his position against this troublesome background. But Wolfe

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<sup>10</sup> Wolfe, 34-35, 262-64 (cf. 317-22).

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 259 (cf. 250).

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 278, here Wolfe envisions the inaugural CN magistrate as one of the “great men” who was instrumental in leading to establish the renewed Christian commonwealth (277). As the premier leader and “world-shaker,” he founds a “measured and theocratic Caesarism.”

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 287, citing John Calvin’s commentary on Psalm 82:6; also, per Francis Turretin (*IET*, 3:18.34.5), the Christian Prince is called the “vicar of God” who brings God near to the people (286).

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 279.

dismisses such questions outright, waving off “any supposed connotations of nationalism, whatever those might be,” insisting he does not need to “justify or explain away any historical example of nationalism.”<sup>15</sup>

Wolfe rather takes cover behind his own “conceptual defense” that the “*ism of nationalism*” is merely “the nation acting as a nation for its good;” therefore he “does not appeal to historical examples” or “waste time repudiating ‘fascist nationalism’.”<sup>16</sup> This reads like open-faced irony since Wolfe’s entire work is replete with historical references to the Reformed thinkers of the 16<sup>th</sup> through 18<sup>th</sup> centuries and often harkens back to the colonial period. Clearly his perception of colonial America as an assortment of CN nations colors his view and influences his outlook on the history of both nationalism and CN. Yet even in these discussions, he does not address slavery, religious executions, and the near genocide of Native Americans, atrocities coded in Christian religion, which cast a long dark shadow upon his CN idealism.<sup>17</sup>

The problem with Wolfe’s historical lacunae is that it dismisses the great concerns one may have with CN as if they should not be concerning at all, but there is a restless elephant here that cannot be ignored. Strangely, Wolfe takes the time to document the “homicidal persecution” of 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century Roman Catholics without recognizing that this was an alternate form of

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<sup>15</sup> Wolfe, 279.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>17</sup> See Thomas S. Kidd, *American Colonial History: Clashing Cultures and Faiths* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), xi-xii, who in his introduction notes, “Many in early America interpreted their interactions with their rivals, including violence and enslavement, through the lens of religion and spiritual belief...Religion in colonial America could inspire everything from exploration to genocidal conquest, idyllic communes to generations of spite, and the dehumanization of entire peoples to advocacy for human rights.” Even the Puritans of New England trafficked in the slave trade which was “pervasive” in their colonies (95); and, of course, it was famously these same Puritans who hanged 19 women during the Salem witch trials (209). Beyond this, it should be remembered that by the election of Thomas Jefferson, atrocities against and wars with the Native Americans had left the remnant of their general population at a quarter of what it was in 1700. Remarkably, as John Winthrop assessed the decimation of the native populace by smallpox in 1634, the biblical proportions of the plague were viewed as the Lord’s work who “hathe cleared our title to what we possess (8).

CN, and that the Reformers also promoted similar means of enforcing the laws of their own CN commonwealths.<sup>18</sup> He admits that the “Reformers generally approved of capital punishment for heresy,” but he quickly qualifies their posture as measured and reserved by comparison.<sup>19</sup> The lesson of the Reformers according to Wolfe, is that while civil action against heresy is justified, it should be carried out with “discernment, care, gentleness, and prudence.”<sup>20</sup> How a CN government carries out the death penalty with care and gentleness is not explained. Wolfe insists his work is theoretical, and this apparently excuses him from treating his topic historically. Yet, he also insists that his work should not be taken as a mere “intellectual exercise...of Christian political theory” but rather as a “vision of the future.”<sup>21</sup> Theoretical or not, Wolfe is promoting a well-rehearsed form of ideological government.

### Justifying Violent Revolution

Ideally, the goals of CN are ushered in through national renewal coupled with the civic resolve to implement overtly Christian governance, but violent revolution is also justified in achieving this goal.<sup>22</sup> In fact, Wolfe tips his hat toward a violent revolution in America, which could topple the current government, capture alleged tyrants, and renew the country in the image of a CN state.<sup>23</sup> He leaves the non-theoretical aspects to “strategists, organizers, and foot

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<sup>18</sup> Wolfe., 389. It is implied that Catholics are not Christians, thus their modes of government should not be conflated with CN. This is further borne out by the fact that Catholics, Greek Orthodox, and Jews are not discussed within the considerations of a CN commonwealth. Wolfe discusses how to handle heretics, non-Christians, dissenting Christians, and conforming Christians, and presumably Catholics, Greek Orthodox, and Jews would fit somewhere along this prism (387-96).

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 390.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 391.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 478.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 336-37.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 336-37. Cf. 344-45, where the context of this Christian revolution is made explicitly American.

soldiers,”<sup>24</sup> but calls upon Christians to train their will and cultivate their resolve in order to be prepared for such action.<sup>25</sup>

One may sympathize with the desire for a Christian nation-state, but the rhetoric of toppling a liberal democracy is contrary to the Christian message of love and humility toward neighbor and honor and subjection to government authority. To be fair to Wolfe, he discounts the usually cited biblical passages, arguing that the NT writers would have offered a vastly different approach to government if first century Christians had been in the majority. He holds that Paul’s “silence on revolution cannot be construed as a denial of its permissibility,” as it simply would have been absurd in his day.<sup>26</sup> Considering that Paul admonished Christian slaves to “adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things” rather than pilfer their master’s home (Titus 2:9-10), one is rightly doubtful about such claims.

#### The Issue at Hand: Illustrating the Dangers Not Arguing the Principles

Wolfe welcomes anyone to challenge the validity of his arguments,<sup>27</sup> but the purpose of this paper is not to argue against the rationale or even the theology of CN, but to illustrate how it strips the evangelical church of its moral and spiritual witness and makes Christian people unfit to carry out the commission of Christ to proclaim His Gospel. This is charitable to Wolfe, who himself admits that he is not a theologian but a political philosopher and theorist presenting a systematic guide justifying the tenets of CN.<sup>28</sup> Wolfe affirms that a CN society will prosper in

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<sup>24</sup> Wolfe, 433-34.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 352.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 351.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 198.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 16-17.

earthly and heavenly good, but he does not speak toward the importance of the Christian witness and the Gospel commission. Granted, his intention is to provide an intellectual and theoretical justification for CN that can push the movement forward within the United States.<sup>29</sup> In sum, Wolfe is explicating how a CN government could work in theory and is not attempting to draw theological conclusions regarding Christian witness and the propagation of the Gospel. The following sections will highlight the importance of this omission.

### **A Survey of Christian Nationalism**

One of the most integral features of CN described by Wolfe is its ethnic particularity, which he argues is a natural inclination of man which is not a result of the Fall, but rather a God ordained element of human flourishing, as “no nation (properly speaking) is composed of two or more ethnicities.”<sup>30</sup> This fundamental aspect of Wolfe’s CN is a key factor in defacing the Christian witness for the Gospel. This homogenization of religion, ethnicity, and culture into a nationalistic mixture includes three potent ingredients of religious nationalism more broadly. First, it cultivates a sense of danger and urgency, as adherents view themselves under attack from exterior forces who wish to diminish the nation by undermining its heritage. Second, this spurs a desire to counter a perceived national decay centered in secularism and fear of the Other. Thirdly, this coalesces into a movement to take one’s country back by defending its religious and national heritage. Distilled in this concoction of religious nationalism is an image of the true patriot; that is, only the religious nationalist is a true and rightful citizen who loves his country.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Wolfe, 433-34.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 135 (The full discussion is found on 134-49).

<sup>31</sup> Conor Friedersdorf, “How to Be a Great American,” *The Atlantic* (July 16, 2009): <https://www.theatlantic.com/daily-dish/archive/2009/07/how-to-be-a-great-american/198730>, observes how pundit Sean Hannity defines being a “great American” upon religious nationalist stereotypes.



## United States

The United States has a long history of overlapping religion and government. Many of the colonies were founded as official bastions of Christian denominations, and to this day religion continues to play a powerful part in American politics.

### **Colonial America**

Various forms of CN were established in the American colonies, and this became a pronounced feature of colonial life and worldview.<sup>32</sup> In the Massachusetts Bay Colony, the early Puritan settlers established a theonomic government and “managed to preserve a relatively uniform faith and practice in their ‘Bible Commonwealth.’”<sup>33</sup> However, despite their theological commitments, they were yet hostile to nearby Indian tribes and persecuted alleged idolaters and Sabbath breakers, even wielding capital punishment for crimes of blasphemy and witchcraft, accusations often employed against Christian expressions which ran contrary to the majority.<sup>34</sup> During this tenure of theocratic rule, these Puritans executed the Boston Martyrs for Quakerism<sup>35</sup> and held the Salem Witch Trials, which ultimately led to the execution of nineteen people.<sup>36</sup> As Thomas Kidd well observes, “Freedom of self-determination or individual conscience had little place in the Puritan vision of liberty.”<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Douglas Wilson, *Mere Christendom* (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 2023), 88, “And not only has this Christian nationalism thing been done before, it has been done in America before. If we succeed, this will not be Christian America. If we succeed, this will be Christian America 2.0. This will be Christian America again.”

<sup>33</sup> Kidd, 92.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 90-91.

<sup>35</sup> Marmaduke Stephenson, William Robinson, Mary Dyer, and William Leddra were hanged between 1659-61 for holding Quaker beliefs determined to be blasphemous and heretical.

<sup>36</sup> Kidd, 208.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

## Constitutional America

The late twentieth century witnessed an increase in CN aggression. Tracing this rise of extremism, John White finds that “Christian Nationalists are unapologetic about their embrace of violence,” even citing Wolfe to bolster his point.<sup>38</sup> He lists several violent groups and deadly incidents to illustrate how CN ideology often leads to violence and vividly highlights its inherent dangers.<sup>39</sup> The events of January 6, 2021, produced surreal images of CN fervor, including rioters brandishing Bibles, holding crosses, and invoking the name of Jesus in chants, prayers, and even worship songs.<sup>40</sup> In White’s assessment, CN ideology “fueled the mob,” warning that future CN terrorism is “inevitable.”<sup>41</sup> While church attendance steadily declines, CN is on the rise<sup>42</sup> and Christian nationalists have a strong voice which reverberates through our political

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<sup>38</sup> John White, “Theology of Control: Christian Nationalist Violence and Hostility,” Thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2024, 61, wherein he further interprets Wolfe as “calling adherents to be violent.”

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 65-65, his examples include the Defensive Action Movement (DAM), which bombed abortion clinics and murdered doctors in the eighties and nineties; the Army of God which used similarly violent measures; the deadly conflict at the compound of Covenant, Sword, Arm of the Lord (CSA) in 1985; and the Oklahoma City bombing in 1995. He then recounts the mass shootings which killed nine in Charleston, South Carolina in 2015, eleven in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania in 2018, and ten in Buffalo, New York in 2022, which exemplify the racism and antisemitism that often goes hand in hand with American CN.

<sup>40</sup> Armaly, Miles T., David T. Buckley, and Adam M. Enders. “Christian Nationalism and Political Violence: Victimhood, Racial Identity, Conspiracy, and Support for the Capitol Attacks.” *Political Behavior* 44, no. 2 (June 2022): 941; also White, 70-71.

<sup>41</sup> White, 71-72, further stating that CN is in direct conflict with liberal democracy (77) and poses a “deep threat to homeland security” (79).

<sup>42</sup> Jeffrey M. Jones, “Church Attendance Has Declined in Most U.S. Religious Groups,” *Gallup* (March 25, 2024): <https://news.gallup.com/poll/642548/church-attendance-declined-religious-groups.aspx>. See also PRRI, “Support for Christian Nationalism in All 50 States: Findings from PRRI’s 2023 American Values Atlas,” *Public Religion Research Institute* (February 28, 2024): <https://www.prri.org/research/support-for-christian-nationalism-in-all-50-states>.

system.<sup>43</sup> This is remarkable in light of Wolfe’s portrayal of CN, which produces a cultural Christianity driven by social norms rather than spiritual formation.<sup>44</sup>

## Brazil

On January 8, 2023, Christian nationalists stormed government buildings in Brazil in a violent demonstration of their support for President Jair Bolsonaro, who had lost his re-election bid but fomented his supporters into a frenzy after months of claiming the results were fraudulent. Some have observed a “transnational evangelical cross-pollination” between the United States and Brazil, as their intense populist movements have been strengthened by evangelical Christians.<sup>45</sup> This “virulent” Brazilian strain of CN mirrors its American counterpart, especially as its promoters “continue to spread the idea of the superiority and dominion of Christianity, directly or indirectly contributing to the increasing religious intolerance and racial prejudice that infest the country.”<sup>46</sup>

During his presidency, Bolsonaro derided immigrants, scorned indigenous people and Afro-Brazilians, and persecuted left-wing evangelicals and other minority groups to empower the “real Brazil.”<sup>47</sup> For instance, at a 2017 campaign rally he shouted, “We must end this nonsense

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<sup>43</sup> Mike Hixenbaugh, “Evangelical Leaders Celebrate Trump's Victory as A Prophecy Fulfilled,” NBC News (November 6, 2024): <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/2024-election/trump-wins-election-evangelical-christians-celebrate-rcna178946>, quoting Matthew Taylor of the Institute for Islamic, Christian, and Jewish Studies in Maryland, “I think you’re going to be seeing much more explicit advocacy of Christian nationalism and Christian supremacy from the White House.”

<sup>44</sup> Wolfe, 28-29, 210-12.

<sup>45</sup> Raimundo Barreto and João B. Chaves, “The Shared Religious Roots of Twin Insurrections in the U.S. and Brazil,” *The Washington Post*, January 18, 2023: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/made-by-history/2023/01/18/brazil-insurrection-evangelical-christianity>.

<sup>46</sup> Raimundo Barreto and João B. Chaves, “Bolsonaro’s Faith-Based Enablers: Christian Nationalism is Thriving in Brazil,” *The Christian Century* 138, no. 24 (December 1, 2021): 684.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 685.

of a secular state! It is a Christian state! We will make Brazil for the majority. Minorities must bow to majorities! Either they adapt or they disappear!”<sup>48</sup>

## Ghana

Over 71% of the population of Ghana professes Christianity, and yet, until recently, the country took pride in its constitutional right to freedom of religion, although many conceded that it was indeed a “nation of Christians.”<sup>49</sup> Over the last decade and a half, however, an influential CN movement has gripped the country with “a fervour that is increasingly shaping its national identity.”<sup>50</sup> While Ghana has historically fostered an environment where indigenous religions, Christianity, and Islam could coexist in relative peace, CN political parties have risen to power in the country contending that Ghana belongs only to Christians.<sup>51</sup> This has led to increasing tensions as Christian nationalists openly condemn minorities and Muslims.<sup>52</sup>

Like their American brethren, Christian nationalists in Ghana are promoting the “fusion of their preferred form of Christianity” with the civic life of their nation, despite the fact that their constitution was designed to ensure religious freedom and resist the establishment of a state religion. While a secular state constitutionally, Christian nationalists in Ghana are thoroughly undermining religious and minority rights.

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<sup>48</sup> Ricardo Barbosa Jr. and Guilherme Casarões, “Statecraft under God: Radical Right Populism Meets Christian Nationalism in Bolsonaro’s Brazil,” *Millennium* 50, no. 3 (July 2022): 685.

<sup>49</sup> Jeffrey Haynes, “Christian Nationalism and Politics in Ghana,” *Religions* 14, no. 9 (September 2023): 4.

<sup>50</sup> Matthew Mpoke Bigg, “Faith Puts Ghana at Heart of Global Christianity,” Reuters, February 18, 2017: <https://www.reuters.com/article/world/faith-puts-ghana-at-heart-of-global-christianity-idUSKBN1670UO>.

<sup>51</sup> Cosmas Ebo Sarbah, “Religion, State, and Constitution in Ghana: Disputed Realms of Neutrality,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 58, no. 3 (Summer 2023): 386. He further insists that “freedom of religion is alive and well in Ghana,” and believes that the court system will rightly handle discrimination cases as they arise (397).

<sup>52</sup> Jeffrey Haynes, “Christian Nationalism Poses a Threat to Human Rights in Ghana,” *The Conversation* (October 24, 2022): <https://theconversation.com/christian-nationalism-poses-a-threat-to-human-rights-in-ghana-192518>.

## Germany

The Alternative For Germany (AFD) recently won historic victories in the country. Although no far-right candidate has won a parliament seat since World War II, this movement has quickly become one of Germany's most popular and controversial political parties.<sup>53</sup> The AFD has built a platform of nationalism, anti-immigration, and anti-Muslim sentiment, while highlighting conservative family values and Christian culture, becoming the party of choice for many Christians.<sup>54</sup> Even though Christians make up a minority of AFD supporters,<sup>55</sup> they are nonetheless part of the “political earthquake” that is shaking up German politics, despite the fact that Catholic and evangelical churches across the country have condemned the party as “not electable for Christians” due to its ethnic nationalism and “positions that contradict the basic values of Christianity, especially with regard to human dignity and diversity.”<sup>56</sup>

Not surprisingly, strong similarities have been observed between AFD supporters and politicized Christian conservatives in the United States.<sup>57</sup> Moreover, both AFD and CN advocates promote ethnic nationalism, isolationism, hostility towards NATO, embrace

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<sup>53</sup> Paul Kirby and Jessica Parker, “German Far-right Hails ‘Historic’ Election Victory in East,” *BBC* (September 1, 2024): <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cn02w01xr2jo>.

<sup>54</sup> Wolfgang Stock, “Column from Germany: Why Some Christians Fall for the AFD Narrative,” *Christian Network Europe* (August 26, 2024): <https://cne.news/article/4399-column-from-germany-why-christians-fall-for-the-afd-narrative>.

<sup>55</sup> Andrea Althoff, “Right-Wing Populism and Religion in Germany: Conservative Christians and the Alternative for Germany (AfD),” *Zeitschrift Für Religion, Gesellschaft Und Politik* 2, no. 2 (2018): 359.

<sup>56</sup> Stock; see also, Smits-Lucas, Arieke. “German Church Struggles with Radical Right-wing AFD Party.” *Christian Network Europe* (CNE News) (May 21, 2024): <https://cne.news/article/4263-german-church-struggles-with-radical-right-wing-afd-party>.

<sup>57</sup> Althoff, 353.

authoritarian powers, and diminish Russia's invasion of Ukraine, all of which threatens the security of trans-Atlantic nations.<sup>58</sup>

### Russia and Ukraine: A Conundrum

Both Russia and Ukraine share a common bond in the Russian Orthodox Church, which has 12,000 parishes in Ukraine. Lena Harned has documented how President Vladimir Putin speaks of the invasion of Ukraine in religious terms, calling for a re-unification of Orthodox Christians in historically Russian lands, and has further explained how "Russian ethno-ideological religious nationalism" has been used to spur the conflict as one of "competing religious narratives."<sup>59</sup> In fact, the Patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church, who sides with Putin, has described the ongoing war as a struggle of "metaphysical significance" against the corrupting influence of Western liberalism.<sup>60</sup>

Ukrainians, however, have not been willing to embrace religious nationalism, generally preferring a secular society.<sup>61</sup> This may stem from their lack of a unified national religious narrative, not to mention several competing Orthodox churches which vie for national supremacy.<sup>62</sup> This divide is strikingly illustrated in public opinion, where "devout Orthodox

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<sup>58</sup> Robert Benson, "A Bellwether for Trans-Atlantic Democracy: The Rise of the German Far Right," *Center for American Progress* (October 30, 2024): <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/a-bellwether-for-trans-atlantic-democracy-the-rise-of-the-german-far-right>.

<sup>59</sup> Lena Surzhko Harned, "Russian World and Ukrainian Autocephaly: Religious Narratives in Anti-Colonial Nationalism of Ukraine," *Religions* 13, no. 4 (April 2022): 3.

<sup>60</sup> Ishaan Tharoor, "The Christian Nationalism Behind Putin's War," *The Washington Post* (April 19, 2022): <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/04/19/patriarch-kirill-orthodox-church-russia-ukraine>.

<sup>61</sup> Harned, 11.

<sup>62</sup> John P. Burgess, "Borderland Churches: Faith and Identity in Ukraine," *The Christian Century* 133, no. 7 (March 30, 2016): 30.

people in Russia are more likely to support authoritarianism and justify corruption, unlike their Ukrainian counterparts.”<sup>63</sup>

Dr. Radu Gheorghiuță of Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary has observed that Russia and Ukraine present an ironic conundrum: “This tragic conflict is projected and conducted as a CN war against the evils of Western democracy. Vladimir Putin views himself as the last and sole defender of genuine Christianity against all the atheistic Western democracies. However, Ukraine is a Christian nation similar to Russia and both are Eastern European Orthodox countries, hence the conundrum – which Christian nation against which?”<sup>64</sup>

### **A Survey of Non-Christian Religious Nationalism**

It is important now to turn the issue upside down and attempt to view Christians in the reversed role of the minority in countries where religious nationalism contributes to harassment and persecution. Perhaps stepping into the shoes of the marginalized will aid in understanding just how preposterously hypocritical and unchristian CN truly is.

#### India

In his thorough analysis, Christophe Jaffrelot traces the rise of Hindu nationalism in India during the twentieth century, and how it has gained increased political power over the last twenty years. He further outlines the “political trajectory of India from populism to ethnic democracy

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<sup>63</sup> Harned, 10.

<sup>64</sup> Email exchange, Kansas City, MO., March 23, 2024.

and authoritarianism” during Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s tenure in office, which has created a harsh political atmosphere for minorities.<sup>65</sup>

Within this environment, minorities such as Christians and Muslims, along with those who promote secular pluralism, are considered suspect, the Other which must be confronted, exposed, and stopped. Under the Modi regime, the Hindu nationalist group, RSS,<sup>66</sup> of which he himself is a member, has been able to harass, bully, and intimidate religious minorities with impunity, despite the fact they have been connected with allegations of physical violence, vandalism, rape, and murder.<sup>67</sup> In an attempt to preserve Hindu culture and counter the perceived decline of the Hindu population, Christian groups, and especially missionaries, have been targeted as the enemy within.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Christophe Jaffrelot, *Modi’s India: Hindu Nationalism and the Rise of Ethnic Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021), 445. Modi was recently elected to his third term and is now the longest serving Prime Minister. Jaffrelot arrives at three important conclusions regarding Modi’s success: First, Modi’s nationalist sentiments combined with his charismatic populism has been used to move the government further and further away from its constitution by energizing the Hindu vote and solidifying religious and ethnocentric power. The reigning government has “wielded its Hindu nationalism to win an absolute majority that [has released] it from the compulsions of coalition politics” (447). Second, Modi successfully enlisted the support of the lower economic classes, regardless of whether his government actually benefited them, by cultivating the desire for a united India for true Indians, a Hindu Rashtra (Hindu Nation) (447-48). Third, Modi’s government has permitted unsanctioned groups to carry out “cultural policing in the street or to trolls doing the same on social media” without interference, providing a de facto approval of coercive vigilante activities (449).

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 12-16, 29. Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (R. S. S.), literally “National Volunteer Organization.” The group was founded in 1925 to promote Hindutva (Hindu-ness) and establish a Hindu Rashtra (Hindu nation).

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 191-92.

<sup>68</sup> One RSS official wrote an open letter accusing Christian ministries of “crimes against humanity.” See Shri Indresh Kumar, “An Open Letter to Pope: Stop Conversion in the Guise of Service,” *The Organiser* (October 19, 2008): <https://organiser.org/2008/10/19/35880/general/ra8c5ab95>. The alliance between Hindu extremists and the Modi government prompted a retired official to write an editorial, stating, “It is tragic that these extremists have been emboldened beyond permissible limits by an atmosphere of hate and distrust. The Christian population, a mere two percent of the total populace, has been subjected to a series of well-directed body blows. See Julio Ribeiro, “As a Christian, Suddenly I am a Stranger in My Own Country,” *Indian Express* (March 17, 2015): <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/i-feel-i-am-on-a-hit-list>.



## Iran

In discussing Iran, it must be readily noted that this country is experiencing radical shifts due to younger Iranians turning away from Islam toward Zoroastrianism, Baha'ism, Christianity, and even Buddhism, let alone their preference for a secular government.<sup>69</sup> As many have noted, there is a strong undercurrent of Persian nationalism which views the history of Iran (both real and imagined<sup>70</sup>) as exemplifying the apex of Islamic civilization, and her people as God's chosen race who will one day lead the Muslim world.<sup>71</sup> For the time being, Iran remains a striking example of majority-led tyranny where Christians and religious minorities suffer under the oppression of Islamic nationalists.<sup>72</sup>

Islamic revivalists in Iran oppose secularism and Western philosophy and seek to “build a theocracy, an Islamic state constitutionally based and operated in full light of shari’ah as the guiding principle reflecting the Will of Allah.”<sup>73</sup> This religious fervor is often coupled with racial antagonism against groups perceived as not truly Iranian, and has produced a breeding ground

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<sup>69</sup> Pejman Abdolmohammadi, “The Revival of Nationalism and Secularism in Modern Iran,” *LSE Middle East Centre Paper Series*, 11 (November 2015): 10.

<sup>70</sup> See Reza Zia-Ebrahimi, *The Emergence of Iranian Nationalism: Race and the Politics of Dislocation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), who explains that the “dominant ideology of modern Iran” (218) is “dislocative nationalism” which holds Iran as a “cohesive nation and again as a nation that is culturally and racially out of place, unrelated to its surrounding, racially different from its neighbors, and only accidentally Islamic. Iran is *imagined* as Aryan and as foreign to its natural environment” (6-7). Under this idea, “alien invasions are wholly blamed for Iran's decay, and recovering the culture of pre-Islamic Iran is...key to the nation's regeneration” (38).

<sup>71</sup> Meir Litvak. “‘God’s Favored Nation’: The New Religious Nationalism in Iran,” *Religions* 11, no. 10 (October 2020): 12-13.

<sup>72</sup> Adelle M. Banks, “Religious Freedom Watchdog Critiques Iran, 27 Other Countries.” *The Christian Century* 140, no. 6 (June 2023): 20, citing USCIRF chair Nury Türkiye, regarding Iran’s “systematic, egregious, and ongoing religious freedom violations,” who said that “Iran’s security forces have shot and killed peaceful protesters, detained and tortured others, and engaged in a systematic campaign of sexual and gender-based violence against not only women and men but boys and girls as well.” Importantly, see Afshin Matin-Asgari, “Iranian Identity and National Oppression: Crafting the Modern Iranian Nation–State,” *Iranian Studies* 57 (2024): 315, who points out that the oppression of minority groups has now become a topic of national discussion.

<sup>73</sup> Jan A. Ali, “Modernity, Its Crisis and Islamic Revivalism,” *Religions* 14, no. 1 (January 2023): 4.

for unspeakable atrocities against minority groups.<sup>74</sup> Due to the oppressive nature of Iranian law, the country has been highlighted by the United States and the United Nations as a place where minorities live under high risk of harassment, imprisonment, and execution.<sup>75</sup>

## Bhutan

The Kingdom of Bhutan is a small country in the eastern Himalayas with a population of less than a million people. In spite of its size, it has yet managed to take the 36<sup>th</sup> spot on the Open Doors World Watch List due to high levels of persecution stemming from its strong Buddhist nationalism. Citizens are expected to follow the state religion, Mahayana Buddhism, and while religious freedom is ostensibly a constitutional right, the fervor for Buddhist culture and the preservation of its “spiritual heritage” has led to the persecution of Christians, especially if they have converted from Buddhism.<sup>76</sup>

Like Hinduism, Buddhism is usually marked by tolerance and peace; nevertheless, with the rise of ethnic nationalism in many South Asian countries, there has also been an observable rise in religious violence at the hands of Buddhist extremists under the influence of nationalist monks who have successfully politicized the religion and created an environment where non-Buddhists are treated like second-class citizens or worse.<sup>77</sup> As a distrusted minority, Christians are denied registration as an official religious group, meaning they are “not permitted to organize

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<sup>74</sup> Matin-Asgari, 315, recounts the military killings of Kurdish laborers.

<sup>75</sup> Office of International Religious Freedom, “2023 Report on International Religious Freedom: Iran,” U.S. Department of State: <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-report-on-international-religious-freedom/iran>; Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, “Iran: UN Experts Alarmed by Escalating Religious Persecution,” United Nations, Press Release, Special Procedures (August 22, 2022).

<sup>76</sup> World Watch Research, “Bhutan: Full Country Dossier,” *Open Doors International* (January 2024), 6; see also Office of International Religious Freedom, “2023 Report on International Religious Freedom: Bhutan,” *U.S. State Department* (2023), Executive Summary.

<sup>77</sup> Eva Chappus, “Buddhist Nationalism: Rising Religious Violence in South Asia.” *University of Denver Undergraduate Research Journal*, Vol. 4, No. 2, Article 1 (2023), Introduction.

publicly, own property, raise funds, conduct outreach activities, or import literature.”<sup>78</sup> This oppressive environment has led Christians to practice self-censorship, avoid any religious imagery or symbolism, and perform secret baptisms at night in remote areas.<sup>79</sup>

### **The Juxtaposition of Christian and Non-Christian Nationalism**

The like-minded goals and tactics of religious nationalists around the world should be readily apparent; and when placed in juxtaposition with CN, the truth is revealed as in a mirror. There is a deep disparity between the Christian witness and CN—the two are manifestly at odds. Religious nationalism vilifies those who threaten an idealistic heritage and culture. Hindu, Islamic, Buddhist, and Christian nationalists all view themselves under attack, striving to preserve their sacred culture and take back their country from immigrants, secularists, and the principles of liberal democracy. India, Iran, and Bhutan provide examples of the Christian minority experience, where the church has no political influence and Christians suffer under the rule of majority-religion nationalists. As CN is reflected back on itself through non-Christian counterparts, it should serve as a potent warning to those who claim the crucified Christ as Lord.

#### **A Clear and Present Danger**

The danger of CN is not that Christians might be good patriotic citizens with a love of country; rather, the danger lies in beliefs and practices that are explicitly unchristian in any historical, traditional, and evangelical sense of the word. CN ideology contains the latent ingredients which create a dangerous fusion of political religion. Instead of exerting political power over perceived adversaries and minorities, Christians have a commission to proclaim

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<sup>78</sup> “2023 Report on International Religious Freedom: Bhutan,” Executive Summary.

<sup>79</sup> “Bhutan: Full Country Dossier,” 26.

Christ and a responsibility to adorn their lives with a righteous testimony that is appropriately reflective of the Gospel.

### **Christian Nationalism Strips the Gospel Bare**

There are four basic problems with Wolfe's CN, which strip the Gospel bare of its fundamental principles of love, mercy, and grace. First, it emphasizes ethnic particularity. Wolfe claims that "the instinct to love the familiar more than the foreign is good."<sup>80</sup> It should be incontrovertible among an evangelical audience that this view of love is contrary to the Christian ideal, and is nothing more than a well-worn path to prejudice and racism. Second, it emphasizes Christian political power rather than Gospel propagation, which amounts to supplanting Christ's kingdom with a CN state. Third, it undermines religious liberty. In his resentment toward secularism and liberal democracy, Wolfe promotes limited liberty for the few; that is, the freedom of worship, let alone the freedom of speech, is only granted to adherents of the state church. Finally, it undermines the Christian witness. Since CN is motivated by the goal of Christian power, there is little, if any, sense that Christ is to be glorified through the testimony of Christians and the Church. Foremost in Wolfe's CN thought-world is the conquering of the enemy, that is, those who promote pluralism and liberal democracy.

For Wolfe, nationalism generally and CN particularly are one in the same, with CN having the higher goal of accomplishing its means "in Christ," by which he means for and by Christian Nationalists to the exclusion of all others. Underscoring the inherent hazards of such thinking, a 2017 analysis of 37 countries demonstrated that religious discrimination in Christian-majority Western democracies is on the rise. The survey revealed that "no country in the study lacked at least one minority which was subject to societal religious discrimination," and further

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<sup>80</sup> Wolfe, 118.

highlighted “the extent to which antipathy toward the religious other is a common element of society.”<sup>81</sup> CN fuels these underlying political tensions, stokes the fires of prejudice, and creates a nigh irresistible temptation among Christians who are already leaning toward far-right policies.

### **A Baptist Counterbalance**

This paper has illustrated the imbalanced and unbiblical nature of CN. Before presenting a balanced and biblical answer to the problems it poses to the Christian witness, it must first be understood why CN in both mild and extreme forms is gripping large segments of the church, both Catholic and evangelical. In the United States there has been a steady decline of Christianity coupled with a steady rise in diversity of race and religion. Moreover, racial conflicts, identity politics, and LGBTQIA+ issues have taken centerstage in America, both in the news as well as in entertainment and pop culture. Time would fail to recount how pervasive this is in society, but the important point is how invasive it feels to conservative Christians.<sup>82</sup> Whatever one makes of the American “culture wars” this concern should not go unnoticed, but more so, requires a reasoned response to counter the seductive attraction of CN.

### **The Baptist Faith and Message and Religious Liberty**

For Southern Baptists, one need only to look to the denomination’s statement of faith and practice as published in the *Baptist Faith and Message* (2000). The introductory committee report acknowledges that “Baptists cherish and defend religious liberty,”<sup>83</sup> and importantly

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<sup>81</sup> Jonathan Fox, “Religious Discrimination in European and Western Christian-Majority Democracies,” *Zeitschrift Für Religion, Gesellschaft Und Politik* 1, no. 2 (2017): 203. The study included the United States.

<sup>82</sup> Wolfe encapsulates CN anger against woke culture, queer influence, and feminism, and highlights the perceived hostility toward the “straight, white male” as the “chief out-group” (436).

<sup>83</sup> *The Baptist Faith and Message: A Statement Adopted by the Southern Baptist Convention June 14, 2000 and Amended June 14, 2023* (Nashville: LifeWay Christian Resources, 2023), 21.

stresses that “The church should not resort to the civil power to carry on its work,” and further that “a free church in a free state is the Christian ideal, and this implies the right of free and unhindered access to God on the part of all men, and the right to form and propagate opinions in the sphere of religion without interference by the civil power.”<sup>84</sup>

This high esteem for religious liberty and the free exercise of religion, which handily complements the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, is roundly criticized by Wolfe, who confesses that Baptist theology and tradition is a marked problem for the core tenets of CN.<sup>85</sup> Wolfe argues that religious liberty was only meant to keep the peace within a “pan-protestant civil order.”<sup>86</sup> He further argues that religious liberty is a misnomer in a pluralistic society, acting as the “soft power of liberalism” which is used to stifle the Christian religion.<sup>87</sup>

In Wolfe’s estimation, Christians are under a secular occupation, which they will only fully understand when they deconstruct their mistaken notions of American liberty which views freedom as universal and treats equality and diversity as virtuous.<sup>88</sup> Under Wolfe’s CN state, the government would suppress false religion, since “non-Christians...are not entitled to political equality” and may be subject to civil action, including capital punishment, for persistent and subversive conduct, such as proselytizing or blasphemy.<sup>89</sup> It should be stressed that Wolfe also

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<sup>84</sup> *BFM*, 18.

<sup>85</sup> Wolfe, 217-18.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 339.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 342-44.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 387-92.

calls for “appropriate action” against dissenting Christians, which may require “active suppression” depending on the circumstances.<sup>90</sup>

Nevertheless, The *BFM* affirms the separation of Church and state while also encouraging believers to seek out ways to bring their society “under the sway of the principles of righteousness, truth, and brotherly love.”<sup>91</sup> In this way, Southern Baptists provide for corporate religious separation and individual Christian engagement. Rather than promoting CN, the *BFM* unabashedly promotes religious liberty and the Christian witness, all with the stated goal “to win the lost to Christ by verbal witness undergirded by a Christian lifestyle, and by other methods in harmony with the gospel of Christ.”<sup>92</sup>

#### A Brief Word on Secular Government

Anglican scholar Michael Bird has weighed in on CN quite extensively over the last few years. His arguments for Western concepts of liberal democracy are worthy of inclusion here, especially as he seeks to remind evangelical Christians of its importance in free societies, insisting that “Freedom must be based on principle not popular whim.”<sup>93</sup> Bird argues for a “confident pluralism” which is centered in “expressive liberty,” that is, “a presumption in favor of individuals and groups living their lives as they see fit and according to their own understanding of what gives life meaning and value.”<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Wolfe, 393.

<sup>91</sup> *BFM*, 18, cf. 16. It should be remembered that the *Westminster Confession* (23.3-4) influenced the *BFM* (XVII), thus both agree that the civil government should be separate from the church.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>93</sup> Michael F. Bird, *Religious Freedom in a Secular Age: A Christian Case for Liberty, Equality, and Secular Government* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2022), 96.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 96. The concept of “confident pluralism” is borrowed from John D. Inazu, *Confident Pluralism: Surviving and Thriving through Deep Difference* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 6-7.

This may seem elementary to many Americans, whether Christian or not, but while such ideals befit principles of liberty, they come with built-in conflict. Bird admits that a diverse society will inevitably create a “messy” political environment consisting of “chaotic interaction in the public square,” but argues that in practicing the principles of freedom, a society “must do its utmost to honor the principles that limit the possibility of coercive practices and intimidation.”<sup>95</sup> In an age of increasing polarization, Bird leans on NT principles and pleads for a political vision which harmonizes with the biblical values of love and tolerance, concluding that “victory in pluralism is not vanquishing your adversaries, but winning their respect, living in peace with them, and affirming their right to be who they are!”<sup>96</sup>

### **Confronting Christian Nationalism Pastorally**

Admittedly, American CN is not tethered to religious observance,<sup>97</sup> but since it predominantly affects church goers, it must be addressed in the sphere of Christian practice.<sup>98</sup> Drew Strait is helpful in this regard. He keenly observes that CN is a threat to the witness of the church, and argues that it must be confronted pastorally.<sup>99</sup> Since CN adherents commonly hold strong views of biblical literalism,<sup>100</sup> he calls for “preaching the whole life of Jesus,” especially

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<sup>95</sup> Bird, 97.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid. On this point, he cites Romans 14:19: “Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification” (NIV).

<sup>97</sup> Samuel Stroope, Paul Froese, Heather M. Rackin, and Jack Delehanty, “Unchurched Christian Nationalism and the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election,” *Sociological Forum* 36, no. 2 (June 2021): 419.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 420.

<sup>99</sup> Drew J. Strait, “A Pastoral Approach to Resisting Christian Nationalism’s Influence in the Local Congregation,” *Brethren in Christ History & Life* 46, no. 1 (April 2023): 61.

<sup>100</sup> Andrew L. Whitehead and Samuel L. Perry, *Taking America Back for God: Christian Nationalism in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 6.



His ethical teachings, as an effective tool for disorienting the CN worldview.<sup>101</sup> When confronted with the conflict between CN and the ethics of Christ, a person who believes the Bible to be the perfect word of God, may be challenged to rethink their CN worldview. Indeed, cognitive dissonance can be far more effective in dismantling the CN worldview than debating political policies and social trends.<sup>102</sup> The Bible can provide the necessary common ground between Christian faith and CN, and in combination with sound biblical interpretation, this method may inoculate against CN ideology and will help adherents to deconstruct such beliefs.<sup>103</sup>

### The Example of Paul

Looking to the Apostle Paul as an example, Adam Wyatt affirms that Christians need not abandon their love of country, but they must learn that they are dual citizens with loyalties to the kingdom of God that supersede their political loyalties. In his words, Christians have a “supranational identity that is not confined to the nation,” and must therefore adjust their love of country in the light of their duty to the kingdom of God.<sup>104</sup> Wyatt shows how Paul’s sense of patriotism and citizenship was rooted in God’s sovereignty and viewed finite political power “through the lens of the second coming of Christ.”<sup>105</sup> Wyatt reminds Christian Americans that they are sojourners “through a wonderful country that is not truly our home,” and that one may be a grateful and proud patriot as long as their love of country is defined through a reasoned

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<sup>101</sup> Strait, 74.

<sup>102</sup> Ryan LaMothe, “Confusion of Tongues: Christian Discipleship and the Problem of Patriotism,” *Pastoral Psychology* 58, no. 4 (August 2009): 413, points out that ideological patriots resort to psychological defense mechanisms to prevent cognitive dissonance with their faith beliefs. Admittedly, this presents a problem for Strait’s pastoral approach.

<sup>103</sup> Strait, 74-75.

<sup>104</sup> Adam Wyatt, *Biblical Patriotism: An Evangelical Alternative to Nationalism* (Denver: GCRR Press, 2021), 195. He demonstrates that the apostle had a “clear understanding of both the state and of citizenship” (153).

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 154.

evaluation of biblical teaching.<sup>106</sup> This approach allows for love of homeland while keeping the Gospel free of political pollution.

### Conclusion

Adorning the Gospel in political theory has only ever served to strip the Gospel bare of its witness for Christ. The answer for the present age is not Christian nationalism but a mission-minded Christian citizenship, by which the Gospel is not hindered or perverted by provincial prejudice, but bolstered by a global evangelicalism that stands “as a witness to all the nations” regardless of national heritage (Matt 24:14). Christians must not permit political influence or motivation to detract from their witness for Christ and the fulfillment of His commission. Wolfe believes that adopting “a ‘radical’ principle of inclusion is to oppose God,”<sup>107</sup> but the cross itself symbolizes “self-sacrifice, service, and radical inclusion.”<sup>108</sup> CN strips the Gospel bare of its witness in opposition to the command of Scripture to adorn it with a testimony that reflects the love, mercy, and grace of the Lord Jesus Himself. If eternal vigilance is the price of liberty, it must be no less for the Christian witness.

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<sup>106</sup> Wyatt, 208-09.

<sup>107</sup> Wolfe, 204.

<sup>108</sup> Stephanie Peek, “The Kingdom of God: A Dangerously Powerful Challenge to Oppression,” in *Baptists and the Kingdom of God: Global Perspectives*, edited by T. Laine Scales and João B. Chaves (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2022), 76.

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