

Onward Christian Soldiers
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Christian Nationalism is anti-Jesus and anti-American. It is hostile to the foundations of Christianity and to the foundations of the American Republic and our democracy. It looks back to a time that never existed and finds its enemies to be those who are not Christian or Nationalist as they are. Ironically, but not surprisingly, those who adhere to it are ignorant of the reality that by claiming it, they are opponents to what they think they are cherishing. Christian Nationalism is anti-Jesus and anti-American.

Some national politicians like Georgia U.S. Congresswoman Marjorie Taylor Greene openly declare her Republican Party needs “... to be the party of nationalism and I’m a Christian, and I say it proudly, we should be Christian nationalists,’ adding that it is ‘nothing to be afraid of,’ and that it will solve school shootings and “sexual immorality in America (Amanda Tyler, Opinion, CNN, 7/27/22, <https://www.cnn.com/2022/07/27/opinions/christian-nationalism-marjorie-taylor-greene-tyler/index.html>).

While I think she is an idiot, my spiritual practice is also as a religious liberal – liberal from the Latin, *liberalis*, meaning free, generous, which is what I seek to become - but don’t take lightly the prominent presence of Christian Nationalism and that it had remained just beneath the American public square until the last 5 years or so. Now, it is openly used as justification for political policies fashioned in the halls of Congress. It is as openly and vigorously discussed in some quarters of our national politics today as these lyrics resounded through Christian sanctuaries in Britain and the U.S. from the late 1800’s and throughout the 1900’s, “Onward, Christian soldiers, marching as to war/With the cross of Jesus/Going on before,” though its popularity has diminished in the 21st century. It was sung when Churchill and Roosevelt signed the Atlantic Charter in 1941 and we entered WWII on Britain’s side, with Churchill noting,

“... I felt that this was no vain presumption, but that we had the right to feel that we were serving a cause for the sake of which a trumpet has sounded from on high... that here was... the sure hope, of saving the world from measureless degradation.”

- Ace Collins (2003), [*Stories Behind the Hymns That Inspire America*](#), Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, pp. 153–154,

I am always suspicious of any claims by any human beings of whatever rank political or religious, that connect any religion with any governmental state, action, or policy. Call me a Protestant. I protest when religion and the state are the two parties in a wedding. I speak now and never hold my peace. Those two should not be married.

God was not on the side of either the North or the South in our Civil War (see note below), though both sides claimed the favor, any more than there was divine favor given the National Socialist Party in Germany, the Nazis, or the alliance Churchill and Roosevelt struck to resist it. Christians on both sides claimed it then. God did not endorse the Holy Roman Empire of history or Israel in the time of David or any of the Dynasties in ancient China or any Muslim countries today or yesterday.

Since the advent of nations, and before the Christian Church was embraced as the official religion of the Roman Empire in 324 A.C.E., and up to and through the popularity of the hymn, “Onward Christian Soldiers,” these two centers for the accumulation and dispensation of social human power have been declared as joined. In dictatorships, monarchies, oligarchies, autocracies, democracies, some have claimed the social mechanisms for governing and worshipping to be mutually joined. How could God prefer one form of government when apparently God favors them all? So, what happens when someone declares God loves one form of government over all others? What happens in this democratic Republic when someone does this, combines the coercive power human governments hold with the coercive power a religion holds when it is preferred?

As a devotee of spiritual freedom – that is, as one who holds to the Extraordinary Power of freedom in all its forms – this religious liberal maintains that when the coercive powers of human government, the state, weds the coercive powers of formalized, institutional religion, no good thing is borne, lest of all freedom and love. A wall of separation between religion and government, the independence of church and state, protects the freedom a democracy makes possible and the truth that makes us free.

And that is because government and religion – along with custom, history, the family, and others - are part of society’s “leadership team,” maybe even the most powerful on that team in terms of the construction and maintenance of society. Sociologist Peter Berger, in his classic book *The Sacred Canopy*, explained how any society’s ways impress themselves upon individuals immediately upon our departure from the womb; how our families and the groups we form and join, are shaped by social processes distinctive to a society. At home we are taught to eat using silverware, as I was tutored by my mother that’s what “civilized people do” though much of the world doesn’t. My father, his and the opposing political party, my small town, my home state all taught me how to vote and why; to get an education and why. Society creates us, thought Berger, and even if you disagree citing other influences, a society’s unexamined claim is that its form is fundamentally the finest form of human grouping simply because it exists here over against other possible forms.

Our society impressed itself upon me this way during my childhood: men and women only married, men worked and women took care of the homestead and the children, and white men were fitted for the good jobs and white women spoke for all women’s concerns. Three years before my father was born women couldn’t vote, and when his grandparents married black men and women and children were being held as property. When our Unitarian forebearers, the white Thomas Jefferson, the free-thinker who owned black slaves gathered with the white Unitarian churchman John Adams to construct the Declaration of Independence with other white men many of whom later created the U.S. Constitution, Jane Adams, whom this society today knows, if they know her at all, as Adam’s wife, admonished him, “Don’t forget the ladies,” by which she meant the white ladies. They did. They also forgot human slavery, the subjugation of Indigenous peoples, and so many, many others who were not a part of “We, the people...” There were 3 million people living then within the borders of the newly formed United States. White women could not vote or own land and some human beings who were fully black, were only 3/5 human.

Society impresses upon us what is “normal” which, in turn, is considered objectively true over other possible arrangements. This Berger called *nomos*, the way a society enforces itself upon its members as the real nature of relationships, the true form of human life, and the existence that is the balance that maintains all of life. Its opposite, in any society at any time, is *anomie*, confusion, chaos which needs be avoided at all costs. To any society at any time, balance is the good life because the society as it is, is seen as the true life. It explains how the ideas of the Declaration of Independence, with Liberty and Justice for All, could be fashioned by many of the same white men into a U.S. Constitution that contained so little of either that of the 3.4 million people only 6% could vote, excluding the 700,000 black slaves or the 150,000 Native Americans, almost an additional million!

But, of course, most every American today will say this society created a government by the people, for the people, and that we have always been a self-governing democracy.

And Berger claimed that religion takes society’s relationships, its form and conceptions of what is good and true and needs be maintained, even the conceptions that are misconceptions, and adds to the societal pressure to conform and maintain balance against the chaos of change, and projects those arrangements into the Cosmos as authored by God or the gods, the Extraordinary Power that, ironically, is considered as looking down on us! Religion takes society’s impressing itself upon us, forming us as good members of society who desire goodness and truth embodied through “our way of live” and the government that maintains it, and religion makes it into a sacred canopy over all the earth, including all others around the world who live in societies deemed foreign to the ways of God.

To Christ the King – a governmental position after all, ask Charles today – religion sings:

... We are not divided/All one body we/One in hope and doctrine/One in charity...”

So, when political ideologies wed religious ideologies, the most powerfully coercive force is created that destroys other religions and other forms of government in the name of goodness and truth. Christian Nationalism takes the order Berger thought compels every society in its forming of its members; and the balance all individual members of need to live life meaningfully and truthfully to keep chaos at bay, and destroys order and balance in the name of goodness and truth.

I’ll say it again. Christian Nationalism is anti-Jesus and anti-American. It is hostile to the foundations of Christianity and to the foundations of the American Republic and our democracy. It looks back to a time that never existed and finds its enemies to be those who are not Christian or Nationalist as they are. Ironically, but not surprisingly, those who adhere to it are ignorant of the reality that by claiming it, they are opponents to what they think they are cherishing. Christian Nationalism is anti-Jesus and anti-American.

Because the genius of this country’s form of government may lie, ironically, in the fact that when “We the people of the United States...” was written, “we” only meant 6% of the population! Why is that genius when the reality was like all the other forms of government? Because it was followed by the phrase, “in Order to form a more perfect Union...” How can you form

something “more perfect” than “perfect”? Change. If “All men are created equal” is declared as justification for forming a new form of government, and yet it’s declared when they aren’t, how can that become “more perfect” without change? How? without a change that expands who is included in the “We”? Our form of government is founded in change. Freedom that doesn’t expand Liberty to those who aren’t fully free yet, isn’t free. Our current society, where everyone ISN’T free, ISN’T safe, ISN’T the recipient of justice and equity, isn’t perfect. And yet, we can become more perfect, and that is the trajectory we as free member are obligated to work for our society to become. Our society’s balance is found in the changes that expand freedom.

And Christianity? Quit subverting the message of him whose message is the foundation. Jesus admonished his time and ours: “Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.” Fulfilling one’s Christian identity is to know these are two different centers of power, compelling from us two different obligations and two different kinds of actions. For Caesar, the state, in the form today of the U.S. government, “conceived in Liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all are created equal,” our obligation is not to look to yesterday’s idea of freedom when “We the people…” only meant 6%. Freedom today becomes true only when it is extended to those who do not reside in its fullest measure today. Freedom becomes true tomorrow when a free society becomes “more perfect” by its expansion of freedom. And to render to God the things that are God’s, well, I would suggest, as I always would, for you to go into prayer. And ask, Who is my neighbor that I should love them as myself? I don’t mean who I THINK RIGHT NOW is my neighbor, but who You think is my neighbor, the ones I don’t see or who disrupt my society’s sense of order and my need for balance. I need to change. Pray, and wait for the voice that responds, and whether it resides in the unconscious or in the heavens makes no difference. Ask, How can I love more those whom You have said are my neighbors, those who mine eyes have not see, so as to make Your Love, in whose image all are created, can become more free and true for them and for me; that we may grow more into Your Likeness and Your Love.

AMEN. SO BE IT. SHALOM. SHALEM. NAMASTE.

NOTE: “It’s abundantly clear, as recent scholarship has demonstrated that religion stood at the center of the Civil War for both sides. Both North and South looked to God for meaning, and each side believed—with equal fervor and certitude—that God was on its side. Many ministers, generals, leaders, and editors went so far as to proclaim that God had ordained the war and would determine its length, its damages, and its outcome. The victor would show, in other words, whose side God *really* supported.”

- “Religion in the Civil War: The Southern Perspective,” Harry S. Stout,
<http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/tserve/nineteen/nkeyinfo/cwsouth.htm>