

Faith Confronts Authoritarianism: Prophetic Voices of our Time

Lutheran leaders and interfaith voices
address the public issues challenging our
teachings and beliefs

Third Edition

July 26, 2026

Commemoration for Sinéad O'Connor

(8 December 1966 – 26 July 2023)

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Preface

We are living in a time of political confusion.

The social climate has shifted in radical and unexpected ways. The political center where a stable consensus holds sway in relation to the far right and left seems to have vanished. Commentators refer to the shifting “Overton Window,” the range of positions or ideas acceptable to the mainstream public.

The media landscape has created a fractured society where there is no longer a shared narrative for a significant portion of our population. While modern society and advances in communications technology makes some of this inevitable, the United States is uniquely polarized and is one of a number of countries with a populist front that is challenging democratic norms and institutions.¹ We see a populism that has displaced a set of partisan positions with a reign of personality and flexing of power. We no longer debate the merits of a policy or law. We no longer analyze data and scrutinize results and trends. There is a lack of moral formation and conversation. Statements are made and positions are taken purely for the way they can undermine an opponent and shift the discourse toward or away from a desired outcome.

We are morally fragmented.

What follows is a collection of Bishops’ statements, scholarly articles and blog posts that represent voices of faith bringing their traditions to moral and ethical discussions around war and peace, law and order, bigotry and bias. Former Bishop Eaton writes about the One Big Beautiful Bill that radically reorganized budget priorities, Bishop Strickland writes about the increasing violence fomented by Antisemitism, Sister Dottie Almoney, Director of the Deaconess Community responds to ICE arrests, Ben Lorber writes as a Jew facing the politicization and weaponization of responses to Antisemitism, former Bishop Ortiz brings our Baptismal calling into our daily lives, Professor Craig Nesson addresses the heresy of Nationalism. I have organized these into six subject areas and they are loosely organized by topics under those subjects.

We see an emerging Christianity which serves as superficial identity, symbols and labels, flags to rally around and seemingly tribal displays. Among the loudest voices we don’t often hear Christians referencing things like, “put away your sword”, “welcome the stranger”, “love your neighbor”, “turn the other cheek,” or “love your enemies.” Instead we hear about a Christianity that emphasizes male headship, “traditional” families, western civilization and racial

¹ [“In 25-Country Survey, Americans Especially Likely To View Fellow Citizens as Morally Bad: 53% of U.S. adults say Americans have bad morals and ethics.”](#) Pew Research Center, March 5, 2026.

purity. Christianity has a lot more to say about public and private morality, about personal integrity and public responsibility and there is a history of a broad range of positions and arguments.

This collection is meant to bring recent efforts at moral discernment and engagement with spiritual resources and religious thought together to aid more engagement and wrestling, more thought and study.

- Jim O'Hanlon

4 April, 2026

Martyrdom of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.



In 2019 the [#ELCA](#) signed on to the Christians Against [#ChristianNationalism](#) statement condemning Christian Nationalism as a distortion of the gospel of Jesus and a threat to American democracy. We encourage all our Christian siblings to join us in opposing this threat to our faith and our nation. Read more and sign the statement at www.christiansagainstchristiannationalism.org/

"Christian Nationalism often overlaps with and provides cover for white supremacy and racial subjugation. We reject this damaging political ideology and invite our Christian [siblings] to join us in opposing this threat to our faith and to our nation."

Christians Against Christian
Nationalism statement, 2019



Section One: America

"There is not a nation on the earth guilty of practices, more shocking and bloody, than are the people of these United States, at this very hour.

-Frederick Douglass, July 5, 1852
(1818 – 1895)

"As I have walked among the desperate, rejected, and angry young men... (T)hey ask -- and rightly so -- what about Vietnam? They ask if our own nation wasn't using massive doses of violence to solve its problems, to bring about the changes it wanted. Their questions hit home, and I knew that I could never again raise my voice against the violence of the oppressed in the ghettos without having first spoken clearly to the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today -- my own government."

-Rev. Dr Martin Luther King Jr., April 4, 1967
(1929 – 1968)

A Christian nation? At 250, America is still fighting over what that means

Scholars say American history is more Christian than secular advocates claim — and less religious than Christian nationalists would assert. A look at the complicated, contested history of America as a Christian nation.

Bob Smietana

May 13, 2026

([ReligionNews.com](https://www.ReligionNews.com) RNS) — When people ask Holly Hollman if America is a Christian nation, she has a simple response.

“What do you mean by that?”

The longtime general counsel of the Washington, D.C.-based Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty, which promotes the separation of church and state, Hollman explains that if the question is whether most Americans are Christian, that’s yes. But if they’re asking whether Christians should have special legal privileges that others don’t have, she says her answer is a hard no.

Most historians and legal scholars agree that two things have always been true about the United States — it has no official religion, and Christianity has shaped its culture, laws and public life since before its founding. But what does it mean to be a nation of mostly Christians without a state religion? For most of the nation’s history, the country held that tension without resolving it.

The debate over that question has gained new intensity in the Trump era, especially as the country approaches its 250th anniversary. On Sunday (May 17), the Trump administration will host “Rededicate 250,” a daylong festival of prayer and thanksgiving on the National Mall. The idea, Trump said when he announced the event at the National Prayer Breakfast, is to “rededicate America as one nation under God.” Many of the speakers at the event — most of them Christian and evangelical — espouse the idea that America was and always has been a Christian nation.

The argument is not merely historical. Some proponents of America as a Christian nation argue that non-Christians are essentially second-class citizens — and say only Christians should enjoy religious freedom or have the right to run the country. That’s turned disagreements over America’s founding into a debate over national identity with direct consequences for the country’s growing number of non-Christian Americans.

Until the 1970s, the belief that America was a Christian nation — demographically and culturally — was commonplace, said John Fea, a professor of history at Messiah College in Pennsylvania and author of “Was America Founded as a Christian Nation?” Many of the nation’s laws, on everything from sexuality and marriage to more mundane details, such as what kinds of businesses could open on Sundays, were shaped by Christian ideas.

The notion of America as a Christian country became contested and redefined during the Reagan era and the rise of the religious right, which wanted the country’s laws to be more explicitly Christian. There were calls for official prayers and Bible readings in school and a return to “family values” in response to the sexual revolution of the ’60s and 1970s and the rise of feminism. All of a sudden, the idea of being a Christian nation became a partisan debate, not a historical one.

“You want to get on the side of Christian America, or you’re going to oppose a Christian America — that pretty much tells you where you are at politically today,” said Fea.

Fea is careful to note that America has never been legally a Christian country — the establishment clause in the First Amendment to the Constitution explicitly forbids establishing an official national religion. Nonetheless, from the earliest days of the republic, many Christians, on all sides of the political spectrum, have argued that all aspects of society, including governmental policy, should be shaped by their faith.

Matthew Avery Sutton, a professor of history at Washington State University and author of “Chosen Land,” a religious history of America, said the country is more religious than secular Americans claim and less religious than Christian nationalists would have us believe.

White Protestants, he said, had no qualms about shaping education, politics and foreign policy, as well as the day-to-day aspects of life — especially in the first 150 years of the country’s life. There were Christian prayers in school, and political debates on issues such as immigration, slavery, the use of alcohol and other social issues were rife with references to religion.

And politicians talked a lot about God.

That’s something conservatives like David Barton, a popular evangelical author who promotes the idea that America has always been a Christian nation, get right.

“When they say that the First Amendment did not keep religion out of government but simply kept government out of religion — I think that is an accurate description of the way the First Amendment was applied,” Sutton said.

Much of the modern debate about America as a Christian nation has been shaped by a 1947 Supreme Court decision, *Everson v. Board of Education*. In that case, a New Jersey taxpayer named Arch Everson objected to a local school board policy that reimbursed parents for bus fare to school, even if kids went to Catholic schools.

Everson lost — the court ruled that since the reimbursement went to the parents, it was legal. However, the court also ruled for the first time that the First Amendment applied to state governments — and it made Thomas Jefferson’s idea — that the First Amendment made a “wall of separation” between church and state — an explicit part of law.

“The First Amendment has erected a wall between church and state,” the court wrote. “That wall must be kept high and impregnable.”

That ruling would pave the way for later ones that ended official prayer and Bible readings in school and would eventually shift the way many Americans view this issue, especially those on the political left, Fea argues.

“For people on the left, especially, *Everson* has reshaped the way the whole national history, going back to 1776, has been told,” Fea said. “All of a sudden, you have this wall of separation of church and state that’s high and impregnable.”

Sutton said the *Everson* decision was good for America. But the court’s reading ignored a lot of history. “I like that interpretation better,” he said. “I think that produces a better country, but it is a bit ahistorical.”

Legal experts like Hollman have a different view.

Hollman, who also teaches law at Georgetown University, sees the *Everson* case not as a turning point but as surfacing a principle present from the beginning.

“There’s a thread in the understanding of the First Amendment — one of the central purposes is to keep the government out of essential matters of religion,” she said.

“Certainly, an essential matter of religion is how people believe about God and their relationship to God, and what Scripture they hold as important.”

Sutton pointed to “*The Light and the Glory*,” a bestselling book first published in the 1970s, after government-sponsored prayer and Bible reading were banned in school, as helping to inspire calls to revive Christian America. Co-written by Peter Marshall Jr., a pastor and speaker who championed the idea that America was founded as a

Christian nation, the book was popular with homeschoolers and conservative Christians.

“They helped fuel this idea that the nation was once one thing and that had been lost, and that it’s up to Christians to reclaim it,” Sutton said.

Christians have been making that same argument since the earliest days in the United States, often in ways that sound like the Seven Mountain Mandate, a conservative evangelical idea that Christians should run all parts of society.

“The complete Christianization of all life is what we pray and work for, when we work and pray for the coming of the kingdom of heaven,” the Rev. Washington Gladden, a Columbus, Ohio, pastor and leader of the Social Gospel movement, told the State Association of Congregational Churches of Ohio in May of 1894.

For Gladden, though, making society more Christian meant doing things such as building housing for the poor, ending segregation, giving better wages for workers, welcoming immigrants, putting limits on profits from the stock market and other social causes.

That call to revive a God-blessed past has gained new popularity today in conservative circles, through writers such as Barton and through the rise of Christian nationalists. For them, making society more Christian means making sure conservative Christians have political power and opposing same-sex marriage and abortion.

Much of what proponents cite as proof that America was founded as a Christian nation is factually incorrect, according to Warren Throckmorton, a retired psychology professor and author of “The Christian Past That Wasn’t,” due out May 19.

Throckmorton notes that Ben Carson, the former secretary of Housing and Urban Development, neurosurgeon and author, claimed that prayer saved the U.S. Constitution. While on a book tour in 2024, Carson told the story of how delegates to the Constitutional Convention in June of 1787 found themselves bogged down. Then Ben Franklin suggested that the delegates start praying and asking for “the assistance of Heaven.”

“And they knelt and prayed. And they got up and they put together the Constitution of the United States, which I think is a God-inspired document if we will follow it,” Carson said, at an event Throckmorton recounted in his book.

Franklin did implore delegates to pray, said Throckmorton. But they decided not to.



“The Convention, except three or four persons, thought prayers unnecessary,” Franklin would later write.

For Throckmorton, concerns about the separation of church and state go way back — all the way to his distant ancestor, John Throckmorton, a follower of the Baptist preacher Roger Williams. When Williams was exiled from Massachusetts after clashing with Puritan leaders, John Throckmorton joined him in what became the state of Rhode Island — one of the few early Colonies not to have an official state church.

“The Banishment of Roger Williams” by Peter F. Rothermel, circa 1850. (Image courtesy Wikipedia/Creative Commons)

“Religious freedom in America and separation of church and state does not only go back to Williams, but it goes back to the people who are willing to sacrifice everything and move to Providence with him,” Warren Throckmorton said.

Even though most Americans have been Christians, Throckmorton said, there’s been no consensus on the most Christian way to run a country. Those disagreements started even before the country was founded — like the feud between Williams, a Baptist, and the Puritan leaders of Massachusetts, who were Congregationalists. Christians even fought over which edition of the Bible to read in public schools — leading in the 1800s to the so-called Bible War in Cincinnati and the riots in Philadelphia between Catholics and Protestants.

Those disagreements continue today with different Christians arguing over immigration enforcement policies and claims by Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth that God has blessed America’s war on Iran.

“There’s no unified view with Christianity,” said Throckmorton.

In his latest book, Throckmorton debunks what he calls seven myths about America’s past — from the idea that early colonists made a “covenant” with God to the idea that America’s founders were all Christians and wanted to create a Christian homeland.

These myths are built on stories like the one about Franklin and prayer — which are partially true — in order to create a politically useful version of the past.

“One of the reasons that founding myths arise is so that we can feel a part of something bigger than ourselves — part of a really great country and a really great religion,” he said. “I mean, you don’t want to be a part of a bad religion or a bad country.”

Daniel Darling, author of “In Defense of Christian Patriotism,” is sympathetic to the claim that Christianity is a central part of America’s identity.

Christianity has long served as America’s civil religion, he said, providing a common moral framework for American culture and law.

Along with giving a sense of right and wrong, that framework taught that our fellow citizens are people made in God’s image and, as such, have inalienable rights not from government but from God, said Darling.

He said that Christianity and especially churchgoing also helped provide social capital and build community, two things that are in short supply these days as religion has declined over the past few decades. When people say they want to get back to being a Christian nation, Darling thinks they are really longing for a return to a sense of community and common purpose. They don’t want to go back to the 1950s, he said, because that would mean undoing the progress that’s been made on civil rights and other issues since then.

“But I do think there is a sense that we’ve lost something good, even if we’ve made progress. I think you can hold those two things together.”

Fea said that as a historian, he wants to know what people think being a Christian nation means. He pointed to Martin Luther King Jr.’s letter from a Birmingham jail, which linked “Judaean Christian” values to the nation’s founding.

Civil rights protesters, King wrote, drew on the heritage.



In this file photo taken April 12, 1963, the Rev. Ralph Abernathy, left, and the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., right, are taken by a policeman as they led a line of demonstrators into the business section of Birmingham, Alabama. Arrested for leading a march against racial segregation, King spent days in solitary confinement writing his “Letter from Birmingham Jail,” which was smuggled out and stirred the world by explaining why Black people couldn’t keep waiting for fair treatment. (AP Photo)

“One day the South will know that when these disinherited children of God sat down at lunch counters, they were in reality standing up for what is best in the American dream and for the most sacred values in our Judaeo Christian heritage,” he wrote, “thereby bringing our nation back to those great wells of democracy which were dug deep by the founding fathers in their formulation of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence.”

Fea said that there has often been a backlash in American culture during times of demographic and social change. That was true in the 1800s, when Irish immigrants came to the U.S., and in the early 1900s, when Italians and other Europeans arrived, and it’s been true in recent years with Hispanic immigrants — and with Muslim and Hindu immigrants.

He believes that backlash is helping fuel the arguments that America is a nation for Christians. Recently, Jenna Ellis, a former Trump lawyer turned podcaster, argued that freedom of religion only applied to Christians — not those of other faiths.

“I mean, we don’t have all of these protections for our rights that our founders recognize come from God, our Creator, so that we can go out and live a pluralistic society and say, well, let’s recognize the dignity of Islam,” she said, claiming that the founders only wanted to protect Christians.

Fea says that’s not what history tells us. The founders knew that Hindus and Muslims might make their way to America and believed religious freedom applied to them.

“The challenge at the 250th is to think about how we can still hold on to those ideas about equality, liberty and religious freedom and make them work in a modern context,” he said.

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The real American religion: A July 4 postmortem

Opinion H. Stephen Shoemaker | July 14, 2026



i

Amid the cries to Make America Christian Again, the truth is, Christianity never had a chance.

Orthodox theologian David Bentley Hart said as much in an interview provocatively titled, “David Bentley Hart: The Theologian is a Quiet Rioter.”

Here are his words: “Christianity never succeeded in America. Most Americans think of themselves as Christians. But the only religion in America that ever flourished was America. And it twists everything in its own image.”

Speaking of this religion of America, he says: “Our religion is a kind of ... post-Christian mystery religion based on wealth, power and one’s personal relationship with a kind of gnostic Jesus.”

By “gnostic,” I think he means a nonhistorical Jesus who means what we want him to mean and who invites us into a cozy private relationship with him, our certifiably crucifiable Lord.

In our day in America, we see little difference between Jesus and Caesar.

In the American version of the gospel story about someone taking a Roman coin with Caesar's image on it to Jesus, they ask: "Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not?" Jesus says, "Show me the coin used for the tax." They bring a Roman coin. "Whose head is this?" Jesus asks coquettishly, "The emperor's," they answer. Then Jesus asks, "Don't you think my face would look better on this coin?"

Roger Williams, founder of the Baptist movement in America, was banished from the Massachusetts Bay Colony for his irregular theology, not to mention his befriending of the Native Americans. (He said they should be paid for their land. And he created the first English/Native American dictionary.)

He named in his colorful 17th-century language the false gods of his day: "The truth is, the great Gods of this world are God-belly, God-peace, God-wealth, God-honor, God-pleasure, etc."

"The truth is, the great Gods of this world are God-belly, God-peace, God-wealth, God-honor, God-pleasure."

He would not be asked to preach in the White House today, nor would he entertain the invitation.

The irascible Jesuit priest Daniel Berrigan, who with eight others poured homemade napalm on draft files in Catonsville, Md., during the Vietnam War, named in a poem the American Trinity: General Motors (the Unmoved Mover), General Foods (the Son) and General Electric (the Holy Spirit).

What about the three persons of the American Trinity today?

- Musk/Tesla
- Zuckerberg/Facebook
- Bezos/Amazon

Surely today,

- God-Power
- God-Wealth
- God-Race

John Calvin called our human hearts "perpetual idol factories." The prophet sings, "And the people bowed and prayed to the neon god they made."

"In this time of spiritual and moral emergency we must not despair."

Yet, in this time of spiritual and moral emergency we must not despair. An episode in the life of Elijah the prophet helps us at this point. Elijah was in mortal danger for having publicly opposed King Ahab and Queen Jezebel, not to mention the prophets of Baal whom Ahab and Jezebel had appropriated for their purpose. Ahab and Jezebel were out to kill him, and he was in full flight. God told him to go to Mt. Horeb — also named Sinai — where God had delivered the Ten Commandments amid earthquake, wind and fire.

Elijah went and hid in a cave at its base. Yahweh, the Lord, spoke to him: “Elijah, what are you doing here?” (The God of the Bible often asks such a question.) Elijah answered, “I have been zealous for Yahweh, Lord of hosts; yet the Israelites have forsaken their covenant, ruined thy altars and killed thy prophets. I alone! I alone am left, and now they seek my life!” God commanded him to go up the mountain to the top.

So there was Elijah, terrified and despairing, hoping, waiting for God to appear as God had appeared to Moses. Here came the earthquake, wind and fire, but God was not in them as before. Then came what the Hebrew language describes as “crushed silence.” Elijah covered his face with his robe, for in the silence, Yahweh. God was there.

Then God recommissioned Elijah to go back to his people as their prophet. Elijah had thought he was all alone, martyr’s complex in full swing. But this is what God said to him and why I tell his story: “Go back to your people! There are 7,000 left in Israel whose knees have not bent to Baal nor whose lips have kissed him!”

Now there’s a bracing thought for us this day amid the religion that is America.

<https://baptistnews.com/article/the-real-american-religion-a-july-4-postmortem/>

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Christian Nationalism: Primer on an American Heresy

Craig L. Nesson

Wartburg Theological Seminary

The prominence and influence of Christian nationalism in the last decade gives expression to a distinctly American heresy due to its distortions of historic Christian faith. It is necessary from the outset to make a clear distinction between Christian nationalism and patriotic Christianity. Note the differences between these two terms. In the first, the noun is nationalism and Christian a mere adjective to describe nationalism as the central focus. In the second, Christianity is the noun with patriotic as the descriptor. In this way, Christians in different countries can be patriotic without compromising the heart of the Christian faith,¹ whereas for Christian nationalism “America” is always first.²

Christian nationalism is a movement with many antecedents. A notable flashpoint occurred with the presidency of Barack Obama, the first US President of African American descent.³ This symbolic moment evoked fear in the Religious Right at shifting demographics that project white Americans of European descent to become the minority by 2045.⁴ The MAGA movement leveraged this symbolic event to strengthen its following by appealing to white racism.

Heresy can be defined as a set of beliefs that distort and conflict with the core teachings of historic ecumenical Christianity.⁵ Among the core Christian beliefs contradicted by Christian nationalism, we highlight four:

1. God created all people in the image of God, who are worthy of intrinsic respect and dignity.
2. Jesus Christ died and was resurrected to bring God’s forgiveness and love to all people.
3. Jesus Christ taught the Great Commandment—love of God

1. Keith W. Clements, *A Patriotism for Today: Love of Country in Dialogue with the Witness of Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011).

2. Stephen Wolfe, *The Case for Christian Nationalism* (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 2023).

3. Andrew L. Whitehead and Samuel L. Perry, *Taking America Back for God: Christian Nationalism in the United States* (New York: Oxford, 2020), 55–88.

4. Robert P. Jones, *The End of White Christian America* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2016).

5. “Ecumenical Christianity” represents a consensus about normative Christian teachings and practices among mainline Protestant churches.

It is necessary from the outset to make a clear distinction between Christian nationalism and patriotic Christianity. Note the differences between these two terms. In the first, the noun is nationalism and Christian a mere adjective to describe nationalism as the central focus. In the second, Christianity is the noun with patriotic as the descriptor.

and love for the neighbor as oneself.

4. The core practices of Christian faith embodied by Jesus Christ include hospitality, generosity, feeding the hungry, healing the sick, and peacemaking.

Christian nationalism is an American heresy with beliefs and practices that distort and contradict an ecumenical consensus about the core teachings that are normative for Christian faith as embedded in Scripture, creeds, confessions, and doctrines.⁶ In contradicting this historic tradition, it must be rejected as endangering historic Christianity.

Genealogy

Five antecedents influenced the shape of Christian nationalism: American civil religion, British Israelism, American evangelicalism, fundamentalism, and dispensationalism. Each contributes elements taken up into Christian nationalism, though none by itself is sufficient for explaining the contemporary movement.

American civil religion (starting in the sixteenth century) is

6. See Jim Wallis, *The False White Gospel: Rejecting Christian Nationalism, Reclaiming True Faith, and Refounding Democracy* (New York: St. Martin’s Essentials, 2024).

deeply embedded in the history and identity of the United States.⁷ Early Puritan leaders praised America as the New Israel with the characteristics of the Promised Land. America had been appointed a Manifest Destiny from God to expand its dominion across the continent from the Atlantic to the Pacific Oceans. During the Cold War in the 1950s, the term “under God” was added to the Pledge of Allegiance and “in God we trust” was added to US currency. Presidents routinely end speeches by invoking, “God Bless America.” “There is a long history of understanding the US as a nation favored by God above other countries. This leads to a belief in American exceptionalism that contends that the US never has done and never could do wrong.

British Israelism (starting in the sixteenth century) deepens the biblical claims justifying American civil religion.⁸ The central conviction holds that Anglo-Saxons are racially and linguistically descendants of the ten lost tribes of Israel. These Anglo-Israelites are the inheritors of God’s promise that gave them a new promised land as they came to the US (a belief that also appears in Mormonism). Although the earliest references date from the sixteenth century, it was not until the nineteenth century that British Israelism groups were organized both in Britain and the US, some of which are still active today.

American evangelicalism (beginning with eighteenth to nineteenth century revivalism) belongs to the origin story of many different Christian traditions. While Christian nationalism does not accord with its original intent, elements from evangelicalism have been incorporated into it. One element is a biblicism that interprets and cites Scripture with little attention to original context and draws nationalist conclusions based on passages taken out of context. A second element involves the spirit of revivalism that invites people to convert to a different set of beliefs. A third element is the sense of urgency that belongs to a culture of conversion based on individual religious experiences and testimony to others through the media.

Fundamentalism (late nineteenth to early twentieth centuries) is a movement derived from evangelicalism that intensifies biblicism into biblical literalism. Fundamentalism emerged as a reaction to the threat of modernity that employed scientific reasoning to the interpretation of Scripture. Fundamentalists invented a theory of verbal inspiration to argue for the literal truth of the Bible, for example, claims for a seven-day creation or forty-day flood. One of its most fervent concerns aims to refute “Darwinism” and the theory of evolution. Among the “fundamentals” that became the measure of true Christian faith were literal belief in the virgin birth, bodily resurrection, historical miracles, and death of Jesus as substitutionary atonement.

Dispensationalism (mid-nineteenth and twentieth centuries) takes fundamentalism in an apocalyptic direction with the

There is a long history of understanding the US as a nation favored by God above other countries. This leads to a belief in American exceptionalism that contends that the US never has done and never could do wrong.

theology of John Nelson Darby (1800-1882) and the Scofield Reference Bible.⁹ Darby interpreted the Bible as a series of events that predict the end times, including a pre-tribulation rapture whereby true Christians will be taken up to God prior to a time of great tribulations on earth at Christ’s return. The Scofield Reference Bible, edited and annotated by Cyrus I. Scofield (1843-1921), divided history into seven dispensations with the expectation that the world is now entering its final stage. The Bible is understood to prophesy contemporary events as signs of the end of the world through a literal interpretation of the Book of Revelation and other apocalyptic books.

Theological foundations: Dominionism

Christian Reconstructionism (beginning in the 1970s) is one of the lesser known but extremely influential origins of Christian nationalism. R. J. Rushdoony stands as the intellectual founder of Christian Reconstructionism,¹⁰ also called Dominionism, with reference to Genesis 1:26: “Let us make humans in our image, according to our likeness, and let them have dominion...” Building on the theological legacy of Dutch Calvinism (Abraham Kuyper) that gave theological warrants to apartheid in South Africa, Rushdoony produced three massive volumes titled *The Institutes of Biblical Law*.¹¹

Rushdoony’s project interprets and promotes the Bible as the basis for the American legal system: “Precisely because lawyers, courts, and scholars today are usually radical humanists and anti-Christian, there is commonly a hostility towards any full acknowledgment of the Biblical nature of the legal heritage of Western civilization.”¹²

Clearly, with the growing decline of public and private

7. Philip Gorski, *American Covenant: A History of Civil Religion from the Puritans to the Present* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019).

8. Aiden Cottrell-Boyce, *Israelism in Modern Britain* (New York: Routledge, 2020).

9. R. Todd Mangum, Mark S. Sweetnam. *The Scofield Bible: Its History and Impact on the Evangelical Church* (Lisle, IL: IVP Books, 2010).

10. For a critical study of Rushdoony’s thought, see Michael McVicar, *Christian Reconstruction: R. J. Rushdoony and American Religious Conservatism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2015).

11. R. J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law: Three Volumes*. (Vallecito, CA: Chalcedon, 2020).

12. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law*, 1:805

morality, no arrangement of men or political institutions can provide relief. The evil is primarily in man, and in his institutions and environment insofar as they reflect his nature. Rabshakeh was right with reference to Egypt: "Now, behold, thou trustest upon the staff of this bruised reed, even upon Egypt, on which if a man lean, it will go into his hand and pierce it: so is Pharaoh king of Egypt unto all that trust on him" (2 Kings 18:21). The future does not rest with pierced-hand politics but with the sovereign and triune God and His absolute law.¹³

Christian Reconstructionism seeks to establish and enforce biblical law as the foundation for American government. Provisions include:

- Reconstructing a Christian government to legislate a Christian State¹⁴
- Christian law to regulate the legal system and courts¹⁵
- Legislation to control nonconformists (fornicators, homosexuals, revilers, adulterers)¹⁶
- Women are subordinate to men¹⁷
- God authorizes a Christian order, not democracy¹⁸
- Spiritual rule by right-thinking Christian elders¹⁹
- Federal government programs, public health care, and liberal education are enemies²⁰
- Education should be directed by Christians, not the State²¹
- Submission to the Bible as the Word of God as the law of the land²²
- Free market capitalism as an outgrowth of Christianity²³
- A Christian "remnant" needs to retake American civilization²⁴

Gary North, Rushdoony's son-in law, was another central proponent for Christian Reconstructionism. An Austrian School economic historian and theological author, North was the founder of the Institute for Christian Economics. He wrote more than fifty books from the perspectives of history, economics, and Reformed theology.²⁵ North advocated for the establishment

Gary North advocated for the establishment of biblically grounded law to order American society and an economic system based on the Protestant work ethic. Together with Rushdoony, their work built the intellectual foundations of Christian nationalism.

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Rise of the Christian Religious Right (1970s-1990s)

Until the late twentieth century, American evangelicals were largely distinguished by a concentrated focus on evangelism and bringing people to Christ. Their lack of attention to social ethics led Ron Sider to found the movement, "Evangelicals for Social Action" in 1978 (now Christians for Social Action),²⁷ based on the 1973 Chicago Declaration of Evangelical Social Concern.²⁸ During these same years, the "Religious Right" first emerged in defense of an IRS threat to the tax exempt status of Bob Jones University in Greenville, South Carolina. The key issue, as described by Randall Balmer, was the court ruling that "any organization that engaged in racial segregation or racial discrimination was not by definition a charitable organization, and therefore had no claims on tax exempt status."²⁹

Paul Weyrich of the Heritage Foundation (founded in 1973) saw an opportunity with this lawsuit to motivate apolitical evangelicals to become a voting block for the Republican Party. Weyrich wrote in the mid-1970s:

The new political philosophy must be defined by us

of *Divine Influence* (Moulton, AL: Axehead Press, 2022). The online version of *The Biblical Structure of History* includes a listing of North's books: <https://www.garynorth.com/TheBiblicalStructureOfHistory.pdf>.

26. Jerome E. Copulsky, *American Heretics: Religious Adversaries of Order* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2024) refutes the claims of Rushdoony and North, counting them among American heretics.

27. Christians for Social Action, "CSA History," <https://christiansforsocialaction.org/about-us/history/>.

28. From the Vault: Voices from Wheaton Archives and Special Collections, "A Prophetic Document: The 1973 Chicago Declaration of Evangelical Social Concern," <https://fromthevault.wheaton.edu/2023/11/01/a-prophetic-document/>.

29. Randall Balmer, *Bad Faith: Race and the Rise of the Religious Right* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2021), 43.

13. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law*, 1:807.

14. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law*, 1:795.

15. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law*, 1:23-26.

16. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law*, 3:25.

17. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law*, 1:352-359.

18. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law*, 2:641-643.

19. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law*, 1:753-757.

20. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law*, 3:169-170.

21. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law*, 2:71-75.

22. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law*, 2:690-692.

23. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law*, 1:532-536.

24. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law*, 3:185-186.

25. His books include Gary North, *The Biblical Structure of History: Unfolding of God's Redemptive Purposes* (Dallas, GA: Five Point Press, 2022) and Gary North, *The Five Pillars of Biblical Leadership: The Covenantal Pattern of Divine Influence: The Covenantal Pattern*

[conservatives] in moral terms, packaged in non-religious language, and propagated throughout the country by our new coalition... When political power is achieved, the moral majority will have the opportunity to re-create this great nation.³⁰

Balmer argues that it was this resistance to the forced integration of evangelical campuses, not abortion (or the Equal Rights Amendment), that initially galvanized conservative evangelicals into political action. This means that *defending racial segregation was the precipitating issue that created the Religious Right*, although this was masked as protecting “religious freedom.”³¹

Weyrich served as a major figure linking political operatives and the religious leaders starting to organize political action by conservative Christians. There were many evangelical leaders and organizations involved in the mobilization of the Religious Right, first as a voting block for conservative issues aligned with the Republican Party and later as the base for Christian nationalism in support of Donald Trump and the MAGA movement.³² While Loren Cunningham (Youth with a Mission) and Bill Bright (Campus Crusade for Christ) founded their organizations to promote global evangelism, it was their collaboration led to the formulation of the Seven Mountain Mandate that became the heartbeat of the Christian nationalist movement. They were among those evangelical leaders who turned away from Jimmy Carter, an evangelical Christian, to support Ronald Reagan for President, due to Reagan’s alignment with those issues deemed most vital for establishing a Christian culture: rejecting humanistic media influences, opposition to globalism in education, and the drift of the nation into sexual immorality.³³

Francis Schaeffer, the founder of L’Abri in Switzerland, was a prolific author and advocate for these causes.³⁴ He exerted intellectual influence on many evangelical leaders, including Jerry Falwell at the founding of the Moral Majority in 1979. Falwell’s Lynchburg Christian School had also been threatened by the tax exemption ruling against “segregationist academies.” Falwell claimed that America had been a Christian nation since

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its founding and called for a return to its origins.³⁵ Pat Robertson was a televangelist with a large audience through his Christian Broadcasting Network and his featured show, *The 700 Club*. Robertson founded the Christian Coalition of America in 1987, and motivated Christians to influence public policy at every level of government, including by the publication of voter guides to support candidates loyal to Christian morality.

James Dobson, the founder of the Family Research Council and the program Focus on the Family, was a leader in promoting traditional “family values.” The author of many books on raising children and Christian marriage, Dobson brought his credentials as a child psychologist to authorize the use of corporal punishment to discipline children and to endorse complementary gender roles for men and women as the basis for society. Through his broadcasts, newsletters, and books, Dobson became a fixture for defining the “Christian family” and exercised his influence to support partisan politics in the late 1980s.³⁶ At the decline of the Moral Majority and Christian Coalition, Focus on the Family became a key influencer for political engagement by evangelicals.³⁷ Together the leaders of these evangelical networks exerted enormous influence in building the Religious Right through their organizing, broadcasting, and publishing. Their work was foundational for those carrying forward this agenda today, such as Paula White-Cain, now Senior Advisor to the White House Faith

30. Paul Weyrich Papers, “The Moral Majority” (undated paper, Box 19, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming), as cited by Balmer.

31. Balmer, *Bad Faith*, writes in Chapter 9 about ‘Why the Abortion Myth Matters’: “So, what does it matter that their political movement, the Religious Right, grew out of (to put it plainly) racism, a defense of racial segregation in evangelical institutions? On the face of it, it matters not at all. I have no reason to doubt the sincerity of evangelicals who oppose abortion—some have devoted their entire lives to this cause—even as I suspect the motives of those who brought the issue to their attention. I believe the abortion myth matters because unacknowledged and unaddressed racism has a tendency to fester.” Fester it did—eventually into white Christian nationalism.

32. Laura K. Field, *Furious Minds: The Making of the MAGA New Right* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2025).

33. Matthew Boedy, *The Seven Mountains Mandate: Exposing the Dangerous Plan to Christianize America and Destroy Democracy* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2025), 10.

34. Barry Hankins, *Francis Schaeffer and the Shaping of Evangelical America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008).

35. Michael W. Austin, *American Christian Nationalism: Neither American nor Christian* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2024) refutes these claims.

36. Kristin Kobes Du Mez, *Jesus and John Wayne: How White Evangelicals Corrupted a Faith and Fractured a Nation* (New York: Liveright, 2020), 78-87.

37. Kobes Du Mez, *Jesus and John Wayne*, 206-208.

Office.³⁸ and Charlie Kirk's Turning Point.³⁹

The origin story of Christian nationalism begins in the last decades of the twentieth century. "Christian nationalism" eventually became the designation for this new faith expression, wedded to Republican party politics and eventually to the MAGA movement.⁴⁰ In the early 2000s, it became ever clearer how true Christians in this movement share a common racial-religious-nationalist identity. Though the racist commitments have often been disguised, the religious beliefs and political commitments make clear that the designation "white Christian nationalism" is an even more accurate description.⁴¹ The romanticizing of the Confederacy (and its monuments) and the propagation of fear through conspiracy theories—especially "racial replacement theory"—incited increasing support during and after the Obama presidency.⁴² There was a growing sense of urgency that America needed to remain a white Christian nation and that Christian values must be legislated as the law of the land.

The New Apostolic Reformation

How was it possible to mobilize pastors and churches for the political agenda of Christian nationalism without denominational structures? Matthew D. Taylor explains that the primary sector within American Christianity for the dissemination and influence of the New Apostolic Reformation has been among charismatic, nondenominational churches, which he calls "independent charismatics" (such as Word of Faith, the Apostolic and Prophetic Movement, and Messianic Judaism).⁴³ These churches "feel a strong charismatic kinship with Pentecostals, even if they ultimately reject the denominational elements."⁴⁴

C. Peter Wagner devoted much of his career serving on the faculty of Fuller Theological Seminary after spending sixteen years as a missionary in Bolivia. His passion in ministry and teaching was to promote church growth, working first as a student and then as a colleague of Donald McGavran at Fuller.⁴⁵ Due to his growing appreciation for and fascination with charismaticism, Wagner invited John Wimber, his former student and Vineyard

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pastor, to co-teach a course with him at Fuller titled "Signs, Wonders, and Church Growth."⁴⁶ In the class, Wimber prayed for the coming of the Holy Spirit, gave personalized divine revelations to students, taught them how to pray for healing, cast out demons, and disclosed God's instructions for their lives. This course became a phenomenon, breaking enrollment records with hundreds of students and visitors in attendance over four years until it was cancelled by the seminary. By then, Wagner had become charismatic himself and turned from mainstream evangelicalism to collaborate with Cindy Jacobs, who opened to him new horizons about prophecy, prayer for healing the nations, and spiritual warfare.⁴⁷ After Jacobs introduced Wagner to the Latter Rain network of charismatic pastors, prophets, and apostles, he turned his full attention to global nondenominational charismatic Christianity as the future of church growth.⁴⁸

This shift immersed Wagner into a world of engaging in "spiritual warfare." Reflecting on the possibility of spiritual warfare not only as an individual but as a global phenomenon, he developed the notion of "territorial spirits," demons that afflict the world.⁴⁹ These are especially active in what is called the "10/40

38. Taylor, *The Violent Take It by Force*, 22-48, in his first chapter titled, "A Televangelist in the White House," describes the career of Paula White that prepared her to become "the first pastor to offer an official blessing over an attempted American insurrection" (48).

39. Boedy, *The Seven Mountains Mandate*, 52-54, 121-25, and throughout, deals extensively with the contributions of Charlie Kirk and Turning Point.

40. See Angela Denker, *Red State Christians: Understanding the Voters Who Elected Donald Trump* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2019).

41. Bradley Onishi, *Preparing for War: The Extremist History of White Christian Nationalism—And What Comes Next* (Minneapolis: Broadleaf, 2023).

42. Katherine Stewart, *The Power Worshipers: Inside the Rise of Religious Nationalism* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2020).

43. Matthew D. Taylor, *The Violent Take It by Force: The Christian Movement that Is Threatening Our Democracy* (Minneapolis: Broadleaf, 2024), 17-22.

44. Taylor, *The Violent Take It by Force*, 20.

45. Donald A. McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth*, rev. and ed. C. Peter Wagner (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990).

46. C. Peter Wagner, ed., *Signs and Wonders Today: The Story of Fuller Theological Seminary's Remarkable Course on Spiritual Power. Revised and Expanded Ed.* (Altamonte Springs, FL: Creation House, 1989).

47. Cindy Jacobs, *The Voice of God: How God Speaks Personally and Corporately to His Children Today* (Ventura, CA: Chosen Books, 1995). Taylor, *The Violent Take It by Force*, 80, writes that "no Christian woman living today has capitalized more on this experiential point of access to authority or attained greater spiritual renown than Cindy Jacobs."

48. Taylor, *The Violent Take It by Force*, 56-59.

49. Insofar as Christian nationalism, especially through the New Apostolic Reformation, has interest in spreading its religious and moral agenda internationally, one could refer to "Christian supremacism." Taylor, *The Violent Take It by Force*, 240.

window,” encompassing nations between those latitudes, which include North Africa, the Middle East, and much of Asia. Wagner organized a campaign of “strategic-level spiritual warfare” through annual prayer and fasting cycles that involved an estimated fifty million evangelical Christians across the world. This was the initial foray by Wagner into what would become the New Apostolic Reformation.⁵⁰

Renewed belief in present-day prophets and apostles had circulated within the world of independent charismatics already for decades. Wagner’s contribution was to organize these beliefs into a movement.⁵¹ This began with a symposium of 500 world leaders that led to linking independent charismatic congregations with the designated as prophets and apostles who were to guide them. The symposium gave birth to the name, the New Apostolic Reformation. Wagner “deeply believed that God was calling him to organize and oversee leadership networks to further this transformation of the church.”⁵² Together with Chuck Pierce, Wagner taught courses first at Fuller and later at the Wagner Leadership Institute in Colorado Springs on Spiritual Strongholds, Confronting the Powers, and Churches of the New Apostolic Paradigm. The crucial instruction was that churches and ministries must be guided and governed by contemporary prophets and apostles.

Wagner served as the convening apostle of his own International Coalition of Apostles that sought “to introduce as many other leaders as possible to the New Apostolic Reformation and its implications for the Kingdom of God.”⁵³ This led next to the formation of a roundtable of charismatic prophets called the Apostolic Council of Prophetic Elders, organized by Wagner together with Cindy Jacobs. Eventually, an inner group of the twenty-five apostles and prophets closest to Wagner became the Eagle’s Vision Apostolic Team. Wagner thus served as an apostle and “spiritual father” to his “spiritual children.”⁵⁴ Cindy Jacobs had already discerned that she was a modern-day prophet in the 1980s. This network placed her in the company of many others who believed that God had commissioned them as prophets or apostles.⁵⁵

So, what is the role of prophets and apostles? The role of prophets and apostles is to guide and direct independent charismatic pastors, congregations, and their members to engage together in spiritual warfare against the principalities and powers.

50. Taylor, *The Violent Take It by Force*, 60-61.

51. C. Peter Wagner, *Apostles and Prophets: The Foundation of the Church* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2000).

52. Taylor, *The Violent Take It by Force*, 63.

53. For this quote and the following, Taylor, *The Violent Take It by Force*, 66.

54. Five members of the Eagle’s Vision Apostolic Team were present at the January 6 insurrection. Taylor, *The Violent Take It by Force*, 76.

55. This company included Bill Hamon, *Apostles Prophets and the Coming Moves of God: God’s End-Time Plans for His Church and Planet Earth* (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 1997), who writes, “This book is dedicated to the great company of Prophets and Apostles that God is bringing forth in these last days.”

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They believe that Christians need to conquer the high places of influence in society and govern from top down. Engaged in a cosmic spiritual war against the forces of darkness, they believe God has mandated them to use spiritual violence to defeat Satan and then build the kingdom of God on earth.⁵⁶

Wagner describes *prophets* as those “who can hear from God more accurately and communicate that message to the body of Christ...but most of the time they have little or no idea what to do with it.”⁵⁷ *Apostles* are those who exercise leadership by “hearing what the Spirit is saying to the churches and by setting things in order accordingly for the expansion of the Kingdom of God.”⁵⁸ Prophets give their messages to the apostles who put them into practice with the pastors and their churches.

Local pastors voluntarily submit to the authority of the apostles insofar as their pastoral responsibilities do not permit them a wide enough vision for advancing God’s plans. “By joining an apostolic network, a pastor agrees to be subject to the authority of the apostle who rules over the network.”⁵⁹ They also agree that their church will give financial support to the apostolic network and allow it to assume spiritual authority over the pastor and church. Because this is a voluntary arrangement, the church and pastor may sever ties at will. Wagner explains why this seldom happens:

It is because apostolically oriented pastors feel that the apostle adds value to their life and ministry. They are convinced that they would not be able to reach their full

56. Taylor, *The Violent Take It by Force*, 3.

57. C. Peter Wagner, *Dominion! How Kingdom Action Can Change the World* (Grand Rapids: Chosen Books, 2008), 27.

58. Wagner, *Dominion! How Kingdom Action Can Change the World*, 31.

59. R. Douglas Geivett and Holly Pivec, *The New Apostolic Reformation? A Biblical Response to a Worldwide Movement* (Wooster, OH: Weaver Book Company, 2014), 41-42. This book gives an extensive biblical critique of the New Apostolic Reformation and its teachings: “As we await the next great event on God’s revelatory calendar—the return of Christ—we do well if we give ourselves to the careful study of Scripture, and look not to so-called new truths from present-day prophets” (208).

destiny in serving God apart from the spiritual covering of the apostle.⁶⁰

In this way, churches choose to come under the sway of prophets and apostles committed to the beliefs and politics of Christian nationalism. Taylor describes this arrangement as a “spiritual oligarchy, one in which the newly commissioned apostles and prophets take over huge chunks of the Independent Charismatic landscape.”⁶¹

One of the most powerful tools guiding the ministry of this network is an instrumentalist understanding of the power of prayer. “Strategic level spiritual warfare” transforms prayer into an instrument that directs God to accomplish that for which the prophets, apostles, and people pray, because God depends on their intercessions.

God’s purpose may or may not be accomplished depending, to one degree or another, on the obedience of His people and their willingness to use the weapons of spiritual warfare that He has provided.⁶²

God’s action, in this view, is contingent upon the intercessions by prayer warriors and their apostolic generals. “God’s will might be thwarted if the enemies are too strong or if God’s people don’t muster enough spiritual warriors.”⁶³ If one prays earnestly enough, God will do it. This conviction led the prophets Dutch Sheets and Chuck Pierce to make a fifty-state tour in 2002 to rally the network into prayer for the nation, believing that it had been their intercessory prayer outside the White House that was the decisive factor in the 2000 presidential election, giving the office to George W. Bush over Al Gore.⁶⁴ Based on such convictions about prayer, Sheets popularized the “Appeal to Heaven” flag that symbolizes Christian nationalist beliefs.⁶⁵ This flag appeared prominently among the faithful at the January 6 insurrection.⁶⁶

Seven Mountains Mandate

The core beliefs of Christian nationalism coalesced into a program called the Seven Mountains Mandate. The origin story goes back to the 1970s in the joining of minds between Loren Cunningham and Bill Bright, the founders of two evangelical college campus evangelism organizations.⁶⁷ Bright brought to Cunningham a

The Seven Mountains Mandate... goes back to the ... joining of minds between Loren Cunningham and Bill Bright, the founders of two evangelical college campus evangelism organizations. ... Because cultural trends in America are leading the country down the road to destruction, Christians need to take dominion over seven institutions in society: education, family, religion, government, business, media, and entertainment.

list of seven cultural areas in need of Christian influence and leadership. When they met, Cunningham disclosed that God had revealed to him the same list, only worded somewhat differently. Because cultural trends in America are leading the country down the road to destruction, Christians need to take dominion over seven institutions in society: education, family, religion, government, business, media, and entertainment.⁶⁸

- *Education.* Public education is understood as an enemy to Christian faith due to its secularizing influence and indoctrinating of students. A key step in turning America back to God requires opposition to public schools and the promotion of private education, including vouchers that direct public money to Christian schools. The election of school board officials at every level of government is instrumental for conquering this mountain. This allows for Christian nationalists to control the adoption of curriculum and to implement policies in public schools, such as the posting of the Ten Commandments.
- *Family.* At the heart of this movement is the reestablishment of a Christian family structure to counteract the disintegration of family values in American society. This requires that men reclaim their role as heads of the household and women uphold their responsibilities in the home as wife and mother. Anti-transgender politics fuels the defense of the traditional nuclear family as God’s revealed order. This family structure authorizes traditional masculinity to guide male leaders in the struggle for the seven mountains and traditional femininity to give stability to society through biblical marriage.

60. C. Peter Wagner, *Changing Church* (Ventura, CA): Regal Books, 2004), 36.

61. Taylor, *The Violent Take It by Force*, 122. Taylor, 127-129, explains the dynamics solidifying this arrangement.

62. C. Peter Wagner, ed., *Destiny of a Nation: How Prophets and Intercessors Can Mold History* (Colorado Springs: Wagner Publications, 2001), 12.

63. Taylor, *The Violent Take It by Force*, 211.

64. Dutch Sheets and Chuck D. Pierce, *Releasing the Prophetic Destiny of a Nation: Discovering How Your Future Can Be Greater Than Your Past* (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 2005), 17-18.

65. Dutch Sheets, *An Appeal to Heaven* (Dallas: Dutch Sheets Ministries, 2015).

66. Taylor, *The Violent Take It by Force*, 238-239.

67. Boedy, *The Seven Mountains Mandate*, 1-2.

68. For the following, see Boedy, *The Seven Mountains Mandate*.

- **Religion.** Christian nationalism engages in a culture war to shift public opinion and implement policies favoring its religious priorities. This involves spiritual warfare against clergy, denominations, and religions that are contributing to the moral and spiritual decay of America. God works through prophets, apostles, pastors, and their churches to organize events, hold trainings, influence social media, and publish materials to win the hearts and minds of citizens and persuade them to support their theocratic agenda throughout the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of government.
- **Government.** Dominionism aims to convert democracy into theocracy by implementing biblical law as the norm for American government (Rushdoony). Christian nationalism views secular democracy as the enemy of God and seeks to elect leaders who will accomplish this transformation from within. The effort begins on the level of local and state government, including elected positions that appear less important. Public officials can then restore traditional American values. Project 2025 reflects these values for policy implementation. Through this strategy, a political minority can prevail over the majority.
- **Business.** Overtaking this mountain involves commissioning business leaders to employ their wealth and influence to rebuild the nation according to God's economy. Free market capitalism affords the opportunity for wealthy people to invest in political influence to shape public policy in favor of wealth creation and profit. The prosperity gospel endorses financial success as a reward to God's faithful people and a measure of divine approval. According to Wagner, business leaders can be "marketplace apostles" to transfer wealth and transform the nation to reshape the culture according to Christian values.
- **Media.** The secular media promote interpretations of the news that malign and contradict God's will for the nation. Leaders in the movement that became Christian nationalism have long engaged in battle against mainstream media. With the advent of Fox News, cable news channels, and social media, there now are networks with an extensive media reach both for supporters and to attract new viewers: "Christians must become aware of the awesome power of the media to mold our moral and political consensus."⁶⁹ Conspiracy theories are especially powerful to grip and hold attention.
- **Entertainment.** The Religious Right has established its own entertainment empire to construct and promote Christian culture. Movies, TV shows, radio, books, periodicals, and videos have become widely available to influence and persuade the American public to adopt their values and counter secular morality. The culture war extends to every interest area, including sports and pop culture. Powerful memes populate and saturate the internet with images that lampoon enemy views and win sympathy in the culture war. Brilliant

69. Pat Robertson, "A Christian Action Plan for the 1980s," *Biblical Economics Today* 2 (Dec/Jan 1980): C-16.

The Seven Mountains Mandate has been enjoined for implementation by the prophets and apostles of the New Apostolic Reformation, transforming them from a grassroots effort to a top-down agenda accomplished by a vanguard of influential leaders in each of the seven areas.

memes often prevail over reasoned arguments and factual documentation.

Both Cunningham (Youth with a Mission) and Bright (Campus Crusade for Christ) implemented this seven-point program as "mind molders" for their respective organizations. Subsequently, Francis Schaeffer added the intellectual respectability of Christian Reconstructionism (Rushdoony) by calling them "spheres."⁷⁰ Taking up the promotion of this agenda from Cunningham in 2000, Lance Wallnau popularized them as "seven mountains" through many conferences, books, and videos.⁷¹ His core narrative held that "Christians are the embattled and beleaguered cultural exiles and...the real Americans and the destined leaders at the tops of all the mountains of influence."⁷² Johnny Enlow writes: "The favor to 'invade' these seven mountains is already upon us as part of God's end-time strategy to establish Him as Ruler of the Nations."⁷³

The Seven Mountains Mandate has been enjoined for implementation by the prophets and apostles of the New Apostolic Reformation, transforming them from a grassroots effort to a top-down agenda accomplished by a vanguard of influential leaders in each of the seven areas.⁷⁴ The inner circle of collaborators with Wagner included Ché Ahn, Cindy Jacobs, Bill Hamon, Becca Greenwood, and Dutch Sheets. These influential evangelical leaders amplified attention to the Seven Mountains in their ministries, broadcasts, and writings.⁷⁵ Peter Wagner joined together the Seven

70. Francis A. Schaeffer, *How Should We Then Live? The Rise and Decline of Western Thought and Culture* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1976).

71. Lance Wallnau, *Seven Mountains: The Rise and Fall of Nations*, DVD and CD series (Lance Wallnau, 2019).

72. Taylor, *The Violent Take It by Force*, 170.

73. Johnny Enlow, *The Seven Mountain Prophecy: Unveiling the Coming Elijah Revolution* (Lake Mary, FL: Creation House, 2008), 10.

74. See Taylor, *The Violent Take It by Force*, 154-156.

75. Ché Ahn, *Into the Fire: How You Can Enter Renewal and Catch God's Holy Fire* (Ventura CA: Gospel Light, 1998); Cindy Jacobs, *The Reformation Manifesto: Your Part in God's Plan to Change Nations Today* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2008); Bill Hamon, *Prophets and Prophecy: Guidelines for Receiving, Understanding, and*

Mountains with dominion theology and his prophetic-apostolic network for spiritual warfare in his 2008 book, *Dominion! How Kingdom Action Can Change the World*. Among the proponents of Christian nationalism, Lance Wallnau was instrumental for connecting the Seven Mountains agenda with the MAGA movement of Donald Trump.⁷⁶ This role led Taylor to conclude that “Lance Wallnau is the most important evangelical political theologian of the twenty-first century.”⁷⁷

One of the most astounding political developments in relation to Christian nationalism was the coalescing of support among American evangelicals for the candidacy and election of Donald J. Trump as President of the United States.⁷⁸ Kristin Kobes Du Mez documents the growing support for Trump from few early endorsers to a virtual evangelical consensus on his anointing as their “New High Priest.”⁷⁹

Evangelicals were looking for a protector, an aggressive, heroic, manly man, someone who was not restrained by political correctness or feminine virtues, someone who would break the rules for the right cause. Try as they might—and they did try—no other candidate could measure up to Donald Trump when it came to flaunting an aggressive, militant masculinity. He became in the words of his religious biographers, “the ultimate fighting champion for evangelicals.”⁸⁰

None of the reasons Trump might have been repugnant to evangelical Christians proved as important as his potential for furthering their political goal of conquering the Seven Mountains.⁸¹

After his meeting with Trump in September 2015, Wallnau received a revelation from God telling him that “Trump is a Cyrus.”⁸² Just as the restoration of the Jewish people took place through deliverance from the Babylonian Exile by the Persian emperor, Cyrus (called an “anointed one” in Isaiah 45:1), so God has anointed another political leader, Trump, to restore Christians to power in America. Wagner explained:

God is not limited to using Christians to accomplish His purposes. We need only to recall Cyrus, the idolatrous king of Persia, whom God used to help get His people

Fulfilling God's Personal Word to You (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 2010); Rebecca Greenwood, *Destined to Rule: Spiritual Strategies for Advancing the Kingdom of God* (Ada, MI: Chosen, 2007); and Dutch Sheets, *Intercessory Prayer: How God Can Use Your Prayers to Move Heaven and Earth* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1996).

76. Lance Wallnau and Bill Johnson, *Invading Babylon: The 7 Mountain Mandate* (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 2013).

77. Taylor, *The Violent Take It by Force*, 171.

78. David Brody and Scott Lamb, *The Faith of Donald J. Trump: A Spiritual Biography* (New York: Broadside Books, 2018).

79. Kobes Du Mez, *Jesus and John Wayne*, 250-271.

80. Kobes Du Mez, *Jesus and John Wayne*, 253. The citation is from Brody and Lamb, *The Faith of Donald Trump*, 260.

81. Lance Wallnau, *God's Chaos Candidate: Donald J. Trump and the American Unraveling* (Keller, TX: Killer Sheep Media, 2016).

82. Taylor, *The Violent Take It by Force*, 160.

In the subsequent decades, elaborating the Seven Mountains teaching became architecture for the political platform of the Republican Party with Project 2025. This is widely accepted as the consensus agenda by conservative evangelicals and their leaders across a broad spectrum of Christian traditions.

back to Jerusalem... Let me point out that influence is related to spirituality in the Religion Mountain, but this is not true in any of the other six mountains that are the molders of culture. The chief producer [of] influence in the six non-Religion mountains is not spirituality but success.⁸³

In the subsequent decades, elaborating the Seven Mountains teaching became architecture for the political platform of the Republican Party with Project 2025.⁸⁴ This is widely accepted as the consensus agenda by conservative evangelicals and their leaders across a broad spectrum of Christian traditions.

Conquering the Seven Mountains can command militancy under the cover of Scripture: “... until now, the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and violent people take it by force” (Matt 11:12). The argument for an armed populace, including assault weapons, is covered by the Second Amendment. The Bible and Bill of Rights go hand in hand. The roots of paramilitarism in America stretch back to the post-Vietnam era and the white power movement.⁸⁵ Antecedents for the Christian nationalist commitment to violence, if necessary, include the Branch Davidians, Oklahoma City Bombing, and survivalist movement.⁸⁶ The militancy of Christian nationalism manifested itself again in the terror of January 6. Taylor concludes: “If we don't pay close attention to the theologies, prophecies, decrees, and declarations of the far-right charismatic Christians, we may sleepwalk into

83. Quoted by Taylor, *The Violent Take It by Force*, 163.

84. Project 2025, “Mandate for Leadership: The Conservative Promise (Washington, DC: The Heritage Foundation, 2023): https://static.heritage.org/project2025/2025_MandateForLeadership_FULL.pdf.

85. Kathleen Belew, *Bring the War Home: The White Power Movement and Paramilitary America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018).

86. Craig L. Nessan, “When Faith Turns Fatal: David Koresh and Tragic Misreadings of Revelation,” *Currents in Theology and Mission* 22 (June 1995):191-199.

another Christianity-influenced insurrection.”⁸⁷

Responding to Christian nationalism

How can ecumenical Christians make a faithful response to the challenges of Christian nationalism? Amanda Tyler, lead organizer of Christians against Christian Nationalism, has articulated an 8-point program.

1. Name and understand the threat of Christian nationalism
2. Ground yourself in God’s love
3. Denounce violence
4. Commit to the separation of church and state
5. Take on Christian nationalism close to home
6. Organize for change
7. Protect religious freedom in public schools
8. Take your place in the public square⁸⁸

Pamela Cooper-White offers psychological insights about those attracted to Christian nationalism and how to talk with them. Once a relationship has been established, it may be possible to look for common ground by maintaining kindness, checking one’s assumptions, and avoiding arguments. Cooper-White acknowledges there are many contextual factors that can inhibit or promote constructive exchanges. While such encounters can be very challenging, they can also be a form of “holy work.”⁸⁹

As Christians prepare themselves to respond to Christian nationalism, some core theological commitments and ministry practices can guide us. Above all, one needs to remain clear that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is the central confession of Christian faith. The doctrine of justification by grace through faith in Christ Jesus needs to center both our own lives and our engagement with others. This Gospel message roots us in God’s mercy, love, forgiveness, and eternal life as a gift we receive, not a political agenda we must enact. This Gospel then sets us free: *free from* political ideology that demands loyalty and *free for* serving our neighbors and an endangered creation through political action and advocacy.

As we reflect on Christian faith convictions, we can turn to the ecumenical creeds, confessions, catechisms, and doctrines we have inherited from our faith ancestors in the Great Tradition. These can serve as standards for evaluating the claims of Christian nationalism and alert us to its distortion of nationalism by turning the nation into an idol.

Jesus also knows those others, the representatives and preachers of the national religion, those powerful, respected people, who stand firmly on the earth inseparably rooted in the national way of life, the spirit

One needs to remain clear that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is the central confession of Christian faith. The doctrine of justification by grace through faith in Christ Jesus needs to center both our own lives and our engagement with others. This Gospel message roots us in God’s mercy, love, forgiveness, and eternal life as a gift we receive, not a political agenda we must enact.

of the times, the popular piety. But Jesus does not speak to them; he speaks only to his disciples when he says, blessed—for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.⁹⁰

Orthodox Christian teachings offer sound biblical grounding that has been tested by the church over the generations. These teachings include the belief that all human beings are created with value and worth as those made in the image of God, the Great Commandment, the Sermon on the Mount, the parable of the Good Samaritan, and God’s preferential concern for hungry, thirsty, stranger, homeless, sick, and imprisoned (Matt 25:31-46). Such foundational Scripture passages contradict the claims and commitments of Christian nationalism.

As we talk with and care for those who defend and advocate for Christian nationalism, we need to remain centered in our own belovedness in Jesus Christ by relating to others in the spirit of the Gospel. Jesus instructed us to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us (Matt 5:44). It is better not to engage in arguments or debates. These only foster the polarization that already divides and tears society apart. We are called to respect the dignity of those with whom we disagree for we all are made in God’s image.

In our conversations, we can model civility by accenting the value of relationships over the need to be right. That involves active listening, even though we may hear claims that are difficult to fathom. When discussions devolve into anger and reach an impasse, it is better to conclude the conversation and agree to disagree. Afterward, we can pray for the welfare of others and recenter ourselves in Christian charity. Such engagement can be

87. Taylor, *The Violent Take It by Force*, 240.

88. These are full chapters in Amanda Tyler, *How to End Christian Nationalism* (Minneapolis: Broadleaf, 2024).

89. Pamela Cooper-White, *The Psychology of Christian Nationalism: Why People Are Drawn In and How to Talk Across the Divide* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2022), 136.

90. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, ed. Geoffrey B. Kelly and John D. Godsey, trans. Barbara Green and Reinhard Krauss (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2001), 103.

extremely difficult and exhausting. For that reason, we need to mind our own wellness and tend to our own soul care in prayer, spiritual practices, worship, and Christian community.

Literature on Christian Nationalism: An Annotated Bibliography

Alberta, Tim. *The Kingdom, the Power, and the Glory: American Evangelicals in an Age of Extremism*. New York: Harper, 2023.

This book, written by a journalist who understands evangelical Christianity at the grassroots, portrays how authentic evangelicalism has been compromised and corrupted by political partisanship. The pursuit, exercise, and abuse of political power have exchanged the kingdom of Christ for the lure of worldly influence and contributed to the demise of the evangelical church.

Austin, Michael W. *American Christian Nationalism: Neither American nor Christian*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2024.

The allegiance of Christian nationalists to a Christian nation and Christian culture guide their efforts to gain political power and cultural control to impose their views on all Americans. This agenda is contrary both to American values and Christian virtues. The author articulates an alternative agenda based on Martin Luther King Jr.'s vision of Beloved Community.

Balmer, Randall. *Bad Faith: Race and the Rise of the Religious Right*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2021.

This book, written by a scholar and keen observer of religion in America, analyzes the emergence of the Religious Right in the 1970s as a reaction against the elimination of tax-exempt status for racially discriminatory institutions, not originally against abortion. Rejecting the evangelical Jimmy Carter and rallying loyalty for Ronald Reagan, the evangelical movement shifted its alignment toward Christian nationalism.

Bewle, Kathleen. *Bring the War Home: The White Power Movement and Paramilitary America*. Cambridge: Harvard, 2018.

Beginning with the aftermath of the Vietnam War, this book documents the underground leaders and racist commitments behind violent paramilitary groups in the US, including Ruby Ridge, the Branch Davidians at Waco, and the bombing at Oklahoma City.

Boedy, Matthew. *The Seven Mountains Mandate: Exposing the Dangerous Plan to Christianize America and Destroy Democracy*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2025.

This book is a primer on each of the Seven Mountains (education, government, religion, family, business, media, and entertainment) that drive the agenda of Christian nationalism. The author gives attention to major leaders of

this movement, especially to the role of Charlie Kirk and Turning Point. Videos by Boedy are available on each of the seven mountains to summarize the book.

Cooper-White, Pamela. *The Psychology of Christian Nationalism: Why People Are Drawn In and How to Talk Across the Divide*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2022.

This is a study in the psychological dynamics of those who support Christian nationalism. It provides helpful guidance for understanding, relating to, and engaging those involved in the movement. The book offers very practical considerations for dealing with family, friends, and church members influenced by this movement.

Copulsky, Jerome E. *American Heretics: Religious Adversaries of Order*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2024.

This book is a historical study that examines illiberal thinkers (Rushdoony) and movements that for religious reasons opposed American liberal democracy, especially the separation of church and state. Criticizing pluralism and secularism, they anticipated the collapse of an unrighteous nation and looked forward to the founding of a Christian commonwealth.

Denker, Angela. *Disciples of White Jesus: The Radicalization of American Boyhood*. Minneapolis: Broadleaf, 2025.

The radicalization of young white men in America is one of the most disturbing aspects of Christian nationalism. Saving young boys and young men here means making them disciples of White Jesus to validate their worth and condemn all those who disagree. The book describes the digital and physical spaces where this formation is manufactured.

Denker, Angela. *Red State Christians: Understanding the Voters Who Elected Donald Trump*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2019.

Based on extensive interviews with followers of the MAGA movement, especially in those states that voted for Donald Trump, this book portrays the issues (abortion, guns, economics) and populations (farmers, blue collar, evangelicals, conservative Catholics, Muslims, Latinx Christians) that led to his triumph in the 2016 election.

Du Mez, Kristin Kobes. *Jesus and John Wayne: How White Evangelicals Corrupted a Faith and Fractured a Nation*. New York: Liveright, 2020.

This book explores the politicization of the Religious Right beginning with the 1970s to the MAGA movement, which coalesces around male domination in support for the death penalty, racism, and gender hierarchy, and opposes immigration, gay rights, gun control, and public education. These same commitments also alienate many from evangelical churches.

Fanestil, John. *American Heresy: The Roots and Reach of Christian Nationalism*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2023.

This book explores American history to discover how truth and heresy are intertwined in white Christian nationalism according to six themes: creation (order and violence), providence (destiny and nostalgia), salvation (progress and white racism), truth (innovation and propaganda), liberty (independence and conspiracy theories), and virtue (patriotism and nationalism).

Field, Laura K. *Furious Minds: The Making of the MAGA New Right*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2025.

This book chronicles the rise of the New Right and the intellectuals directing the ideology behind the MAGA agenda (Project 2025), including Patrick Deneen, Christopher Rufo, Peter Thiel, and J. D. Vance. The furious minds of the New Right use state power to wage culture war against liberal democracy and those supporting it in universities, journalism, public media, and international institutions.

Geivett, R. Douglas and Holly Pivec. *The New Apostolic Reformation? A Biblical Response to a Worldwide Movement*. Wooster, OH: Weaver Book Company, 2014.

This book provides an evangelical appraisal, based on Scripture, of the origin, leaders, writings, and claims of the New Apostolic Reformation, especially its views on apostles and prophets, and their role in leading spiritual warfare, working miracles, and organizing for political action.

Gorski, Philip S. and Samuel L. Perry. *The Flag and the Cross: White Christian Nationalism and the Threat to American Democracy*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2022.

This book traces the rise of Christian nationalism over several decades as it became a religious force upholding right-wing politics and the MAGA takeover of the Republican Party. The white Christian nationalist worldview—with its commitments to authoritarian leadership, exclusionary racism, and the use of violence—is an acute threat to democracy as demonstrated by the January 6 insurrection and its aftermath.

Jones, Robert P. *The End of White Christian America*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2016.

The author analyzes survey data about demographic changes that project the future minority status of white Americans that are raising fear and anxiety about family, race, culture, and religion. This research is foundational to understanding key factors in the rise of Christian nationalism.

Looper, Joel. *Another Gospel: Christian Nationalism and the Crisis of Evangelical Identity*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2024.

Politicized evangelicals follow a gospel of anti-democratic nationalism and cultural conservatism that displaces the church as the focus of Christian mission. In contrast to Christian nationalism in Putin's Russia, the way forward involves a return to the evangelical vision of community centered in Jesus Christ and guided by the Holy Spirit.

McVicar, Michael. *Christian Reconstruction: R. J. Rushdoony and American Religious Conservatism*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2015.

This book offers a critical introduction to Christian Reconstructionism (also known as Dominionism) and its founder and theological architect, Rousas John Rushdoony (1916–2001). Rushdoony helped set the agenda of the radical Christian Right, advocating for theocracy and rule by Christian law in the executive, legislative, and judicial branches to “reconstruct” individuals under Christian governance.

Miller, Paul D. *The Religion of American Greatness: What's Wrong with Christian Nationalism*. Grand Rapids: IVP Academic, 2022.

While nationalism has a long tradition in American history, the phenomenon of Christian nationalism is an entirely new manifestation, seeking to elevate American greatness at the expense of following democratic process and respecting political differences. This is a careful and balanced critique from a conservation perspective.

Nessan, Craig L. and Angela Denker. “Declaring Independence from Christian Nationalism.” Theme Issue of *Currents in Theology and Mission* 53 (July 2026): www.currentsjournal.org

This issue engages Christian nationalism through historical, theological, biblical, and anthropological perspectives. The authors criticize the racist, antidemocratic, and exploitative politics fueled by Christian nationalist ideology that distorts interpretation of the Bible and theology to support authoritarian rule in the United States.

Onishi, Bradley. *Preparing for War: The Extremist History of White Christian Nationalism—And What Comes Next*. Minneapolis: Broadleaf, 2023.

This book introduces Christian nationalism within the history of right-wing politics and the takeover of the Republican Party. The author relates this history to the white Christian nationalist worldview, authoritarian leadership, and strongman masculinity to analyze the January 6 insurrection and its aftermath.

Stackhouse Jr., John G. *Christian Nationalism: A Christian Guide*. New Brunswick: ThinkBetter Media, 2025.

This is a book for Christians about the meaning of citizenship and patriotism with reference to the United States and Canada. It engages in discussion of the dangers of theocracy in general terms, not the current debate about Christian nationalism.

Stewart, Katherine. *Money, Lies, and God: Inside the Movement to Destroy American Democracy*. New York: Bloomsbury, 2025.

This book investigates how money, lies, and religion inform an antidemocratic coalition engaged in conspiracy theories, backroom political strategies, and building extremist churches. Massive increases in economic inequality and dislocation have fueled the turn toward “reactionary nihilism” led by an authoritarian oligarchy that threatens the future of American democracy.

Stewart, Katherine. *The Power Worshipers: Inside the Rise of Religious Nationalism*. New York: Bloomsbury, 2020.

With singleness of purpose, religious nationalism has zeroed in on polarizing issues and done whatever was politically necessary to achieve its goals: distorting truth, rewriting history, and brokering deals with morally corrupt politicians. Mastering state rights, reviving the racist ghosts of the confederacy, conquering Supreme Court appointments, and sacrificing democracy for theocracy—nothing was out of order to achieve power.

Taylor, Matthew D. *The Violent Take It by Force: The Christian Movement That Is Threatening Our Democracy*. Minneapolis: Broadleaf, 2024.

This is a meticulously researched and detailed study of the figures and events involved in the New Apostolic Reformation, Seven Mountains Mandate, and spiritual warfare leading to the January 6 insurrection and its aftermath. Taylor references all the major figures and events leading the Christian nationalist movement.

Tyler, Amanda. *How to End Christian Nationalism*. Minneapolis: Broadleaf, 2024.

Tyler is the lead organizer of the Christians Against Christian Nationalism campaign. She provides eight steps to end Christian nationalism: 1) understand the threat, 2) center in God’s love, 3) denounce violence, 4) preserve separation of church and state, 5) work locally, 6) organize for change, 7) safeguard religious freedom in public schools, and 8) advocate publicly.

Wallis, Jim. *The False White Gospel: Rejecting Christian Nationalism, Reclaiming True Faith, and Refounding Democracy*. New York: St. Martin’s Essentials, 2024.

This book makes an energetic case for rejecting Christian nationalism based on white supremacy as its major tenet. The author provides an alternative understanding of genuine Christian faith that can contribute to the rebuilding of democracy.

Whitehead, Andrew L. *American Idolatry: How Christian Nationalism Betrays the Gospel and Threatens the Church*. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2023.

This book aims to disentangle authentic discipleship in Jesus Christ from those who claim that civic life should be organized according to the ideology of Christian nationalism. It is informed by the author’s interactions with people and organizations who struggle to distinguish authentic Christian faith from American idolatry.

Whitehead, Andrew L. and Samuel L. Perry. *Taking America Back for God: Christian Nationalism in the United States*. New York: Oxford, 2020.

The authors base their study of Christian nationalism on a wide range of survey data and in-depth interviews to investigate American views on key issues—gun control, immigration, political protests, religious diversity, gender roles, and family life, among others—to analyze political commitments, voting trends, and the religious movement to make American first.

Wolfe, Stephen. *The Case for Christian Nationalism*. Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 2023.

This is an unapologetic argument for Christian nationalism. Wolfe contends that a Christian nation governed by Christian leaders and implementing civil laws according to Christian culture promise renewal for America, the procurement of both earthly and heavenly good. This book makes the case for Christian nationalism by a loyalist to the cause.

Section Two:

The Faith

“This week I’ve been forced to reflect on what I know in my bones but have let atrophy during my years in the Lutheran church. For months I’ve been listening to colleagues, friends, and strangers interpret the news and our current reality. Disbelief, disappointment, and disorienting information have escalated and overwhelmed our senses—and our sanity.

“I believe this overwhelming occurs because at every turn, the word that best describes the implications of our government’s decisions since January (for our country, our world, and the most vulnerable among us) is evil.

- Former Bishop Leila Ortiz,
July 4, 2025

A Call to Spiritual Warfare: Remembering Our Baptismal Power

Rev. Leila M. Ortiz
Bishop, Metro D.C. Synod

July 4, 2025

This week I've been forced to reflect on what I know in my bones but have let atrophy during my years in the Lutheran church. For months I've been listening to colleagues, friends, and strangers interpret the news and our current reality. Disbelief, disappointment, and disorienting information have escalated and overwhelmed our senses—and our sanity.

I believe this overwhelming occurs because at every turn, the word that best describes the implications of our government's decisions since January (for our country, our world, and the most vulnerable among us) is evil.

This past week, in several conversations with colleagues, each has introduced the word “evil” into our engagement. In one call with a colleague I hadn't spoken to in years—a cradle Lutheran, lover of liturgy, with a sharp discerning eye—she said, “This evil is not about flesh and blood. This evil is about powers and principalities.”

Imagine my joy to hear a Lutheran someone, anyone, point to a truth that many avoid, have suspicions about, or simply don't know how to address: we are in a battle that requires spiritual warfare.

We are witnessing systemic, overt, public evil that operates without shame. While many are called to advocate, protest, and fight for human rights in legislatures, town squares, and city streets, we who are baptized are called to something additional and foundational: to affirm our baptism daily and denounce the devil and all forces that defy God through prayer and intercession.

Some of you may have witnessed this—each time I have the honor of leading the affirmation of baptism, I listen carefully to the assembly's response. When I hear voices that are shy and hesitant, I ask that we repeat our responses with bold confidence and fervor:

“Do you renounce the devil and all forces that defy God?”

“I RENOUNCE THEM!”

This is not mere liturgical recitation. This is spiritual warfare—the good fight of faith that we are equipped and called to engage.

A Reminder: Prayer is both a balm for healing and a weapon against forces that thrive on distraction and despair. These forces count on God’s people not knowing their power—power that was announced and claimed at the moment of baptism.

I believe the Spirit is inviting, urging us to live and lead with intentional, prayerful resistance.

Pick a day. Pick an hour. Organize with your church, your family, your friends, and pray together. Name the evil that surrounds you and us—all that doesn’t make rational sense, that disturbs your spirit, that threatens to strip away life abundant and destroy what God has made holy in your life, in our country, and in the world.

The Spirit is calling us to remember who we are and whose we are. The hour is urgent, but we are not without power or hope.

God of justice and mercy, You have marked us as Your own in baptism and called us to renounce all that defies Your love. Grant us courage to name the evil we witness, wisdom to discern the spirits, and strength to stand against the powers and principalities that seek to destroy Your creation.

In a time when demonic powers are bold and public, remind us that Your power is stronger. When evil appears systematic and overwhelming, help us remember that Your love is more systematic still—woven into the very fabric of creation, poured out in Christ, and alive in us through Your Spirit.

Unite us in prayer, O God. Make us bold in our renunciation of evil and fervent in our commitment to life abundant for all. We ask this in the name of Jesus, who has already conquered death and the grave. Amen.

The call is clear. Our baptism has already equipped us for this fight. Let us pray...
with God's help and in Jesus' name.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Leila M. Ortiz', with a stylized, cursive script.

Rev. Leila M. Ortiz
Bishop, Metro D.C. Synod

Section Three:

Principles

“And what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly,
and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?”

- Micah 6:8
Eighth Century BCE

¹⁶ Then Jesus ... entered the synagogue on the Sabbath.
And when He stood up to read, ¹⁷ the scroll of the prophet
Isaiah was handed to Him. Unrolling it, He found the place
where it was written:

¹⁸ “The Spirit of the Lord is on Me,
because He has anointed Me
to preach good news to the poor.
He has sent Me to proclaim liberty to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to release the oppressed,
¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

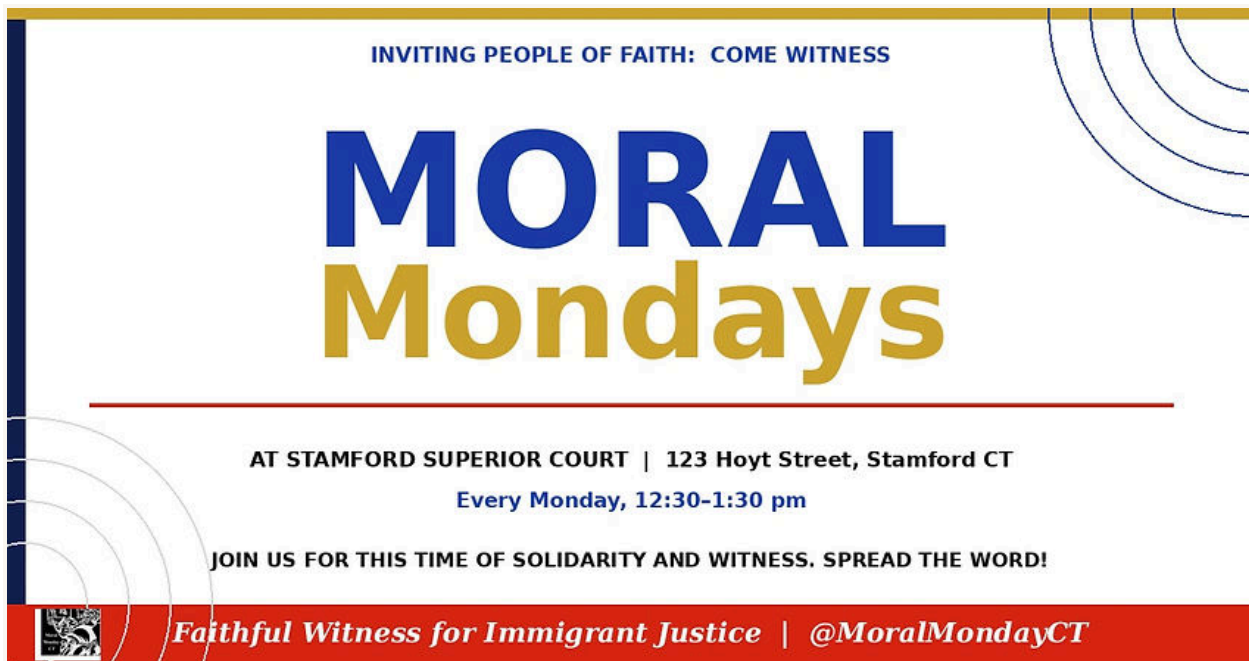
²⁰ Then He rolled up the scroll, returned it to the attendant,
and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue
were fixed on Him, ²¹ and He began by saying, “Today this
Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”

- Luke, chapter four.

Moral Mondays CT/Fairfield County Statement of Principles

[Rabbi Michael Knopf](#)

March 9, 2026



Every Monday, a growing interfaith community gathers at the Stamford Superior Court to bear moral witness — peacefully, visibly, and persistently — in defense of immigrant dignity, the rule of law, and basic human rights.

We believe every person possesses infinite worth. We believe the law must protect everyone equally. And we believe that silence, in the face of injustice, is not an option.

Today we are releasing our formal Statement of Principles.

We invite you to read it — and to join us:

Mondays, 12:30–1:30 p.m., Stamford Superior Court, 123 Hoyt Street, Stamford, CT

A Statement of Principles

Moral Mondays CT/Fairfield County
Faithful Witness for Immigrant Justice

- We believe every person possesses infinite worth.
- We believe the law must protect everyone equally.
- We believe silence, in the face of injustice, is not an option.

Every Monday, 12:30–1:30 p.m. | Stamford Superior Court, 123 Hoyt Street, Stamford, CT



Who We Are

We are clergy and community members, people of faith and people of conscience — representing different spiritual paths but united by a single shared conviction: that every human being possesses inherent dignity, and that what happens to our neighbors is our concern.

Every Monday, we gather at the Stamford courthouse to bear moral witness — consistently, visibly, and peacefully affirming and amplifying that conviction with prayer, with song, and with presence. We believe that silence, in the presence of injustice, is not an option. We refuse to normalize what must not become normal, and we insist on a community with liberty and justice for all.

Why We Gather at the Courthouse

In the fall of 2025, ICE agents were engaged in enforcement operations in and near this courthouse. People who came here to navigate the legal system, to appear before a judge, to do

exactly what the law asks of them, were seized on these grounds. We began our vigil in response — to bear public witness, to raise awareness, and to provide protective presence.

We continue to stand here each week because this courthouse is where the law is supposed to mean something — where rights are supposed to be protected, where every person is supposed to find equal protection regardless of origin or status. We stand here to hold our leaders accountable to that promise: to insist, week after week, that law lives up to its own stated purpose.

We stand here to declare, plainly and publicly, that immigration enforcement which operates through fear, without transparency, without due process, is not upholding the law. It is betraying it. Moreover, we stand here to support and protect our neighbors, and to ensure equal justice for everyone in our community.

What We Believe



We believe that every person possesses inherent dignity — without exception. Our traditions name this differently: the image of God, the sanctity of life, the equal and infinite worth of every human being. Across every tradition represented here, and in the conscience of those with no particular religious affiliation, the conviction is the same: human dignity is not granted by governments and cannot be revoked by them. It belongs to every person — regardless of where they were born, how they arrived, or what documents they carry.

We believe that law exists to protect the vulnerable — or it has failed its purpose. We believe in law. We believe in borders and governance. And precisely because we take law seriously, we insist it apply equally — to every person, without exception. A legal system that operates by different rules for different classes of people is not upholding the rule of law. It is corrupting it. When enforcement operates without judicial oversight, without transparency, without accountability, it is not the law being served. It is power.

We believe that cruelty is not security and that fear is not strength. Seizing people without warning, separating families, treating entire communities as suspect — these do not make anyone safer. They destroy the trust that makes communities function and corrode the

moral fabric that gives law its legitimacy. A society that sacrifices the vulnerable in the name of security has not become safer. It has become less worthy of the name.

We believe that our neighbors are not abstractions. The people whose dignity we defend live here — in Stamford, in Fairfield County, in our neighborhoods. They work alongside us, worship alongside us, and raise their children here. When a father is seized without warning, when a child disappears into a system without transparency, when families live one knock on the door away from catastrophe — that is not a distant policy debate. It is a moral emergency in our own community. As Jesus teaches in the gospel of Matthew, “Just as you did it to one of the least of these, you did it to me.” (Matthew 25:40). How we treat the most vulnerable among us is the measure of who we are as individuals and as a community.

What We Demand

1. **We demand local and state noncooperation with federal immigration enforcement.** Our local police, courts, and public institutions exist to serve all residents — including the undocumented. Trust between communities and local government is a public safety asset that belongs to everyone. We demand that the state of Connecticut, Fairfield County, the City of Stamford and neighboring municipalities refuse to use local resources, personnel, or data as instruments of federal immigration enforcement.
2. **We demand due process and equal protection for all.** We demand that immigration enforcement comply with constitutional standards — judicial authorization, due process, and humane treatment — for every person on American soil. No agency and no administration stands above the law. Equal protection is not a privilege of citizenship. It is the foundation of law itself.
3. **We demand an end to enforcement designed to intimidate.** Arrests in courthouse parking garages, raids in homes and workplaces, operations designed to produce fear rather than uphold the law — these are not legitimate law enforcement. We demand that enforcement actions be conducted within constitutional limits, with judicial authorization, and with full public accountability.
4. **We demand protection of our asylum and refugee system.** The United States has legal and moral obligations to people fleeing persecution and violence. We demand those obligations be honored — not circumvented by administrative procedure or abandoned in the name of deterrence. The right to seek asylum is a legal protection that must be upheld.
5. **We demand dignity in word and deed.** We demand that public officials speak about and treat everyone — including but not limited to our immigrant neighbors — as the full human beings they are. Dehumanizing rhetoric is not merely offensive. It licenses cruelty and makes violence easier to justify. Words from those in power have consequences, and we hold our leaders accountable not only for what they do, but also for what they say.

Our Commitment

We commit ourselves to the moral imperative memorably expressed by the Hebrew prophet Micah, *"You have been told what is good, and what is required of you: only to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly"* (Micah 6:8). Therefore, we will return — every Monday, in rain and cold, in weeks when the news is overwhelming and weeks when it is quiet — until, in the words of the Hebrew prophet Amos, *"justice rolls down like waters, and righteousness like a mighty stream"* (Amos 5:24).

Adopted March 2026, Stamford, CT

Christian leaders condemn Christian nationalism in letter

By Jack Jenkins

Posted Aug 5, 2019

[Religion News Service] A group of Christian leaders has condemned Christian nationalism in a new letter, calling it a “persistent threat to both our religious communities and our democracy.”

The letter, [published](#) on July 29, comes from a coalition of largely liberal-leaning Christian leaders and thinkers. Entitled “Christians Against Christian Nationalism,” it calls on religious Americans to push back against fusions of religion and government they say are distortions of their faith.

“Christian nationalism seeks to merge Christian and American identities, distorting both the Christian faith and America’s constitutional democracy,” the statement reads in part. “Christian nationalism demands Christianity be privileged by the State and implies that to be a good American, one must be Christian. It often overlaps with and provides cover for white supremacy and racial subjugation. We reject this damaging political ideology and invite our Christian brothers and sisters to join us in opposing this threat to our faith and to our nation.”

The letter also suggests that Christian nationalism treats other religions as “second-class faiths.”

“As Christians, we must speak in one voice condemning Christian nationalism as a distortion of the gospel of Jesus and a threat to American democracy,” the letter states.

The letter was organized by the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty, a group dedicated to “protecting religious liberty for all and defending the separation of church and state.”

Amanda Tyler, the group’s executive director, said Christian nationalism is “not new” but that she and others at the BJC were inspired to pull the letter together in light of what she said was a spike in Christian nationalist rhetoric and efforts to [pass state-level legislation](#) that reflects Christian nationalist sentiment.

“Over the past several years, we seem to be stuck on high in Christian nationalism,” she said. “We’ve seen it in violent, even deadly ways. Christian nationalist views can inspire violence — even against houses of worship.”

Although the statement does not mention Donald Trump by name, the president and many of his evangelical supporters have been criticized by liberal Christians for [promoting various kinds of Christian nationalism](#) in speeches and public appearances throughout his first term.

One of Trump’s most vocal supporters, the Rev. Robert Jeffress, pastor of First Baptist Church in Dallas, preached [a sermon](#) in June 2018 insisting that America is a “Christian nation.” The First Baptist [choir](#) also took part in a 2017 Independence Day celebration with Trump, debuting an anthem called “Make America Great Again.” The [song](#), composed by a former minister of music at the church, repeatedly invokes Trump’s 2016 campaign slogan but does not mention God or religion.

Endorsers of the letter skew toward liberal-leaning mainline Christian voices and include prominent names such as the Most Rev. Michael Curry, presiding bishop of the Episcopal Church; the Rev. Elizabeth Eaton, presiding bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America; Sister Simone Campbell, head of Catholic social justice lobby NETWORK; Tony Campolo, founder of Red Letter Christians; Jim Winkler, president and general secretary of the National Council of Churches; Melissa Rogers, former executive director of the White House Office of Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships under President Barack Obama; the Rev. Jimmie Hawkins, director of the Presbyterian Church (USA)’s Office of Public Witness; and the Rev. Paul Baxley, executive coordinator of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

Over the course of the past week, the statement has already received an additional nearly 6,000 signatories, which Tyler said hailed from all 50 states and more than 30 different denominations.

“This is a grassroots campaign,” she said.

Other religious critics of Christian nationalism include the Rev. William Barber, co-chair of the Poor People’s Campaign. He has [repeatedly](#) decried the “false moral narrative of religious nationalism” during [public appearances](#) and has made opposing it one of five major issues at the center of the Poor People’s Campaign. During a [candidates forum](#) hosted by his group in June, Barber repeatedly asked candidates if they would advocate for a public debate on poverty as well as other subjects — including religious nationalism. (All nine candidates said yes.)

Polls show criticisms of Christian nationalism are likely to resonate with a broad swath of Americans. In April, a Morning Consult survey [found](#) that roughly half of registered voters (47%) view Christian nationalism as “a threat to the vital interests of the country,” and 63% of Democrats said the same. Among Republicans, only 35% felt similarly.

Conservative voices such as Washington Times opinion editor Cheryl Chumley have dismissed the statement, calling into question the faith of the signers.

“This is a campaign filled with self-proclaiming Christians whose Christian ideals and beliefs are, in strict biblical teaching, very un-Christian,” Chumley [wrote](#), referencing signatories that include the heads of at least two historic Christian denominations.

Chumley criticized signers who have affirmed LGBTQ identities and relationships.

“If these CACN types see the Bible as their rally call to fight against borders — which is another way of bucking the rule of law — why can’t they see it’s this same Bible that makes clear homosexuality, to God, is an abomination?”

Tyler pushed back on the criticism.

“I don’t think anyone should be challenging the religious identity of the nearly 6,000 Americans who have said they agree with this,” she said.

As a followup, Tyler said she is working on podcasts focusing on the subject of Christian nationalism.

“We wanted to start somewhere and see what kind of resonance this would have with American Christians,” she said. “We’ve seen it has a lot.”

bjconline.org/christians-against-christian-nationalism/statement/

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) Conference of Bishops Emphasizes the Need to Speak the Truth

October 1, 2024

In a perfect garden, created by God for the sake of humanity, evil entered in the form of deception and lies. Christians refer to this story, found in the biblical book of Genesis, as the *fall of humanity*. This foray into human sin began when Adam and Eve, the first humans created in the image of God, were deceived.

Humans have contended with the powers of deception ever since.

Yet we are a people who know and proclaim the power of God at work in the world. We proclaim the power of Jesus Christ, God in the flesh, the one who said, "I am the way, the truth and the life" (John 14:6).

We know that the power of truth is greater than the power of deceit.

We, the members of the Conference of Bishops of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, speak with one voice to condemn the hateful, deceptive, violent speech that has too readily found a place in our national discourse. We lament the ways this language has led to hate-fueled action.

We refuse to accept the ongoing normalization of lies and deceit.

We recommit ourselves to speaking the truth and pointing to the one who is truth. We find courage in our collegiality and implore the members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, as well as our partners and friends, to join us as we:

- Pledge to be vigilant guardians of truth, refusing to perpetuate lies or half-truths that further corrode the fabric of our society.
- Commit to rigorous fact-checking, honoring God's command to "test everything; hold fast to what is good" (1 Thessalonians 5:21).
- Reject the use of humor that normalizes falsehood, remembering that our speech should "always be gracious" (Colossians 4:6).
- Boldly advocate for the marginalized and oppressed, emulating Christ's love for the least among us.
- Courageously interrupt hate speech, standing firm in the knowledge that all are created in God's image.
- Lean in with curiosity, engage with those who think differently and "put the best construction on our neighbor's action" (Luther's explanation of the Eighth Commandment).
- Amplify voices of truth.

Emboldened by the Holy Spirit, may we resist deception and lift up the truth that all members of humanity are created in the image of God.

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all as we respond to the Spirit's invitation into this intentional commitment against deception and for truth.

In Christ,

The Conference of Bishops of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Why I Spent 90 Minutes Steaming an American Flag

By Nadia Bolz-Weber thecorners.substack.com

April 13, 2026



Yesterday I spent a good hour and a half steaming the creases out of an American flag. I slowly moved our cheap \$24 steamer over each inch of the 5x9.5 cotton, removing its creases and thinking of my father and the 23 years he left for work each morning in his crisp blue uniform. While proud of his military career, and maintaining great affection for a childhood spent on Air Force bases, I'm not normally an American-flag kind of girl. So yesterday I was surprised by how very beautiful I found it as a physical object in my hands and on our dining table. The sturdy fabric. The rich, saturated crimson and blue. The perfect embroidered stars.

Beautiful.

But if I see a pick-up truck with American flags flying behind its cab while belching diesel fumes into the street, I do not think that person has a commitment to liberty and justice for all. I think, *There are so many people in my life who would not feel safe around that person.* Because the distance between what I think this flag should represent—a continually unfurling commitment to the dignity of all, protection from tyranny for both our citizens and our allies, and a government of the people, by the people—and what it is so often used to hide behind—the anxious and delusional so-called supremacy of a single race and a single religion, the contraction of rights, a cultish tyranny pawned off as patriotism—makes it difficult to claim this symbol as my own.

But I do love my country, damnit. I love that we set aside the most beautiful parts of this place to belong to all of us in our state and national parks. I love how many languages we speak. How many places we come from. How many ways we pray. I love that there are truths in the U.S. Constitution that even those who penned it could not possibly have understood the full power of.

I want to think of these things when I see the stars and stripes. I want to think of Sojourner Truth and Betty Soskin, Jimmy Carter and Dolly Parton, Amelia Earhart and Chita Rivera. I'm exhausted by seeing Old Glory and thinking instead of those who celebrate removing any mention of the Tuskegee Airmen from the Smithsonian's website.

I want to take back my country's flag.

And the term patriot, while we're at it.

Why can it not be considered a form of patriotism to believe so deeply in what the United States of America has always said it is about that we refuse to settle for less? That we refuse to abandon this country to those who support policies based in little more than small-mindedness and self-interest?

And maybe this is why I keep thinking about interpretation. About who gets to say what a symbol means. About who benefits from calling their reading the only faithful one.

I'm not a terribly sophisticated political thinker, and I do not make a practice of writing about that part of life. Others are far more skilled and informed than I am. Not to mention I am prone to a wee bit of blinding rage, which is no good for anybody, especially me. So I try to stay in my lane. But my lane and this conversation overlap in this way: "constitutional originalism"—the belief that the most faithful way to interpret the Constitution is to try to discern what the framers intended it to mean—feels eerily similar to the belief that the most faithful way to interpret the Bible is to say GOD wrote it, so we should take every contradictory word of it literally through a so-called "plain reading." I'm equally cynical about both, since the loudest proponents of these views have always been those who just so happen to benefit most from those particular interpretations.

Both approaches present themselves as simply "taking the text seriously." But in practice, both can smuggle ideology in through the back door by pretending interpretation is not interpretation. And they get to hide behind these texts and say, Don't be mad at me—this is what THE FRAMERS or GOD says. And then, as anyone who has studied history can attest, atrocities easily ensue.

But texts do not act by themselves. People interpret them. And when interpreters privilege the authority of dead men over the dignity of living people, the result is often that the vulnerable pay the price while the powerful call it faithfulness.

Not to mention that once a reading is labeled “plain” or “original,” dissent can be framed not just as disagreement, but as rebellion against God, law, order, or reality itself. That rhetorical move gives enormous cover to existing power.

But I DO dissent.

The biblical text, when treated as a Living Word and not simply a dead policy manual, allows meaning, comfort, and wisdom to unfold in both old and new ways for each community that studies it. It allows the Bible to surprise us, live in us, even interpret us.

Some may be tempted to walk away from the Bible altogether, and I understand why. I do. But I beg you to reconsider. Because as I’ve said before, scripture and theology are too potent to be left in the hands of those who only use them to justify their dominance over other people. We cannot cede our scriptures to them.

And perhaps the same can be said of the symbols and founding documents of this country. The cost of rejecting them feels too high when reimagining, redefining, and reclaiming are still available to us.

This last December, for his 83rd birthday, I gave my father a leather-bound copy of the U.S. Constitution and other foundational documents—inaugural addresses, Federalist Papers, speeches by Frederick Douglass and Sojourner Truth, and, for some reason, the constitution of the New York Knickerbockers baseball club. He got a little teary, held it to his chest, and said thank you.

Maybe he understood something I am only now trying to say out loud: that love of country is not the same thing as uncritical loyalty. Sometimes it looks more like grief. Sometimes more like argument. Sometimes more like refusing to let a beautiful thing be used to bless our worst instincts.

So yesterday I patiently steamed the creases from an American flag and folded it into a perfect blue triangle on my dining room table, allowing myself to be affected by the beauty of this object before it is handed to my mother at my father’s memorial service.

And so here I am—it’s 4 o’clock in the morning—feeling unexpectedly tender toward a piece of folded cotton on my table, and still unwilling to surrender what it could mean. Maybe that, too, is a form of patriotism AND Christian faith: to hold something gently, grieve what has been done in its name, and still refuse to give up on what it could yet mean.

This last 8 months have been a doozie. I’ve had to step back from public life in most ways other than The Corners. I’m still here.

So thanks for sticking with me. Sending my love, Nadia.

Bishop Eaton Statement on OBBBA's Passage

July 3, 2025

“Whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all and especially for those of the family of faith.” —Galatians 6:10

July 3, 2025

Dear church,

Today the U.S. Congress passed a budget package that will have a monumental impact on many in the country and on our ministries and communities. The scope of the One Big Beautiful Bill Act is generation-defining and life-altering for many, with provisions that will harm the well-being of local communities and the lives of many individuals for decades to come.

This church teaches that government has limits but fundamentally should seek the well-being of all. In at least three obvious ways, the bill undercuts that aspiration. This bill:

- **Abandons our commitments to people who are sick or who live with financial hardship.** For many decades now, our nation has made commitments to come alongside people when they are in their worst moments, through Medicaid, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits and other programs. Our church is on record in supporting such expressions of care and compassion. These lifelines are now endangered by massive cuts and policy changes. More than 17 million people could lose health coverage over the coming years, and [22.3 million U.S. families](#) will lose some or all of their SNAP benefits. These cuts will make our nation sicker and more hungry, disproportionately impacting rural communities by putting hospitals and other community health providers at long-term risk of closure. According to the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office (CBO), the bill transfers wealth from those in the bottom 10% of income to those in the top 10% of income in our nation, shamefully funding tax cuts for the wealthiest Americans on the backs of the most vulnerable.
- **Threatens family and community stability.** As a church, we have worked for many years for comprehensive immigration reform, just asylum policies and a pathway to citizenship for immigrant neighbors. This bill abandons compassion by more than tripling federal spending on deportation and detention and by adding over [\\$170 billion for immigration and border](#)

[enforcement](#). This goes far beyond the reasonable goal of ensuring a safe and orderly border and risks tearing apart millions of families, communities and churches.

- **Harms future generations.** This bill compromises our children's futures by recklessly increasing the national debt and exposing our next generations to dirtier air and a hotter climate. The CBO projects that it will add between \$3 trillion and \$4 trillion to the national debt over the next 10 years. Such excessive spending will worsen, not improve, the fiscal sustainability of our government and the financial prospects of future generations. It also halts and reverses progress toward a clean-energy transition by reversing nearly all the clean-energy tax credits and other incentives passed in the Inflation Reduction Act. This will undo our country's efforts to mitigate climate change and preserve creation for our heirs.

In the Galatians text for this coming **Sunday**, Paul calls the church to do what is good, not simply for other Christians but for all. Luther echoes this in the Small Catechism when he explains the Fifth Commandment, "You are not to kill." "We are to fear and love God," Luther writes, "so that we neither endanger nor harm the lives of our neighbors, but instead help and support them in all of life's needs" (*The Book of Concord*, ed. Kolb and Wengert, p. 352).

As a church, we face this moment together with resolve, rooted in our trust in God, to work for the good of all as these policies begin to impact our congregations and communities. I ask you to:

- Pray with and for those made newly vulnerable, asking for God's presence and power.
- Identify community and [interreligious partners](#) to identify the impacts of this legislation and seek common approaches in your communities.
- Engage in faithful public witness through your networks as well as [ELCA federal advocacy](#) and the [ELCA-affiliated state public policy office network](#).
- Follow and support the work of [ELCA World Hunger](#) and [Lutheran Disaster Response](#).
- [Become part of the ELCA AMMPARO network to walk with migrant neighbors](#).

In peace,

The Rev. Elizabeth A. Eaton
Presiding Bishop
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

A Letter from the Bishop Gustafson Regarding the 2016 Elections

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ in the Central States Synod,

As our country prepares for elections in the fall it is easy to become entangled in the drama, passion, and anxiety that national political campaigns produce. Therefore, as we respect our differing political convictions it is also necessary for us as followers of Jesus Christ to remind ourselves of truths we believe are essential.

Many in our country are suffering from poverty, injustice, and a deep sense of loss. Issues of race, economic inequity, and a nostalgic longing for the past lead some to wonder if they have a place in America, if the future holds any promise for them, if those in authority feel any real compassion for them. When people – regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, or political preference – feel this way they become the natural prey of those who seek to manipulate and agitate others for their own political gain.

As people of faith we remember that God has called us to care for the strangers in our land. As Lutheran Christians we embrace the fact that many of our own ancestors came to this country as refugees and immigrants seeking to build a better life. We understand that people of good faith can and do differ on matters of national policy and national security, but we reject misleading rhetoric that seeks to blame our nation's ills on new arrivals.

Specifically, we Lutherans, many of us of German descent, remember that words can have lethal consequences when they are used to enflame passions and direct those passions against others.

With memories of Fascist attacks on Jews relatively fresh, we believe it is irresponsible and dangerous to demonize Muslims and the Muslim religion.

We reject language that encourages fear and hatred of any of God's children. Instead, we remember that when we confirm our faith we subscribe to a high standard, to "fear and love God so that we do not. . .slander, or lie about our neighbor, but defend him, speak well of him, and explain his actions in the kindest way." (*Luther's Small Catechism*)

As Luther reminded us we are freed in Christ, but that freedom also binds us to one another in service and compassion. So we are grateful that God has placed us in this country at just this time, when there is so much that is to be enjoyed and so much to be shared. We also remember that there is One to whom we all must give account, this same One, Jesus Christ, to whom all human power and authority will one day give way.

Our Lutheran church is deeply rooted in this adventurous enterprise called America and has produced valuable resources that can enrich our thinking and our acting in these complex times.

I encourage you to take advantage these resources by clicking on the links below and I pray for God's blessing and guidance for us all as we find our way into God's future:

[Social Teaching Documents](#)

[Church and Society Social Statement](#)

[Talking Together and Discernment](#)

[Publicly Engaged Church](#)

[ELCA Advocacy Action Center](#)

[Called to Be a Public Church](#)

[ELCA Votes](#)

Peace and joy,

Roger Gustafson

Bishop

Central States Synod-ELCA

Section Four: Antisemitism

⁴Your foes have roared within Your meeting place;
they have unfurled their banners as signs,
⁷They have burned Your sanctuary to the ground;
they have defiled the dwelling place of Your Name.
⁸They said in their hearts,
“We will crush them completely.”
They burned down every place
where God met us in the land.

²²Rise up, O God; defend Your cause!

- Psalm 74

“Only he who cries out for the Jews may also sing
Gregorian chant.” (Marginal note to Psalm 74:8)

-Dietrich Bonhoeffer, November 9, 1938

Today “Authoritarian movements themselves have claimed the mantle of fighting antisemitism.”

A DIZZYING INVERSION AND AN URGENT PAUSE:

Reading Trachtenberg in the 21st Century | [T'ruah](#)

By Ben Lorber

2024

*The following is an excerpt from “**Fragments III: Democracy**,” a journal from T’ruah.*

This is part two of a debate across time between author Ben Lorber and Rabbi Joshua Trachtenberg about American Jews’ strategies to resist antisemitism. [Read part one here.](#)

When Rabbi Joshua Trachtenberg contributed his 1937 essay “Stop Fascism: Preserve Democracy” to an anthology called “How to Combat Anti-Semitism in America,” storm clouds of fascism were darkening Europe. Jews faced mounting persecution in Nazi Germany, and fascist movements were on the march in America — but the worst was yet to come.

In this early essay, the 33-year-old Trachtenberg describes antisemitism in America as a form of oppression “indigenous to our economic system, which goads the underprivileged” to scapegoat Jews for “the iniquities of the system itself.” In response, he calls for Jews to go and teach gentiles why fighting antisemitism and defending democracy is in everyone’s interest.

(Today) ...Authoritarian movements themselves have claimed the mantle of fighting antisemitism. Nationalists from Donald Trump and GOP House Speaker Mike Johnson to Hungary’s Viktor Orban and Israel’s Benjamin Netanyahu understand the strategic value of the idea that “to protect themselves they must protect the Jew first,” yet most Jews, to them, are primarily symbols or tools. **Their real enthusiasm is for supporting the policies of the Israeli radical Right.**

Thus, the fight for “Jews” has become a central plank in the authoritarian agenda. Even while they peddle antisemitism, these Right leaders pose as the greatest friends Jews have ever had. MAGA politicians like Marjorie Taylor Greene rail against “Rothschild space lasers” one moment and smear Jewish-led justice organizations as antisemitic the next. In a single breath, Christian Zionist leaders like Sean Feucht announce rallies ostensibly to protect Jewish students, while pining for the day of Rapture, when Jews and other non-believers will burn in hellfire.³

Trachtenberg advised Jews to utilize “the legislatures, the law-courts, the boycotts, [and] a relentless propaganda” to fight antisemitism. Today authoritarian forces, manipulating legitimate fears amidst rising antisemitism, seize upon efforts to enshrine the controversial International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of antisemitism into law, knowing it will ease the way for wider restrictions on dissenting speech.⁴ They harass universities with frivolous complaints designed to pressure administrators to restrict academic freedom⁵ and employ right-wing media to condition millions of readers and viewers to see Muslims and progressives as terrorists and fifth-columnists — worthy of criminalization, deportation, and political violence. Democratic leaders or Jewish institutions joining in these efforts unwittingly strengthen anti-democratic forces that threaten Jews.⁶

In the years when Trachtenberg wrote “Stop Fascism: Preserve Democracy,” Jewish defense groups such as the ADL seemed poised to be key players in grassroots anti-fascist organizing across American civil society — disrupting fascist organizations, chasing Nazis off the streets, and launching a vigorous defense of liberal democracy.

But as the threat of fascist movements gave way to the threat of American McCarthyism, and as significant numbers of American Jews were given entree into racial and class privilege, groups such as the ADL began to reflect a rightward arc. Where once Jewish communal institutions cooperated to monitor actively antisemitic factions in the American Right, the postwar years saw these groups embracing surveillance of progressives and advocating for causes that wore away at multiracial coalitions. In the 1950s, as the Right persecuted progressives and disproportionately targeted Jewish, LGBTQ, and Black activists in its McCarthyist witchhunt, the ADL and American Jewish Committee not only failed to defend Jews who were targeted; they opened their files to McCarthy’s government agencies and engaged in their own witchhunts against suspected communists in Jewish institutions. After the 1967 Six Day War, the ADL devoted increasing resources to opposing anti occupation activists in progressive and Arab-American communities. In 1978, the ADL, American Jewish Committee, and American

Jewish Congress were among a minority filing Supreme Court briefs in opposition to affirmative action.⁷ While they cited the ignoble history of antisemitic quotas to make their case, a deeper unease lurked: a sense that in areas of opportunity such as education, “more Blacks must necessarily result in fewer Jews.”⁸

Today, **as major Jewish communal leaders invite notorious antisemites to share the stage at the March for Israel**, call for the National Guard to crack down on students protesting for Palestinian rights, and honor Trump’s son-in-law while telling Jewish audiences, “I *really don’t* care how you vote,” the consequences of this pivot are glaring.⁹ Trachtenberg would have found it unimaginable, as he wrote in the shadow of Hitler, that nearly a century later, major Jewish leaders would openly ally with authoritarians in the name of fighting antisemitism.

...

Fighting fascism and antisemitism still requires building “a true ‘united front’” of marginalized groups “on a broad basis of defense of American liberties,” as Trachtenberg put it. But today’s climate complicates the work of coalition-building in ways he could scarcely have anticipated, and not only because major Jewish organizations have driven wedges between Jews and the other marginalized groups and social movements who could be our allies. It’s also complicated because Jews feel real reason to distrust some of those potential allies.

The anxieties that many Jews already felt about antisemitic currents within parts of the Left, and elsewhere in society, have become more pointed since October 7. Amidst widespread protest, instances of unaddressed antisemitic conspiracism, disregard for the humanity of Israeli Jews, and Manichean binary thinking have drawn headlines and condemnation. **Chasms have deepened not only between Jews and potential allies, but also within the kinds of broad liberal-left pro democracy coalitions** that Trachtenberg prescribes. We know that as these coalitions are divided, the likelihood of major gains for authoritarians in the U.S. grows stronger. But the work of repair feels daunting. We don’t know where to begin, and it is easy to despair.

Yet the divisions between Jews and our potential allies are not as unshakeable as they might seem. **Perhaps no divisive tactic has been so consistent as attempts to paint non-Jewish progressive women of color as our enemies — even as antisemitism from white male leaders of the Right passes without remark. The case of Tamika Mallory offers a revealing example** of how mutable such divisions really are. In 2018, Mallory, a leader of the Women’s

March, drew widespread criticism after it was revealed she had attended an event led by Louis Farrakhan, the antisemitic and anti-LGBTQ leader of the Nation of Islam.¹⁰

The resulting public outcry provoked sharp divisions among supporters of the Women’s March — a major gain for MAGA. But Mallory had pre-existing, mutually committed relationships with Jewish activists. At the peak of crisis, these relationships made a difference. During a time when she faced consistently racist public attacks, **Mallory had to discern valid critiques of antisemitism from bad-faith smears.** Through in-depth conversations with fellow activist Sophie Ellman-Golan and others, Mallory deepened her own thinking about the need to fight antisemitism, and the march organizers rethought how to include Jewish women in the march.¹¹

A year later, **Mallory spoke to The Breakfast Club, an influential radio show for audiences of color. “[Antisemitism is] a real, serious problem,” she said.** “It’s one that Black folks particularly need to pay attention to — because there are forces that want to be able to use anti-Black racism and antisemitism within the Jewish and Black communities to keep us apart. Because God forbid we ever pooled our power together and really, really started working together.”¹²

...

Even as they move further into the territory of the Right, **mainstream Jewish defense organizations continue to use the “go and teach” method that Trachtenberg and others advised. Yet is this method working?** Rather than responding to the rise in Palestine solidarity movements with a full-court-press of hot-pink JewBelong billboards, billionaire-funded Super Bowl ads, and legislative campaigns to restrict speech, what would happen if our institutional leaders paused to “go and learn” and “go and act”? What would happen if we approached marginalized groups and justice movements with openness and curiosity, asking questions like: What are the actual demands that student protesters are making, so often mischaracterized in the media? Why do marginalized groups see their own struggles reflected in the Palestinian demand for dignity, justice, and freedom? What does it feel like for them, when those in power smear their activism as antisemitic in order to shut it down?

Political education and awareness-raising around antisemitism remains vital. But unless it is grounded in a meaningful, consistent commitment to collective liberation — to building a world where all forms of oppression are defeated, and every group can be safe and thrive — it doesn’t meet what this moment requires, and it is unlikely to go very far.

Antisemitism is not a “disease,” an “epidemic,” a malaria-infested swamp, or some other force of nature to be tamed, quarantined, or immunized against, as Trachtenberg often describes and as many Jewish leaders today repeat.¹³ Rather, like any form of oppression, it is a creation of all-too-human hands, built and designed for all-too-human purposes, that can be defeated through human collective action. Rather than approaching the fight against antisemitism as technocrats, scientists, or social engineers, we should approach it as movement-builders: sleeves rolled to our elbows, ready to put in the patient work — alongside our partners — of transforming society, one conversation, organizing campaign, collective action at a time.

This approach recognizes that our liberation is fundamentally bound up with that of all other oppressed people, and it’s an approach I think Trachtenberg would agree with. In a time of crisis such as this, when stopping fascism within the U.S. is even more urgent than it was at the time of Trachtenberg’s writing, and strengthening relationships across difference is more complicated, it can feel difficult to pause and envision such an approach. But then, as now, it remains the only way forward.

BEN LORBER (he/him) is a writer, researcher, and educator. As Senior Research Analyst at Political Research Associates, a movement-facing think tank, Lorber helps progressives understand and fight antisemitism and white nationalism. Lorber is co author, with Shane Burley, of “Safety Through Solidarity: A Radical Guide to Fighting Antisemitism” (2024).

<https://truah.org/resources/fragments3-democracy-ben-lorber-a-dizzying-inversion-and-an-urgent-pause/>

A Pastoral Word in Response to Acts of Antisemitism

From Bishop Kevin L. Strickland

Southeastern Synod, ELCA

March 14, 2026

Dear Beloved Ones,

Grace and peace to you in the name of Jesus Christ, the One who calls us to love our neighbor and to seek the peace of the city where we dwell (Jeremiah 29:7).

In recent days and months, we have seen a disturbing rise in acts of antisemitism across the United States. Jewish communities have endured threats, vandalism, harassment, violence, and rhetoric that wounds the dignity of our neighbors and spreads fear in places that should be safe for worship, learning, and community life. As Christians, we must speak clearly: antisemitism is sin. It is a betrayal of the God who created all people in the divine image, and it is a denial of the commandment to love our neighbor as ourselves.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America has long confessed the church's historic failures and sins toward the Jewish people. We remember with humility the ways Christian theology and preaching have contributed to antisemitism through the centuries, including harmful interpretations of scripture and the writings of Martin Luther later in his life. Because of this history, we carry a particular responsibility to reject antisemitism wherever it appears and to stand publicly with our Jewish siblings. Silence is not an option for followers of Jesus Christ.

The apostle Paul reminds us in Romans 12:15, "Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep." Today we weep with our Jewish neighbors who are living with fear and grief. We stand beside them in solidarity and prayer. Their safety matters to us. Their flourishing matters to us. Their place in our shared communities is a gift and blessing.

Scripture also reminds us of the sacred relationship we share with the Jewish people. In Romans 11:17–18, Paul writes that Gentile Christians are grafted into the rich root of Israel's covenant with God. Our faith is inseparable from the story of the Jewish people. Jesus himself was Jewish. The prophets, the psalms, and the promises of God come to us through the people of Israel. To harm Jewish communities is to dishonor the very roots of our faith.

As the Southeastern Synod of the ELCA, we reaffirm our commitment to building relationships of trust and mutual respect with Jewish communities across Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi, and Tennessee. I encourage our congregations and leaders to consider ways to embody that

commitment in tangible ways:

- Pray regularly for Jewish communities and for the peace of all people.
- Speak clearly against antisemitic words, conspiracy theories, and hateful rhetoric when they appear.
- Build relationships with local synagogues and Jewish organizations in your community.
- Offer solidarity and presence when Jewish neighbors experience threats or attacks.
- Educate our congregations about the history and dangers of antisemitism and the church's responsibility to resist it.

In this moment when fear and division threaten the fabric of our communities, the church is called to be a witness to God's justice, mercy, and peace. We do not stand against hatred simply because it is socially unacceptable; we stand against it because the Gospel compels us. Christ calls us to be people who resist violence, protect the vulnerable, and proclaim the dignity of every human being.

The prophet Micah reminds us of God's call: *"What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?"* (Micah 6:8).

May we live that calling with courage and compassion.

Let us pray:

Gracious and merciful God, you are the Creator of every people and the source of all peace.

We pray for our Jewish neighbors and siblings in faith. Surround them with safety, strength, and hope. Heal the wounds of hatred and fear that scar our communities. Give us courage to confront antisemitism and every form of bigotry. Make your church a witness to justice, compassion, and reconciliation for the sake of the world you love. Through Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace. Amen.

In Christ's service and hope,

The Rev. Dr. Kevin L. Strickland
Bishop, Southeastern Synod, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Link ["Don't Blame the Jews"](#) and more videos from Pastor Jim

Bishop Eaton Issues Statement on Fatal Shooting of Two Israeli Embassy Staff in Washington, D.C.

May 22, 2025

CHICAGO — We of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America join our ecumenical and interreligious partners in expressing deep concern and sadness over the deadly shooting of two Israeli Embassy staff outside an event in Washington, D.C. This is yet another example of the rising, deadly scourge of anti-Semitism in our society.

As a church, we have declared that “we recognize in anti-Semitism a contradiction and an affront to the Gospel, a violation of our hope and calling, and we pledge this church to oppose the deadly working of such bigotry, both within our own circles and in the society around us” (“A Declaration of the ELCA to the Jewish Community,” 1994).

We are profoundly disturbed that these killings occurred in the context of an event hosted by the American Jewish Committee that featured speakers from the Multifaith Alliance and the humanitarian organization IsraAID. These speakers were discussing avenues for ensuring that humanitarian aid reaches Gaza, precisely the kind of collaboration that is needed, and that the ELCA supports, as the people of Gaza face starvation and intentional mass displacement.

We join in praying for the families, colleagues and communities of Yaron Lischinsky and Sarah Milgrim, for the Jewish people in our communities who live in fear, and for the people of Gaza, who desperately need humanitarian aid to stay alive. We continue to call for a ceasefire, for the release of hostages and those being detained, for access to humanitarian aid, for rejecting violence as a means of solving the ongoing destruction of the Holy Land, and for recommitments to dialogue, reconciliation and humanization. Above all, we pray for God’s peace and justice to prevail for all people.

The Rev. Elizabeth A. Eaton

Presiding Bishop, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

What Christians Need to Understand About Pharisees

[Rabbi Sandra Lawson](#)

May 08, 2026

I started drafting this piece before I left for Chicago last week.

I was there for the inaugural board meeting of Project Shema, an organization I am excited about and will be writing more about soon. On the way home I got stuck overnight in the Chicago airport — weather. Made it home, turned around, flew to New York, and spent two days at a Jewish organizing retreat with nine Jewish social justice organizations from across the country doing extraordinary work.

I carried this piece the whole time.

Because before any of that happened, I watched Pete Hegseth, the Secretary of Defense, the man pushing to rename the Pentagon the Department of War, stand at a government podium and call journalists, members of the media, Pharisees. And then I watched Senator Jacky Rosen, who is Jewish, confront him directly.

Watch the exchange here.

She told him to his face: Pharisees is a problematic and historically weaponized term that casts Jewish communities as hypocritical and morally corrupt.

He laughed. Said it was a pretty accurate term. Stood by it.

Hegseth's use of the word Pharisees in this context is antisemitic. I'm going to explain why.

But first, over the years, many Christians, particularly those I have encountered online, have used the word Pharisee, thinking they were agreeing with something I said or supporting a point I was making. They meant well. They did not realize the word carries centuries of anti-Jewish distortion. That they were repeating a slur without knowing it.

This piece is for them too. And for any Jewish readers who were never taught this history, which is more of us than you might think.

Who the Pharisees Actually Were

Pharisees were a Jewish intellectual movement that emerged around the second century BCE. They were teachers and scholars. Interpreters of Torah. They believed that Jewish law was meant to be lived, debated, and applied to everyday life, not just practiced by priests in the Temple.

When the Romans destroyed the Temple in Jerusalem in 70 CE, the sacrificial system that had been the center of Jewish life was gone. There was no more Temple. No more priests performing the rituals. By every measure, Judaism should not have survived.

It survived because of the Pharisees.

By the time the Temple was destroyed the Pharisees were already building something different. A Judaism built on study, prayer, and community. A Judaism that could live anywhere. A Judaism that did not require a building to remain intact.

The rabbis who gathered after the Temple's destruction and built what we now call Rabbinic Judaism, the Judaism that is practiced today, were heirs to the Pharisees. The



Talmud, the central text of Jewish law and thought, is a Pharisaic document.

Hillel was most likely a Pharisee. Rabbi Akiva also most likely a Pharisee

And every rabbi alive today, including me, traces their ordination and authority through that line. It is a chain of hands on shoulders stretching back two millennia, from teacher to student, generation to generation. When he spits on the word Pharisee, he is spitting on that entire chain.

RRC Rabbinical Ordination 2018

How a Jewish Sect Became a Slur

I am a rabbi, not a Christian theologian. I am not going to tell you what early Christianity intended. What I can tell you is what Jewish people experienced as a result.

What Jewish people experienced, over centuries of living as a minority inside Christian Europe, was a specific portrayal of the Pharisees being used against us. The Pharisees were cast as hypocrites, rigid legalists, enemies of truth and goodness. That portrayal became part of a broader theology called supersessionism which in plain English, is the belief that Christianity replaced Judaism, that God's covenant with the Jewish people had been cancelled and replaced by something new. In that framework, Jewish practice was obsolete and left behind.

The Pharisees became the symbol of everything that refused to be replaced. The villain of the story.

And over centuries, as that portrayal spread and hardened, the cartoon version of the Pharisees, the scheming, hypocritical, morally corrupt, enemies of truth, became the cartoon version of Jews. Full stop.

It was preached from pulpits. Taught to children. It built the cultural foundation for laws that stripped Jews of rights, expulsions from entire countries, and violence that never really stopped.

It fed pogroms.

It fed worse.

The word Pharisee carried all of that history into the modern era. When you call someone a Pharisee you are reaching into a well that has been poisoning Jewish life for two thousand years.

This is why well-meaning Christians who use the term without knowing its history are still causing harm. **The word does not become safe because the intent was innocent. The history travels with it.**

The Secretary of War

I am a veteran. I served, and I come from a family of people who served. So when I say I am deeply troubled by the direction Pete Hegseth wants to take the military, I am speaking as someone who understands what it means to serve in the military.

Let's be clear: Pete Hegseth did not say this at a church. He said it from a Pentagon podium.

Worth noting: the Department of Defense has not officially been renamed. But Hegseth has publicly pushed to rebrand it the Department of War. The intention is clear even if the paperwork isn't done. He has said the military needs to recover its lethality and its warrior ethos. The name he wants signals how he sees American power, not as a force for protection and deterrence, but as an instrument of war, full stop. That context matters for everything that follows.

Hegseth has described journalists, Democratic lawmakers, and anyone questioning the administration's conduct of the war in Iran as Pharisees. His exact words: the so-called and self-appointed elites of their time who witnessed miracles and still opposed goodness in pursuit of their agenda.

Notice the word miracles.

When a government official frames his administration's policies as miracles and its critics as enemies of goodness, he has left the territory of politics. That logic moves toward theocracy, toward the claim that to disagree with this administration is to disagree with God. That is exactly the move Christian nationalism makes: wrapping political power in divine sanction so that opposition becomes not just wrong but ungodly.

Translation of everything Hegseth said: the people who criticize us are like the Jews who rejected Jesus.

Senator Rosen saw it immediately. She called it what it was. She called him an antisemite to his face.

He laughed and doubled down.

Why I Take This Personally

I am a Pharisee.

Not as a metaphor. As a matter of fact. My rabbinic authority, my ordination, my entire tradition runs through the movement Pete Hegseth just used as a slur for his political opponents.

So for the Christians I encounter online who have used this word thinking you were on my side. I know you meant well. I know you were not trying to invoke two thousand years of anti-Jewish violence. But the word carries that history whether we know it or not. The slur was built on the erasure of Jewish teachers, Jewish scholars, Jewish survival. Every time it gets used, it reinforces the idea that Jewish equals corrupt, Jewish equals hypocrite, Jewish equals enemy of truth.

The word does not become safe because the intent was innocent. The history travels with it.

Now you know. And knowing changes things.

Because when a government official uses this language, from a Pentagon podium, about his political enemies, while laughing at a Jewish senator who tried to correct him, he is signaling something to people who understand the signal. He is casting his opponents in a role that has historically ended very badly for Jewish people and for everyone standing near them.

Here is what I want to leave you with.

The Pharisaic tradition has a name for the kind of argument Senator Rosen was making. It is called *machloket l'shem shamayim* — argument for the sake of heaven. Argument for the sake of truth. It means disagreement pursued in genuine service of what is true and what is good. The Talmud holds this up as one of the highest forms of human engagement. The Pharisees did not silence debate. They built a civilization on it.

Pete Hegseth laughed at a Jewish senator doing exactly that.

We keep arguing for the sake of heaven, for the sake of truth until it matters.

If pieces like this are useful to you, naming things, telling the truth, getting the history right, consider becoming a paid subscriber. This work is reader-supported, and your support makes it possible to keep writing.

Section Five:

Immigration Enforcement

Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame,
With conquering limbs astride from land to land;
Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand
A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame
Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name
Mother of Exiles. From her beacon-hand
Glow world-wide welcome; her mild eyes command
The air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame.
"Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp!" cries she
With silent lips. "Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"

- Emma Lazarus

Bishop Curry Joins Faith Leaders in Letter to Congress Regarding the National Outcry Against I.C.E.

February 9, 2026

Dear member of Congress,

Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? (Isaiah 58:6).

The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the native-born among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God (Leviticus 19:34).

United in faith and rooted in love, the nine undersigned Christian denominations and organizations composed of millions of people across the United States, grieve the ongoing assaults on the dignity, rights and well-being of our immigrant members and neighbors through aggressive immigration enforcement.

Our churches have decried denial of due process and recent violence by federal law enforcement agents, including the shootings of Keith Porter Jr., Renee Nicole Good and Alex Pretti by federal immigration agents. We call for investigation, accountability and justice in these cases.

We also see this as a critical moment to legislate immigration policies that are just, humane and respectful of the dignity of immigrants who, like all people, are beloved children of God. We are grateful that Congress heard the national outcry and did not vote hastily for a Department of Homeland Security (DHS) budget that would have provided additional unchecked funding to ICE and other immigration enforcement agencies.

As you negotiate meaningful reforms in the coming weeks, we urge you to prioritize language that preserves the freedom to worship, to live in safety regardless of race or background, to love our neighbors, and to meet the basic needs and rights of all.

In particular, we ask that you emphasize the following in your negotiations:

- Codify protections from immigration enforcement for our churches and other houses of worship, as well as schools, hospitals, courthouses, and other sensitive locations. We grieve the fear that keeps our siblings and neighbors away from essential religious services and practices. We ask for the sanctity of worship to be respected by prohibitions on immigration enforcement at or near sensitive locations.
- Limit excessive funding for immigration enforcement. Federal immigration enforcement received over \$170 billion in summer 2025 to supercharge enforcement

activities. This surge has led to widespread and indiscriminate detentions, detention facilities operated by private companies that fail basic standards of care and liberties, and intimidation and violence against U.S. citizens and entire communities. More funding for ICE is neither fiscally responsible nor morally defensible. We ask that DHS prioritize funding for programs that support the common good, including funding to reduce the USCIS case backlog.

- Reaffirm restrictions on federal immigration agents' targeting of people based on race, language or country of origin. Federal immigration agents' activities have targeted U.S. citizens, permanent residents and other immigrants because of their appearance, how they speak or where they work. We call for an end to indiscriminate enforcement efforts and an end to surge presences in Minneapolis and other cities.
- Require due process for immigration agents and consequences for failure to follow these processes in their interactions with immigrants and those supporting them. This includes independent investigations of ICE violence that result in meaningful consequences.
- Ensure standards in immigration detention facilities and disallow funding used to detain children. These standards must include adequate medical care, clean water, food, access to religious practices and services, and contact with families and lawyers. The standards must protect the dignity and safety of all. We also call for a total halt to the detention of children.
- End the arrests and traumatizing reinterviews of lawfully present refugees. We affirm our commitment to the U.S. refugee program and urge the protection and ongoing welcome of our refugee neighbors. Reopening cases is unnecessary, cruel, and destabilizes the lives of families that were promised safety by the United States.

In the coming Christian season of Lent, our churches will follow the journey of God's people displaced from their homes and wandering in the desert. Again and again, God provides for their needs, and when they are settled, issues a command: "The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the native-born among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God" (Leviticus 19:34).

Thank you for considering our requests.

Sincerely,

Rev. Yehiel Curry, Presiding Bishop
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Rev. Jihyun Oh, Stated Clerk

General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A)

Richard Santos, President and CEO
Church World Service

Eddy Aleman, General Secretary
Reformed Church in America

The Provincial Elders' Conference
Moravian Church, Northern Province in America

Bishop Tracy Smith Malone, President, Council of Bishops
The United Methodist Church

Krish O'Mara Vignarajah, President and CEO
Global Refuge

Bishop Vashti Murphy McKenzie, President and General Secretary
National Council of Churches

Rev. Teresa "Terri" Hord Owens, General Minister and President
Christian Church (Disciples in Christ) in the United States and Canada



Metropolitan New York Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

A Statement on Immigration Enforcement

January 29, 2026

Siblings in Christ:

These are overwhelming times.

We see the continuation of horrific violence in Minneapolis. Immigrants are harassed on the street by ICE agents, neighbors are kidnapped by people wearing masks, in unmarked cars and driven away.

Many are afraid to leave their homes. Last week, ICE officers detained a five-year-old child, Liam Ramos, and used him as bait to lure his family members out of their home. On Saturday, federal agents fatally shot ICU nurse Alex Pretti as he attempted to administer aid to a protester, following the killing of Renee Good earlier this month.

Feelings of anger, dread, and despondency live among so many of us. How could they not? But to acquiesce to hopelessness is not our call. These events must catalyze us to be the Body of Christ together, to renew our call to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with our God.

This past Sunday, we read together from the book of Matthew. After hearing that John has been put in prison, Jesus leaves Nazareth, taking up residence in Capernaum, and he begins to preach: “Repent, for the Kingdom of God has come near.”

To our 21st-century, English-speaking ears, “repent” sounds like a call to atone for our wrongdoing. But in the original Greek of this passage, we read the word *metanoia*, which calls us to turn around and change our hearts and minds.

Jesus calls us, the body of Christ, to change our hearts and minds, and through that change, also change our world. We are called to be part of the work of making “Thy Kingdom come, on earth.”

We will stand together as a community of faith to oppose injustice wherever we see it. It has been inspiring to see photographs of faith leaders and everyday people, bundled up against the frigid Minnesota cold, standing up and making their voices heard, protecting their neighbors. Closer to home in Metro

New York, we see people gathering for vigils, accompanying their neighbors to immigration court appointments, and mobilizing their neighborhoods to respond to ICE raids across the five boroughs, Long Island, and the Hudson Valley.

I hope you will join me in taking action:

- Show up for each other. Organize and participate in demonstrations in your community that promote justice and peace. Many of our churches have organized vigils and sit-ins, or assembled contingents to attend marches and rallies together.
- Show up for your elected officials. Call your senators to demand that they stop further funding for ICE by rejecting a bill already passed by the House. Call all your Congressional representatives and demand the immediate deescalation removal of ICE in Minneapolis and all our cities.
- Show up in prayer for our siblings, who — out of fear of detainment, deportation, or worse — cannot join us in person. Theirs is the kingdom of God.

May this painful moment serve as a catalyst for a new world built on justice.

Signed,

Bishop Katrina Foster

(Regarding ICE Actions)

A Message from the Directing Deaconess of the Deaconess Community

By Sister Dottie Almonev

January 15, 2026

As Lutheran Christians, we are living in a season of deep sorrow and lament. We are witnessing the dehumanization of our neighbors—people subjected to physical violence and mistreatment by those acting under the authority of the state. Even those who speak out against this brutality are being targeted, and some have paid with their lives.

This is not about being liberal or conservative, red or blue. It is about faith. Our call to love our neighbors and seek justice does not fit neatly into political categories. Long before our current debates, Aristotle described politics as a shared human effort toward well-being and flourishing. In a similar way, our Christian faith teaches that God intends community to be a place where all can experience the goodness God desires for creation. Society is at its best when it reflects God's justice, compassion, and care for every person.

Martin Luther understood how deeply the world needs justice. He taught that while Christians are called to be responsible citizens, we are also called to resist rulers who violate moral and natural law. When laws and policies contradict God's command to love, our ultimate loyalty belongs not to human authority, but to God.

Most people agree that immigration systems and health care structures need reform, and that many programs require thoughtful improvement. But how we treat human beings—especially those who are most vulnerable—reveals a great deal about what we truly value as a nation.

I feel the weight of our country's brokenness. Still, we are not powerless. We can pray, trusting that God is present and still at work. We can raise our voices—calling and writing our elected officials, speaking truth to power, and voting with justice in mind. We can stand alongside our neighbors, showing up for peaceful protest and bearing witness against violence and cruelty.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer reminds us, "Silence in the face of evil is itself evil... Not to speak is to speak. Not to act is to act." Speaking out takes courage. Standing up for justice always carries risk. Yet choosing to help our neighbors—especially when it costs us something—becomes a living testimony to the freedom, dignity, and justice God desires for the world.

May God give us courage to speak, compassion to act, and faith to keep showing up for one another—even now.

Sister Dottie Almonev, Directing Deaconess

Below is a letter from most of the Bishops of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to the church. Please read what we have written and committed our public witness to be.

(Regarding ICE Actions)

A Letter from Bishops of the ELCA to the Church October 8, 2025

Beloved in Christ,

Grace and peace to you in the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

As bishops of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), we write to you in this moment of national and global tension with clarity and conviction. Our faith compels us to stand where Jesus stands—with and for those whom society often seeks to exclude, erase, or diminish.

Our shared confession that every person is created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27) grounds us in the conviction that all people possess inherent dignity. The incarnation of Jesus Christ reveals God's profound solidarity with humanity—especially with those who are marginalized or oppressed. The gospel we proclaim insists that our neighbor's need is the occasion for our love and that our public life is shaped by justice, mercy, and a commitment to the common good.

Further, we have a shared tradition in our social teachings which grounds us. The ELCA's Social Message on Immigration reminds us:

"We are to respond to newcomers as we would to Christ—welcoming them, meeting their immediate needs, and advocating for justice in our laws and policies."

Likewise, our recently adopted Social Statement Faith and Civic Life affirms that Christians are called to be "a public witness, holding leaders accountable when they fail to protect the vulnerable."

We are living through a time when vulnerable communities are being scapegoated and attacked. Immigrants and refugees are vilified, though Scripture commands us to welcome the stranger. People of color continue to bear the devastating weight of racism woven into the fabric of our society. Transgender people, beloved by God, are being targeted with laws and rhetoric that deny their dignity and even their right to exist. These assaults on our siblings are not political abstractions—they are deep wounds in the body of Christ.

In this time of division and fear, we, as people grounded in our faith, insist on love. This commitment flows from our faith in Christ crucified and risen—the One whose love breaks down barriers, confronts hatred, and transforms hearts.

Love insists on the dignity of every human being.

Love insists on justice for the marginalized and oppressed.

Love insists that the church must reflect God's diverse, life-giving community.

Love insists that we listen, speak, and act with respect, even in disagreement.

Love insists on hope, trusting that God's kingdom of justice and peace will prevail.

This love also compels us to speak clearly against Christian Nationalism, which our Churchwide Assembly named as a distortion of the Christian faith and an unhealthy form of patriotism.

Christian Nationalism confuses the Gospel with political power, turns God into a mascot for the state, and privileges some people over others based on race, religion, or birthplace. This is not the way of Jesus. The kingdom of God is not a nation, not a culture, not a political ideology—it is God's reign of love, justice, and mercy for all people.

Therefore, as bishops of this church, we declare that the ELCA cannot be silent. Our call is clear:

- To proclaim the God-given dignity of every human being.
- To resist systems and ideologies, including Christian Nationalism, that oppress, dehumanize, or erase.
- To stand shoulder to shoulder with those who are targeted or harmed.
- To bear public witness that the love of Christ is stronger than fear, stronger than hatred, and stronger than death.

We call on all members of the ELCA to join us in prayer, advocacy, and action:

- Pray for those who are vulnerable and for all who work for justice.
- Advocate in your communities, legislatures, and Congress for laws that protect migrants, advance racial justice, and safeguard LGBTQIA+ people.
- Engage in the holy work of hospitality, creating spaces of safety, affirmation, and belonging for all God's children.
- Model respectful dialogue in a polarized world, seeking understanding rooted in love.
- Hold fast to hope, trusting that the Spirit is still at work renewing creation and reconciling the world to God.

In baptism, we are marked with the cross of Christ forever. That cross is not only a sign of our hope—it is also a summons to follow Jesus into solidarity with those who suffer.

In the power of the Spirit, let us be bold. Let us be faithful.

Let us Insist on Love—in our words, our actions, our public witness, and our life together.

Together in Christ,

Bishop Kevin Strickland Southeastern Synod
Bishop Susan J. Briner Southwestern Texas Synod

Bishop Becca Middeke-Conlin Arkansas-Oklahoma
Synod
Bishop Vivian Davila Caribbean Synod

Bishop Donna Simon Central States Synod	Bishop Erik Gronberg Northern Texas-Northern Louisiana Synod
Bishop Bill Gohl Delaware-Maryland Synod	Bishop Meggan Manlove Northwest Intermountain Synod
Bishop Anne Edison-Albright East Central Synod of Wisconsin	Bishop Martin Halom Northwest Synod of Wisconsin
Bishop Pedro Suarez Florida-Bahamas Synod	Bishop Shelley Bryan Wee Northwest Washington Synod
Bishop Deborah Hutterer Grand Canyon Synod	Bishop Daniel G. Beaudoin Northwestern Ohio Synod
Bishop Paul Erickson Greater Milwaukee Synod	Bishop Kristen Papson Northwestern PA Synod
Bishop Felix Malpica La Crosse Area Synod	Bishop Laurie Larson Caesar Oregon Synod
Bishop Stephen R. Herr Lower Susquehanna Synod	Bishop David Nagler Pacifica Synod
Bishop Wayne Miller Metropolitan Chicago Synod	Bishop Meghan Johnston Aelabouni Rocky Mountain Synod
Bishop Katrina D. Foster Metropolitan New York Synod	Bishop Jeff R. Johnson Sierra Pacific Synod
Bishop Philip C Hirsch Metropolitan Washington, D.C Synod	Bishop Ginny Aebischer South Carolina Synod
Bishop Jen Nagel Minneapolis Area Synod	Bishop Joy Mortensen-Wiebe South-Central Synod of Wisconsin
Bishop Scott Alan Johnson Nebraska Synod	Bishop Amy Current Southeastern Iowa Synod
Bishop Nathan Piphon New England Synod	Bishop Bryan Penman Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod
Bishop Christa Compton New Jersey Synod	Bishop Brenda Bos Southwest California Synod
Bishop Emily K. Hartner North Carolina Synod	Bishop Melissa L. Stoller Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod
Bishop Julie Schneider-Thomas North/West Lower Michigan Synod	Bishop Keith Marshall Southwestern Washington
Bishop Kevin Jones Northeastern Iowa Synod	Bishop Tracey Breashears Schultz Texas-Louisiana Gulf Coast Synod
Bishop Amy Odgren Northeastern Minnesota Synod	Bishop Craig Miller Upper Susquehanna Synod
Bishop Laura Barbins Northeastern Ohio Synod	Bishop Lee M. Miller II Upstate New York Synod
Bishop Christopher deForest Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod	Bishop Phyllis Milton Virginia Synod
Bishop Katherine Finegan Northern Great Lakes Synod	Bishop Scott Dalen Western Iowa Synod
Bishop Stacie Fidler Northern Illinois Synod	

To the congregations, members, and friends of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America in Minnesota

January 15, 2026

We, the six ELCA bishops in the state of Minnesota, are writing today with a word we hope will anchor and sustain all of us in the days to come.

In recent weeks, several thousand ICE and Border Patrol agents have been sent to our state. Their tactics of stopping and questioning our neighbors and their aggressive interactions with the communities where we live have caused fear and anxiety. We grieve the killing of Renee Good on January 7.

All of this comes after other experiences of devastating violence in recent months and years.

We are tired, and our hearts are broken. Yet we are not deterred.

At every act of violence, we have seen you respond with compassion and resilience. This has been a season marked by profound grief. It is also a season in which we have refused to be defined by what the baptismal liturgy names as “the forces that defy God.”

To our pastors, deacons, chaplains and ministry leaders, we say this: we are with you. We give thanks for your faithful leadership, for your courage and discernment, and for all the ways you live into the vocation we share. Dear friends, we believe you have been called and anointed for ministry in this time and place. It is our honor to serve with you.

To all members of our congregations, and our neighbors throughout Minnesota, we say this: we commit ourselves to continue to pray, to advocate and act alongside you, and to use the resources and gifts we have to work toward the fulfillment of the reign of God, so that all may know the abundance of life Jesus comes to give (John 10:10). We encourage you to remain connected to one another and actively support the efforts in your communities to meet the needs of those directly impacted in this time of fear and intimidation.

This past Sunday, congregations across our state marked the Baptism of our Lord. It is a celebration and remembrance of the moment when Jesus himself was baptized, and the voice of God broke through the heavens to declare, “This is my Son, the beloved, with him I am well pleased” (Matthew 3:17).

We believe the voice of God still speaks. We know that all our neighbors bear the image of God. Through the waters of baptism, we have been named and claimed as beloved children of God.

It is our sure confidence in this truth that sustains us. We know we are God’s children, and we know that you are, too. We pray that this truth will continue to anchor, guide and compel all of us as we work for justice for all people in every place.

We also know there are voices around us that challenge the truth of who we are and who our neighbors are. It is our fervent hope that every one of us would remain deeply rooted in our identity as God’s beloved.

To that end, we write with a word of encouragement: go to church or your place of worship, ground yourselves in Scripture, and surround yourselves with those who will echo the voice of God for you. This is the nourishment that will sustain us.

Along with Presiding Bishop Curry, we “join calls for a thorough investigation into this case, accountability for the shooting and a de-escalation of ICE enforcement across the United States.”

When the challenges that surround us are overwhelming, we cling to what is true. We serve a God who sees us and who enters into the beauty and messiness of human life in the person of Jesus the Christ. Because of what God in Christ has done, we know that God is with us and we are not alone (Romans 8:38-39).

Until the day the reign of God arrives in full, we continue to work for justice and peace, grounded in prayer, rooted in Scripture, and compelled by the power of the Holy Spirit.

In sure and confident hope,

Bishop Regina Hassanally
Southeastern Minnesota Synod

Bishop Patricia Lull
Saint Paul Area Synod

Bishop Jen Nagel
Minneapolis Area Synod

Bishop Amy Odgren
Northeastern Minnesota Synod

Bishop Dee Pederson
Southwestern Minnesota Synod

Bishop Bill Tesch
Northwestern Minnesota Synod

Section Six:

War

“Suddenly, one of those with Jesus put his hand on his sword, drew it, and struck the slave of the high priest, cutting off his ear. Then Jesus said to him, “Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword.”

- Matthew 26:51-52

Bishop Curry Issues Statement on Iran War

March 4, 2026

Dear siblings in Christ,

“They shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation; neither shall they learn war any more.” (Isaiah 2:4)

In our Lenten journey, we are reminded of our dependence on God, and we are sustained by hope in the future peace God has promised. As war involving the United States, Israel and Iran intensifies and spreads, we lament how far off that promise seems. We do not know how many people have been killed, but we know the number will continue to grow. Early reports indicate that more than 100 Iranian schoolgirls and several U.S. service members are among them.

The church of Jesus Christ is called to proclaim the peace of God’s eternal reign and to work for an earthly peace here and now. The ELCA social message “Living in a Time of Terrorism” states that this earthly peace is a “precious yet fragile good.” Its existence depends on leaders who prioritize diplomacy over military engagement and deterrence over war, and on citizens who hold government accountable whenever military action is considered.

With many of you, I am distressed that a robust, public discernment through congressional authorization did not occur prior to the United States’ engagement in this war. As Lutherans, we affirm that government and the order that just laws provide are gifts of God for our safety and well-being. This war does not represent the promotion of this just order but rather its failure.

The costs in lives and safety of this failure will be borne by those least able to avoid it — children, families and those without the means to flee. Its deadly toll has been, and will continue to be, paid with the lives of our neighbors, including our siblings in Christ in the Middle East.

This moment underscores the urgent need for robust, well-resourced diplomatic and humanitarian efforts. Our companions in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land have asked our church to pray fervently for peace and safety and to advocate for the dignity and security of all people. ELCA Witness in Society will continue to provide opportunities for this advocacy.

As members of the body of Christ, join me in prayerful, hopeful solidarity with our siblings and neighbors who suffer today.

Together,

- We mourn the rush to war and the combatants and noncombatants who have lost their lives.
- We yearn for creation's fulfillment in "a new heaven and a new earth" where death and pain "will be no more" (Revelation 21:1, 4).
- We strive for justice and peace in all the earth, strengthened by faith in the crucified and risen Lord to persist.
- We trust that, through God who sustains us, our weariness and fear will not overcome us.

In Christ,

The Rev. Yehiel Curry

Presiding Bishop, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

(On How War in Iran is Not Part of God's Holy Plan)

Bishop Nathan Piphio, New England Synod (ELCA) April 2, 2026

"Suddenly, one of those with Jesus put his hand on his sword, drew it, and struck the slave of the high priest, cutting off his ear. Then Jesus said to him, 'Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword.'" Matthew 26:51-52

Many years ago during the Vietnam War, the Rev. Charles Bergstrom, pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church, Worcester, Massachusetts (1963-1977), chose his Easter Sunday sermon to publicly speak against the war.

Pastor Bergstrom chose a packed church on Easter Sunday to speak against the Vietnam War because he said that people of the resurrection of Jesus Christ cannot be people of war. He told his hearers he offered his words not as a political "dove" (the label historically assigned to those opposed to military action), nor as a reformed political "hawk" (the label historically assigned to those in favor of military action). He told his congregation that he was no kind of bird, but he was a disciple of Jesus Christ and a child of the resurrection. As such, he could not justify the Vietnam War.

I think of Pastor Bergstrom's Easter Sermon as the United States is once again at war on Easter Sunday. Especially disturbing about this war with Iran is that the Military Religious Freedom Foundation (MRFF) received over 200 complaints from members of the United States Armed Forces about superior officers justifying war with Iran as part of a holy war to bring about Armageddon and the return of Jesus Christ to earth. One combat unit commander reportedly told his troops that the war is "part of God's divine plan" and that "President Trump has been anointed by Jesus to light the signal fire in Iran to cause Armageddon and mark Christ's return to Earth."

Let me acknowledge a few things ... international affairs, diplomacy, and decisions about war and peace are complex and policy makers must weigh countless factors. Sin exists and because sin exists there will be times when force must be met with force. Lutherans and people of faith serve honorably in the Armed Forces as a noble and patriotic duty. With that said, as a child of the resurrection let me be crystal clear:

Any belief that a self-chosen war in Iran is part of God's holy plan to bring about Armageddon and the return of Christ is a lie from the pit of hell that is to be repudiated and rejected as strongly as possible.

There is so much wrong and evil about such a narcissistic and heretical belief it's hard to know where to begin to repudiate and reject it.

[1] First, the belief is rooted in Christian Nationalism which is a nationalistic ideology that confuses the kingdom of God with a particular government. Christian Nationalism is defined by the belief that the U.S. Constitution was divinely inspired, that Christianity should be a privileged religion in the United States, and that this nation holds a uniquely privileged status in God's eyes.

For theological reasons, the ELCA repudiates Christian nationalism as a distortion of the Christian faith that crosses the line into idolatry." (Pg 57 – "Faith & Civic Life" ELCA Social Statement). Lutherans teach that the kingdom of God is not a nation, not a particular culture, not a racial grouping, not a form of government, and not even a denomination or a religion. (Pg 57 – "Faith & Civic Life" ELCA Social Statement). The kingdom of God is revealed in Jesus Christ and made known in the sacraments available for all peoples of Earth. That kingdom includes peoples from all tribes, languages, and nations and is so vast it cannot be counted (Revelation 7:9).

It is idolatry, and a violation of the First Commandment, when any nation claims a special blessing or a special call from God. The belief that United States military action can bring about Armageddon and the return of Jesus Christ is idolatry par excellence. Do the President and his military commanders really believe they have that much power to force God's hand to bring about their vision of Armageddon? If so, what becomes of God in such scenario? God is turned

into a servant of this nation and President! The hubris of such belief makes the Israelites and their Golden Calf seem like child's play (Exodus 32). If Jesus himself didn't even know the time of his return (Matthew 24:36) then how do our policy makers think they themselves can impart that knowledge into Jesus? Ridiculous.

[2] Second, the belief about Armageddon is often closely tied to the idea of the rapture which is not supported by the Bible. For a faithful Lutheran response to the contemporary imagery of Armageddon and the rapture, I encourage you to read Dr. Barbara Rossing's book, "The Rapture Exposed: The Message of Hope in the Book of Revelation."

Dr. Rossing writes that while the Book of Revelation does include some terrifying imagery about what God can do, it ultimately offers imagery of what God wants to do. The terrifying imagery is a reminder that God was more powerful than the most powerful empire on Earth at the time (the Roman Empire). But this imagery does not indicate God's desire to burn up Earth and replace it. Rather, God wants to renew and restore Earth in love and healing. Dr. Rossing points out that Revelation ends with the life-giving image of the river of the water of life flanked on either side by the tree of life bearing fruit with leaves for the healing of the nations (Revelation 22:1:2). Life, fruit, and healing is God's desire.

Yes, Lutherans do indeed preach and teach the final return of Jesus Christ. But, Lutheran Christians do not believe in the rapture. We do not believe the faithful will be raptured away leaving sinners behind to suffer flames. Instead, Lutherans believe in an "already and not yet" theology. Already, today, Christ returns in the announcement of forgiveness to sinners received in faith, in the promises announced in the water and word of Holy Baptism, and in his real presence in the bread and cup of the Holy Eucharist. Alive in the Word and Sacraments the faithful are then sent as the body of Christ into the world to proclaim God's love in our service, justice and advocacy. This makes the focus of Christian life not on escaping the world and looking towards the end times, but on our neighbors and world right now who need the love and mercy of Christ.

[3] Third, the belief is rooted in an Americanized, contemporary, and hyper-macho Jesus who favors war, aggression, and force that is not the Jesus found in the Bible. The Jesus found in the Bible healed the centurion's daughter, taught his followers to pray for their enemies, and repudiated the Old Testament doctrine of an eye-for-an-eye and a tooth-for-a-tooth.

The Jesus found in the Bible told his followers to put down their swords when they attempted to defend him from arrest in the garden of Gethsemane ... knelt before his disciples to wash their feet and commanded them to do likewise for each other ... and then willingly gave away his earthly power on the cross in order to proclaim the way of life.

There is nothing in the Bible that justifies an image of Jesus blessing the use of American missiles, bombs and tanks as part of God's will. There is nothing in the Bible that suggests blessing upon United States Empire over, and at the expense of, any other country in the world. There is nothing in the Bible that suggests we effect the return of Christ by murdering our neighbors.

There is in the Bible, however, the repeated judgement of the prophets against Israel when the people of God forgot the plight of the orphan, widow and immigrant. There is in the Bible the judgment of Jesus upon those judged goats who in their failure to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, welcome the stranger, cloth the naked and visit the prisoners failed to serve Jesus himself found in these neighbors in need (Matthew 25). There is in the Bible the teaching of Paul that among the fruit of the Spirit is peace, gentleness and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23).

On this Easter Sunday here's the truth: Jesus Christ lives! Jesus Christ defeated death by refusing to participate in the ways of sin, violence, and Empire. This good news of Christ is not a gift for, nor blessing on, one people or country at the expense of all others. Rather the life of Christ is God's gift of life poured out upon all peoples.

As a resurrection people, we are called to participate in the resurrection of Christ in acting and speaking life in places of death. Rather than senseless war, we are called to focused actions of costly solidarity, service and justice. Rather than supporting indiscriminate murder and death through war justified with ambiguous and changing claims, we are called to be the intentional hands and feet of Christ's love for all peoples of earth.

Because Christ lives today, grace and mercy and forgiveness live today! Because Christ lives, God's gift of unconditional mercy and grace received in faith through no works or merit of our own lives! Because Christ lives, we live to freely spread Christ's mercy and grace in the world.

Friends, alive in Christ, be people of resurrection! Tell the story of Jesus, nurture relationships, and do racial justice for the life of the world.

Christ is risen, indeed. Alleluia!

Bishop Nathan Piphio

Social Statements

of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

“This church shall develop social statements ... that will guide the life of this church as an institution and inform the conscience of its members in the spirit of Christian liberty.” (ELCA social statement, “The Church in Society: A Lutheran Perspective”)

ELCA social statements are teaching and policy documents that provide broad frameworks to assist us in thinking about and discussing social issues in the context of faith and life. They are meant to help communities and individuals with moral formation, discernment and thoughtful engagement with current social issues as we participate in God’s work in the world. Social statements also set policy for the ELCA and guide its advocacy and work as a publicly engaged church. They result from an extensive process of participation and deliberation and are adopted by a two-thirds vote of an ELCA churchwide assembly.

ELCA Social Statements:

- Abortion / *Aborto* (1991)
- Caring for creation / *Medio ambiente* (1993)
- Church in society / *Iglesia en la sociedad* (1991)
- The church and criminal justice / *La iglesia y la justicia penal* (2013)
- The death penalty / *Pena de Muerte* (1991)
- Economic life / *Vida economica* (1999)
- Education / *Educación* (2007)
- Genetics / English Only (2011)
- Health and health care / *Salud y asistencia sanitaria* (2003)
- Human sexuality / *La sexualidad humana* (2009)
- Peace / *Por la paz* (1995)
- Race, ethnicity and culture / *Raza, etnicidad y cultura* (1993)
- Sexism / *Sexismo* (2019)

Learn More

elca.org/about-the-elca/who-we-are/our-purpose/social-teachings

The most recent social statement is Faith and Civic Life / La fe y la Vida Civica (2025)