

Civil Religion, Nationalism, and Patriotism

16 June 2021

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Welcome, we're glad to have you here on the Civil Religion, Nationalism, and Patriotism panel. This past year, there have been a lot of questions raised about the role religion plays in public life, particularly its influence on attitudes towards democracy and government. In our discussion today we're going to think through this looking specifically at questions of religion, nationalism, and patriotism. What are some of the most visible and often controversial ways that religion intersects with government and a sense of national identity? Let me define one term that you may not be familiar with, "civil religion": it's more of a term used by scholars, but it means the mixture of religious and political ideas, symbols, language, and meaning that we see in countries throughout the world. For instance, "In God We Trust" is written on the currency or using the phrase "Under God" in the Pledge of Allegiance. But even more politically and emotionally charged are questions of religious nationalism and patriotism with routine Christian symbolism and beliefs being invoked by white supremacists, protesters, rioters, individuals across the political spectrum who claim patriotic virtues. So we'll take these all and bring them together I hope, looking at the role of American religious symbols, American religious heritage, claims to an inclusive, or exclusive, national religious identity, and think about what role Christianity does or should play in American life and identity. We're also going to see if we can disentangle nationalism and patriotism, and discuss how they're each related to religion. What do we even mean when we say Christian nationalism? Is it defined by certain religious beliefs? Or more cultural factors? Is there space for religious beliefs to contribute to healthy patriotism? How's that different than religious nationalism? Is there a positive role for religious police in the public square? Can they help build social trust, address conspiracy thinking, or help overcome political divides? So I have lots of questions and probably more than we have time for, but I'm grateful for excellent panelists who are going to help us work through these ideas. I'll just say a few things briefly about each of them and invite you to go to our website where you can see their full bios.

Dr. Barbara McGraw is a professor of social ethics, law, and public life at St. Mary's College of California. She's the founder and director of the school's Engaged Center for Religious Pluralism. Dr. McGraw holds a Ph.D. in religion and social ethics and a JD both from the University of Southern California. She has authored numerous books and articles on religious pluralism and religious liberty rights and has also provided prior training for government officials on religious diversity. In 2014, Dr. McGraw was recognized for her efforts in this area and was awarded the Mahatma Gandhi Award for the advancement of religious pluralism.

Bradley Rebeiro is one of our own. He studied law and was an undergraduate at Brigham Young University and completed a Ph.D. in constitutional studies and political theory at the University of Notre Dame. His work focuses on the substitutional thought of Frederick Douglass that influenced the Antebellum period and Reconstruction. He'll be joining us at the law faculty here at Brigham Young

University this fall and then he'll also, in 2022, have a clerkship for John K. Bush of the US Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit. We're glad to have him join the faculty.

Dr. Bob Roberts is the founder of GlocalNet Church Planting Family of Churches and co-founder of Multifaith Neighbors Network, an organization committed to creating international religious freedom through international cross-cultural relationships. I've put him in this regard internationally, and have been impressed at the quality and quantity love, and talent that he brings to this field. Over the past 20 years, Dr. Roberts has worked with multiple governments, NGOs, and faith leaders to educate and support efforts to promote international religious freedom around the globe. Dr. Roberts has authored several books and continues his ministry as founding global pastor of the Northwood Church in Fort Worth, Texas.

And finally, and certainly not least, we have Dr. Andrew Whitehead, who is Associate Professor of Sociology and director of the Association of Religion Data Archives at Indiana University and Purdue University. Dr. Whitehead's nationally recognized research focuses on how religion both shapes and is shaped by contemporary American culture. He's co-author with Samuel Perry of *Taking Back America for God: Christian Nationalism in the United States*, which was published just last year by Oxford University Press, and of which we'll hear more about. Dr. Whitehead is a graduate of Purdue University and of Baylor University, where he earned his Ph.D. in sociology.

So, looking forward to this: first, we'll have a short presentation by Andrew Whitehead, on his research on Christian nationalism, a layout of the points, and the start of the conversation. And then we'll invite all the panelists to come and join in. Andrew, please go ahead.

05:25

Well, thank you so much, Professor Clark, for that introduction. And it's wonderful to meet the other panelists and look forward to our discussion today, and hopefully, to continued connections in the future. So it's wonderful to be here. And too, as was introduced, I'll be sharing on Christian nationalism, highlighting a little bit of how we study it, what it is, how we define Christian nationalism. And then, you know, in our book, we connect it to a lot of different hot button social issues and understanding a lot of the polarization within American society today, but I'll focus particularly on this idea of civil religion and patriotism, and also a functioning social and civic sphere. Thinking, you know, through what it takes to be able to, for all of us, to communicate with each other and to get along, essentially, today. And so, you know, on this first slide, I want to give credit to my colleague and co-author, Sam Perry, for a lot of the work, all the work that we do around this, you know. I'm influenced by him and his thinking, and so he deserves credit for that. And so, I'll dive right in by highlighting a little bit of how we understand this. But to locate it, you know, in current, civic and social events. Right now, you know, in Congress, they're talking about whether they should investigate the January 6th insurrection at the Capitol. And as we look back just a couple of months, we see that in that insurrection, and among the violence, signs of "Jesus saves 2020," as you can see there, or Christian crosses, and those that were involved in the insurrection, praying around those crosses, or as they were on the Senate floor, offering a prayer that you might hear a similar prayer in thousands of congregations across the U.S. And this moment really brought to the surface for many Americans, but especially Christians, and especially white Christians, trying to understand and think about: "why did we see so many of these symbols there?" And so for me,

studying this for the better part of almost a decade, I was, you know, shocked to see the insurrection happening, I'm sure most of us were watching the news, but not necessarily surprised. Because we saw for many years, this idea of the U.S. as a Christian nation, what that means to many Americans, and what they feel it gives them the right to do as Americans in taking this country back for what they see as what it should represent and what it should be. And so with that, we've, you know, a lot of outlets and different things have started to think about Christian nationalism. And so our work and others are hopefully helping bring that to the fore. So in our book, *Taking America back for God*, we define and then measure Christian nationalism in a particular way. So Sam and I are sociologists. And so we bring our methodologies to bear, which are large national surveys of Americans, qualitative research interviews with Americans; we spent time in congregations that had God and country celebrations, to get an idea and understanding of what is going on around this idea of the Christian nationalism, this cultural framework. So we define Christian nationalism as a cultural framework that idealizes and advocates for a fusion of Christianity, and we place an asterisk there because of a particular understanding and type of Christianity with American civic life. So a cultural framework really is a collection of myths and traditions, narratives, value systems, that again idealize and advocate this close relationship between this understanding of Christianity, what it means to be an American. But throughout our book, what we show is that this understanding of Christian nationalism, this assumption of this Christian nation, brings along several other assumptions, like nativism, and white supremacy, patriarchy, authoritarianism, militarism. And so when we talk about Christianity in the Christian nationalism, really Christianity should be understood to mean a certain population. So for those that hear it, "We need to make this nation Christian," really it's saying that it means people like us, we need to make it more like us or at least protect our access to the levers of power. And the "our" or "us" generally means white, natural-born citizens who are culturally Christian. And so Christian nationalism and the Christianity of Christian nationalism is better understood more as a cultural package, not just a historic orthodox faith, but there are other assumptions and should leave some values that come along with that, that has been defined as a part of what it means to be Christian and with that, what it means to be American. Now, in our discussion today, and I can't wait to hear from the other panelists, you know, thinking about Christian nationalism, as it relates to civil religion and patriotism, I think it is a really important part of this project. We're able to give a good view of what Christian nationalism is, but the work that needs to be done is how we distinguish that from other ways of being religious in a pluralist democratic society, but also being a functioning and intentional citizen within that society. And so, as Professor Clark mentioned, civil religion really highlights this idea of religious influences from a prophetic tradition, where providence or God or a higher power, you know, demands mercy and justice and humility, and encourages civic republicanism, that the founding fathers wrote about, where it's strong civic virtue, and being a part of what it means to be American. And patriotism, we could think too, or I like to think about it, following other authors that it's really a love for our country-women and country-men, the fellow people around us; not necessarily a love and an allegiance to just the nation and nation-state, but for the people that populate this place with us. And so thinking through what that is, but Christian nationalism, again, I think, is distinct from both of these where it demands an in-group loyalty. It draws from a tradition of essential violence and defending and subduing others, those that are defined as the "them," as opposed to the "us," and waging wars for the good, but again, the good is defined by this in-group. And so it's a very strong tribal identity of who we are versus those on the outside. And the nation that is idealized, and viewed as dominant over other nations, and over the lives of its citizens as well, bringing them to bear and into what they believe is what the nation should stand

for. Now, this is how we understand Christian nationalism, but how do we measure it? Well, in our national surveys, we asked six different questions. And people could strongly disagree to strongly agree with those on the scale. And we ask questions like, “the federal government should declare the United States a Christian nation” or whether the federal government should advocate Christian values, or whether the success of the United States is part of God's plan. And so the degree to which respondents again, strongly agree or strongly disagree, we assign a score on that Likert scale, and we add those together, when we add them together, we're able to see that really Christian nationalism operates on a continuum. It isn't a binary, you are a Christian nationalist, or you are not, but that for many Americans, they find themselves somewhere in the middle. As you can see here, when we add their scores together, some kind of accept this idea of Christian nationalism, and a Christian nation, some kind of resist it, but overall, people are spread all across this continuum. And so to ease decision, you know, in our book, and our work, rather than talking about whether people are higher or lower on the scale, we kind of create a heuristic with four different groups. And so we can see that, and when they say Americans, every American in one of these groups, they're either rejecters, resisters, accommodators, or ambassadors of Christian nationalism. And again, those are assigned to different aspects and parts of this scale. And so rejecters, again, completely reject this notion that America is a Christian nation and benefit or strongly embrace it. And then resisters and accommodators are essentially mirror images of one another. But some kind of accept it, they slightly embrace it, see a role for Christianity, and resisters are a little uncomfortable with that, but it's still kind of unknown to them. And so when we place those groups together, you can see the relative sizes of these four groups. And what we find is that over and over the group that Americans are placed into, it tells us something really important about how they see the world. So it isn't just whether people strongly embrace it, but strongly rejecting nationalism tells us a lot about how people view their social worlds, this nation, its role in world affairs, all of those things too. So rejecters are a little over a fifth of the U.S. population. Resisters are a little over a quarter of the population. Accommodators are the largest group, almost a third of Americans. Then ambassadors are about 20% of the population and the smallest. But we can see if we pair accommodators and ambassadors together, that a little over half the US population is at least amenable towards this idea of a close relationship and fusion towards Christianity again as this cultural package and framework of civil society. So in the interest of time, I won't share all the different socio-demographic similarities, really between the group but also differences, but in our book, we unpack a lot of those and who's in these groups and what they look like. When, you know, one thing that we do like to talk about and share is across different religious traditions, it's important to understand that we find Christian nationalism, represented within each. Now, in some groups, it's more strongly represented. So you can see on the very left, evangelical Protestants, that almost eight out of ten evangelicals are either ambassadors or accommodators. And so Christian nationalism is a key part of that religious tradition, this cultural framework is strong within that religious tradition. But even among mainline Protestants and Catholics, especially, you will find Christian nationalism playing a strong role. And what we see over and over is that if you are an evangelical, a mainline Protestant, or a Catholic, if you strongly embrace Christian nationalism, you tend to look almost identical. The differences across religious tradition kind of disappear and these individuals really look similar, and they look quite different from their co-religionists who might reject or resist Christian nationalism. Now, within black Protestantism, this Christian nationalism, the understanding of this idea of the U.S. as a Christian nation is prevalent, but we find there that in some outcomes, it operates quite differently from white Americans who embrace this. And so here again, we can see that across religious traditions, Christian

nationalism is prevalent, it isn't just located within evangelical Protestantism. Now, to kind of bring this to a close, I just want to highlight the relationship between Christian nationalism, and two different topics that I think are a part of the broader conversation that we'll have today. So one is distinguishing patriotism and Christian nationalism, and how that plays out and how Americans should respond to their economy, and how they relate to the nation. And then the other has to do with conspiratorial thinking. And in this kind of day and age, January 6th was a part of this, but even before that and after, embracing lies and untruths for or refusing to listen to other experts speaking into that, make us working together in civil society really difficult. And so we'll see how Christianity and Christian nationalism is related to that as well. So first is a question we ask of our respondents, whether we should demand America and this nation should demand respect for America's traditions. We can see that as Americans move up the scale, as they are higher on the scale, ambassadors or accommodators, they're much more likely to say that Americans should be forced to respect American traditions. And so when we're thinking about patriotism versus nationalism, patriotism would be love for our fellow countrymen and women, and maybe a warmth and love for this country. But to the point where we demand respect, is that moving patriotism into a different area? Is that allowing for the free expression of beliefs within this country that we say are important? Are we allowing differences of opinions to be held? And so you can see that with Christian nationalism, this idea of respecting the nation is key, and again, it's all about saying that this nation is right and correct and not really bringing any opposition to that, especially among ambassadors. Now, we can distinguish Christian nationalism, though, from religious practice. And this is what we find over and over across many of our findings is that when we look at demanding respect for America's traditions, and how often let's say somebody attends church, it looks like a positive association that people that are religious are much more likely to say, "Yes, you must respect America's traditions." But once we account for levels of Christian nationalism, we then see the true effect of religious practice and we can see that it works as you can see here in the opposite direction. So as people increase in Christian nationalism as I showed on the last slide, that red line increases, they're much more likely to demand respect for America's traditions. But once we account for levels of Christian nationalism, the more religious the American is, the less likely they are to say that we should demand respect for America's tradition. They're more likely to say that we should be able to have differences of opinion among us and that people shouldn't be forced to pay respect and that should be something that they give freely. So here we can see religious practice working in the opposite direction. So let's look at conspiratorial thinking really quickly. So with this, we created a scale with a number of different questions about conspiracy theories, whether people believe that they're true or not. And so this scale ranges from zero to 24. But we can see that right there, as we move from lower levels of Christian nationalism to upper levels of Christian nationalism, ambassadors and accommodators are more likely to embrace more conspiratorial thoughts. Believing that the government is hiding things about let's say, the JFK assassination, or the moon landing even. They're saying that you know, there are things people in power aren't giving us the whole truth. And so they're embracing that. But here again, when we take Christian nationalism, and we take religious practice, and we look at conspiratorial thinking, the religious practice operates in a different direction, Americans are less likely to be very conspiratorial in their thinking once we hold Christian nationalism constant. Now, if you have a Christian nationalist or an ambassador who attends church a lot, they're going to be conspiratorial in thinking. But if you have an American who rejects Christian nationalism, but attends church a lot, this is showing us that they're going to be much less likely to embrace conspiratorial thinking. So again, it isn't necessarily the religiosity, but this cultural framework of Christian nationalism,

playing a key role. So as we think about civil society, and how religion should be practiced in the public sphere, and then with Christian nationalism, we can distinguish between those, and we think it's important to do so. So really quickly. To conclude, we can distinguish and I think it's important, and I look forward to hearing more from the panelists of how we can do this, distinguishing Christian nationalism from civil religion and patriotism, what those mean, and how religion plays a role in all of those over and against Christian nationalism. But also understand that Christian nationalism is key to making sense of much of what we see happening around us, whether it's behaviors and beliefs about COVID, or taking vaccines, or racial role injustice, in policing, or as I showed here today, respecting traditions or conspiratorial thinking. Christian nationalism plays a key role. And so finally, I do think that it is important to understand that Christian nationalism is a threat to a pluralistic democratic society. And we see this playing out in state legislatures and even in the Capitol today, as some of our leaders are thinking through changes to the political process, and who has access to the vote. And Christian nationalism is a key part of that, trying to encourage a pluralistic democratic society where all can play a role and have a voice. We find over and over in our studies that Christian nationalism is opposed to that, and should be taken as a real and present threat. So with that, I will end and thank you, again, for this time in this conversation.

23:22

Thanks so much, Andrew. We appreciate you laying that out and working through some of the nuances of this. And I appreciate your book as well, where it goes into detail and more nuanced. We appreciate you doing what you can in 10 minutes. So thank you. I just want to start the conversation off with Bob. I think that this is something that we all see-through, and you certainly mentioned it. It's easy for the news media, for others to conflate religiosity with Christian nationalism. And in particular, it's white evangelical Christians who get the worst rap, at least in my opinion. You see major news outlets completing an evangelical faith with disruptive manifest Americans of Christian nationalism. And I appreciate in Andrew's book that he points out that only 45% of these ambassadors, the highest level of primitive nationalism, are evangelical, and also that there are many evangelical Christians who are not nationalists at all. So to Bob, you're an evangelical pastor, you're an influencer, and this community you know well. How can you help those of us who aren't, be able to sort of seeing what this looks like from the inside? What role is Christian nationalism playing or not playing in evangelical communities?

24:40

Thank you, Professor Clark. It's an honor to be with you today and I absolutely enjoyed reading the book. I've already tweeted it out and told a lot of the pastors that I missed that they need to read it. If we were offline, I would debate you on some things, Andrew, but I think it's a great book, and I enjoyed it. But what does it look like inside evangelicalism right now? Very confusing. Let me give you four things that I would describe in it. Number one, there's a lot of intense debate. I don't think anyone in evangelicalism would deny that there is not an issue with nationalism. The word has been massaged in such a way that it's an okay word. I don't like the word. When I think about nationalism, I think about World War Two and some of the European nations and Germany and Neo-Nazis and so forth. But you know, the thing is that no, it's not that, it's really patriotism. So I wish we would use that word instead of nationalism. As a result of that, there's just a lot of intense debate over this within evangelicalism. You have people, the rejecters and the ambassadors that Andrew writes about, frankly, are at one another's throats right now. You can see on Twitter, what that looks like. And I think it's complicated by the fact

that religion, politics, nationalism, and the media are now overlapped. So it's just this vicious cycle of creation, for the first time a network of factors that just seem to drive it. So I would say, first thing, it's internal, intense debate. Second of all, it's confusing. What's going on? Our country was founded on religious principles, and some people are saying it was created as a secular state. What is our history? What's going on? How do we respond to that? And yet, if you're Baptists like me, and you love your history, religious freedom, separation of church and state are two big deals. For many of us evangelicals, what's going on where pastors are publicly in their pulpit endorsing candidates? I don't view this as good, because I want to pastor everybody, not just one political party, but you're viewed as less conservative if you don't do that. So I think we've forgotten some of our important histories. And that was the debate of Roger Williams and John Winthrop. It was Williams that said, everybody's got to have freedom. And in Winthrop, on the other hand, who said, yes, freedom for us, like the Puritans, not the broader view. So I think there's a lot of confusion about our history, we've not done a good job of teaching it. And I think we're going to have to reclaim that. I think of confusion in the pulpit, what does a pastor say? The Economist just interviewed me and I commented to him. I know of several young megachurch pastors that are ready to quit, because they see that the church is a mess. You can't challenge things right now. You're viewed as not conservative, not taking the right position. I think the third thing is, for us, it's disruption. In terms of our global missions, people around the world are asking us what's going on in America? Well, what's exceptionalism? I mean, I'm from a different country, how are we supposed to view this? It's disrupting local churches because people are upset with one another. Pastors don't know how to talk about it. And then I also think it's hurting the church as a whole because we have a broad message to all Americans and we lose that. So I would say those

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three things along with some redefinition, how do we move forward? I'm older, I'm 63, Evangelical. I'm glad that we're in the majority. And so as we get older, perhaps some of this controversy will die with us because I think it needs to. I would say this, I don't think he can debate the data and the research that the gentleman did in the book. I like it. I don't particularly like the categories. Too much like saints and sinners. I like what Andrew said. You know, the middle section is where people move towards. I would add a new section. I would call them recognizers being grateful for our history. At the same time, realizing that there were things in our history that led us to this *e pluribus unum*, I think we need to reclaim those. That's what I would say.

29:46

Thanks, I really appreciate that Bob. You know, actually, this question about history is one that I wanted to touch and I know Barbara's written on similar things, and when you're talking I started smiling. Oh, yeah, so let's move there. Right. I mean, it reminds me of the quote by C. S. Lewis that says, it's possible to be strengthened by the image of the past without either being deceived or puffed up. So we think that thinking about Christianity is in the American past, right? Some people would say, Oh, it's irrelevant to our past doesn't seem quite right. It will say, no, it's exclusively designed for Christians. That also doesn't seem quite right. But how do we do that? How do we think about Christianity's role in America and still keep our constitutional commitments to pluralism? What does that look like? Hey, Barbara, if you want to chime in, and others, please, this has meant to be back and forth.

30:44

Sure, I'm happy to. Yeah. I think that, first of all, I really appreciated your comments, Bob. right up my alley. My book is called *Rediscovering America's Sacred Ground*. And I think we need to come up with an alternative set of narratives. And I think our country is missing that. And so there's been a conjoining of Christianity with patriotism in an unhealthy way, and not enough in other ways that are actually more honoring of our heritage. And so Christianity certainly is not irrelevant to our past. And one of the things I think is important to note is that the Enlightenment sought to find a non-religious basis for the principles of liberty and equal inherent dignity on which our nation is founded. There is no doubt that in the West, these principles originated with Christianity in the doctrines of free will and human beings in the image of God. And it was as a counter to hierarchical authoritarianism, which can also be found within Christianity, as is noted in the definition of Christian nationalism in Andrew's presentation and his wonderful book. That hierarchal authoritarianism, including in Christianity, is actually as polio is to the principle of liberty and inherent equal dignity for everyone. Its views are based on the opposite, that some people ought to be accorded more dignity than others. And we could actually see this discussed dichotomy at the time of the founding because while the principles were laid out, of course, the beginning of our nation did not live up to those principles in that they did not recognize the rights of Native Americans. Slavery still continued, women did not have equal rights, etc. But those principles were stated and have been moving forward based on them, and they're ever unfolding. And it is concerning to me, and, obviously to others here in this panel, that what that ending up with is a kind of a story of the American founding, that is rooted in that more authoritarian ideology, and not the principles of liberty and equal dignity that are, you know, that our nation was founded on. But I think it's clear that the pull towards liberty and equal dignity in Christianity, and other religions and ideologies in the US is actually much stronger. And I noted in Andrew's book, that there's a decline in the ambassadors and I find that a hopeful potential for the future, even though they seem to be loudest. But I think it is really destructive for people on the other side of the spectrum, the secular what you might call the secular left to equate all of Christianity with those particular, you know, viewpoints narratives, you know, a whole set of cultural

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components that Andrew talked about when we have this liberty, equal dignity foundation in Christianity that comes through that through the enlightenment and to our founding. So in my view, we ought not to be trying to silence Christianity in the public square, which only leads to the kind of pushback, frankly, that we're seeing now with Christian nationalism, support of authoritarian impulses in our politics. And I always say the issue is not too much religion in the public square. There's not enough and we need the many voices of religious pluralism In the public square, all standing on America's sacred ground of liberty and equal dignity, and this needs to be a prominent voice in the public square. And unfortunately, because the louder voices are on that hierarchical authoritarian wing or side of the issue, people who are more oriented towards liberty and equal dignity tend to silence themselves in ways that I think are not healthy for our democracy. The call for pluralism in our public square has its roots in the founding era. John Locke, on whose writings the Declaration of independence is largely based, said in 1689, "If we may openly speak the truth, and has become one man to another, neither pagan, normal Mohammetan,[Muslim], or Jew ought to be excluded from the civil rights of the commonwealth because of his religion." And Richard Henry Lee said in 1784, "I fully agree with the Presbyterians. The true freedom embraces the Mohammetan, [Muslim], and the Gentoo,[Hindu], as well as the Christian religion." George Washington famously said in 1790, "all possess alike liberty of conscience and

immunities of citizenship. It is now no more than tolerance is spoken of as if it was by the indulgence of one class of people that another enjoyed the exercise of their inherent natural rights.” And just one more quote, because I think this one is super important. It’s also Richard Henry Lee. And this one’s in 1788. He said, “It is true, we are not disposed to differ much at present, about religion. But when we’re making a constitution, it is hoped to be for ages, and millions yet unborn.” So the founders contemplated the diverse voices that would be with us in the future, and who would be rooted in the foundational principles as they unfolded over time. And although they did not actually live up to those principles, in their own era, it’s the call to those principles over time that has opened the nation to its diverse diversity into the equal inherent dignity and liberty of everyone. And so that those diverse voices are here with us. Here we are, and that we need more of that in the public square, not less in my view. Thank you.

38:06

Thank you. Yeah. You know, that brings home to me simply because working in a field of religious freedom, I see this dichotomy where the sort of accommodators ambassadors are likely to stand up for religion in a public square in a way[...], and this really is a part of religion for them to be able to talk about religion publicly and openly and be engaged as religious people public. But the same end of the spectrum doesn’t see religious freedom as extending to all people, right. They want to privilege Christianity. And then on the other hand rejecters, resisters, are adamant about protecting the quiet of everyone, which is crucial and religious freedom. But they will say, No, we have to take things out of the public square, any civil, any situation, any public religion, is going to feed nationalism, is going to exclude minorities, and needs to stay private to build or protect everyone. This is a debate I see over and over again, in academia as well as in practical life. So how do we do this? I mean, I think you’re sort of hitting some of the points, Barbara, but you know, can one really oppose not Christian nationalism, and still see a real room for religion in the public square? Is there a principled way to deal with this? Or is it just sort of forever caught in the debate?

39:38

I mean, are you wanting me to answer that question or open it to others? Well, it’s like branches. I see. Let’s go with him and then go back to you. If you’re okay with it.

39:46

I would add? Yeah, I’ll turn it to Barbara. But I would just add that part of this, at least, to me, it seems like when we look at our own nation’s founding and its inheritance, how it inherited the Enlightenment in the ideals, but yet, there is, you know, clearly undergirding it. Let’s say your Judeo Christian and Christian principles, there’s this inherent tension right between, let’s say, reason as to the Enlightenment versus maybe other principles virtues that we received through revelation. And something that Elizabeth just mentioned that I just thought to myself, well, there’s this inherent tension. And part of the problem is, when we actually try to get rid of that tension, it might become problematic when, when you either have, let’s say, Christian nationalists, on the one hand, who want to simply lead all appeals to maybe reason or to, to right to dignity. But then on the other end, when maybe, rejecters might want to simply get rid of like Elizabeth said, get rid of religion out of the public square, I think we lose something truly unique and fundamental, I think of, you know, Alexis de Tocqueville when he studies America, and I think he saw some of this tension. And when he talks about it, he talks about

how America, how religion was one of its first political institutions, right? And not necessarily because well, this particular religion is necessary for America to thrive, but more so religion sort of gave a taste for freedom for Americans. It helped them to actually build civility and help them to build belonging together, and not necessarily in one predominant sect, or one predominant faith, but rather, building collectively as a community. And I think if we lose that tension that actually shows, I think, where some of the problems begin to arise.

41:45

Before Barbara responds, I'd like to throw something else into the mix because I really enjoyed what she had to say. And I like as well, Bradley, what you were saying. But in our history, I love John Barry's book on Roger Williams. That's just an incredible book. And a lot of people don't realize Williams, you know, was promoting religious freedom for all. Let's buy the land from the natives, no slavery. But you have this argument that he and John Winthrop go back and forth. And what's crazy is Winthrop, if you will, won the culture war, but it was Williams, who won the language and the philosophies. I've been told (please correct me, Barbara), but I've been told and I've read that. Actually, much of what John Locke wrote a good bit of that was condensed from Williams, in terms of what does it mean to live in an open society where Christians can thrive? We don't deny it, for now, I wish there was some way, and maybe you can help us understand, Barbara, but how did we get with this war between religion and secularism? I wish we could somehow separate that, maybe it's not possible. But I wish the conversation could be more with the philosophy of Winthrop versus Williams, but now who's going to want to have a 400-year-old debate? But the reality is this: this is not secular ideology. He was a very passionate man, Williams, who said, no, we've a right; everybody's got to be present. What happened to that history? Is it around? Did it die? How do we resurrect that?

43:37

Right, well, you are singing to the choir. And I think I ought to say that I'm actually not a Christian. So when I'm speaking about these things, I'm talking about them from the perspective of an appreciation. So I think on Andrew's scale, I might be in. If I had answered those questions, one might think I was an accommodationist. But I'm not an accommodation of Christian nationalism. But I am of religion generally, and an appreciation of Christianity in the founding. And I really do agree that this idea that the split that we have between Christianity and the secular has to go because it's actually feeding Christian nationalism. I think. And so to move beyond that, I think we have to make two important distinctions. First, we need to be clear about what we mean when we refer to Christianity. I really appreciated Andrew defining Christian nationalism in the way he did to distinguish it from Christianity in general. Okay, there. There is this battle within Christianity itself. You take back to Winthrop. And in the very beginning, right, Bob. And so that battle is between liberty and authoritarianism. And what we need to do is really claim that and we need to recognize and really claim the Liberty principles on which our country is founded. It wasn't founded on authoritarianism. So liberty Christianity is aligned with our founding principle, and authoritarian nationalist Christianity is not. And second, we need to be clear about what we mean by the public square, you know, certainly, everyone has a right to say anything that doesn't cause chaos or is a threat of harm to, you know, to anyone, right? And, and this is what I call the conscientious public forum, where, you know, we're really free to have whatever debate and dialogue we want. But when we're talking about the forum for Law and Policy, right, that's only appropriately addressed based on our founding principles of liberty and equal in dignity at the level of

what I call the civic public forum, which is a different space. And that's the space where we've had the amazing expanding understanding of liberty and equal dignity in our nation over time. And so in my work, I talked about how the religious right and the secular left, can both cite the founders for their different perspectives of religion and public life. But what I came to understand is that the founders were distinguishing between what supports our constitutional order, and its foundational principles, and what does not. It wasn't about religion versus secular. And so we have to get out of that dichotomy. Rather than opposing Christianity or religion as a whole in the public square, we can make a distinction, we can oppose all forms of authoritarianism, whether they come through Christianity, or any other religion or any other ideology, when they attempt to impose their authority through law and other instrumentalities of the state in ways that undermine the liberty and equal inherent dignity of every human being, and thwart the expansion of the meaning of that over time, as we have in our nation. So I want to just say that even Noah Webster, who is often cited by the religious right for his state mistakes in support of Christianity and the founding. He said, there's a genuine Christianity. Quote, "The religion which has introduced civil liberty is the religion of Christ and His apostles, which enjoins humility, piety, and benevolence, which acknowledges in every person, a brother, or a sister, and a citizen with equal rights. This is genuine Christianity. And to this, we owe our free constitutions of government." So yes, there's a role for religion in the civic public forum along with all the other voices, but it is not any Christianity. It certainly isn't authoritarian, Christian nationalism.

48:41

Thank you. I love the way you spell it out. And it brings me to another one of my questions, which is where we've seen some damaging aspects of authoritarian Christian nationalism, and states the ways it's lined up with racism over the years or white supremacy. I think that Christian nationalism's relationship with recent work, well it's complicated. Andrew in his book explains that they're not identical. But that Christian nationalism is powerfully related to works alongside and propped up racism. And Bradley, I want to bring you in as well, because you've written on Frederick Douglass and he's a great example of somebody critical of the Christian nationalism of his day, and how it was used to oppress black Americans, but who also saw it in himself, but saw the effects of the uneven application of American principles. And so that led him to question the religious, patriotic, and political orthodoxies of the day. I think, the great example of that, you know, most of my students are millennials and have heard it, but most people my age and older haven't, is his Fourth of July speech called "What is the Fourth of July to a Slave." He tries to address this head-on by saying that it was the rich inheritance of justice, liberty, property, and the independence bequeathed by your fathers is enjoyed by you, but not me. As the Fourth of July is yours, not mine. Help us think through this. People in a patriotic effort sometimes can glide over difficult topics and blot in our history like racism. Some people used to say no, that you shouldn't be patriotic and look, see, religion is really damaging. I mean, there's a lot of ways to talk about it and I'd love to hear your insights. And also, Andrew, maybe you can jump back in and talk about some of the details of your research on Christian nationalism and white supremacy. So maybe Bradley, if you could take that on first.

50:48

Yeah. You know, maybe it'll be helpful if I say just, you know, just a little bit about Frederick Douglass in that speech, and then maybe I can lead to Andrew to talk a little bit more about the contemporary implications. And so we can maybe juxtapose how Douglass saw him himself in his own context,

versus maybe how we might look at ourselves today. And so in essence, I mean, similar, actually to Andrews book, Douglass, you know, he teaches us that perhaps the only way to think about America and say maybe the role of patriotism as we've been discussing religion, and now we're entering the realm of racism, the only way to think about it very carefully, and perhaps more carefully than contemporary discourse might allow us otherwise. Douglass recognized, the actual injustice of the time is nothing short of tyrannical or maybe authoritative as Barbara mentioned, but he also acknowledged the nation's founding as one filled with the promises necessary to realize freedom. He actually asked his audience to return to first principles through a sober view of the past, with all of its good and bad. He asked them to critique themselves on how they're holding to those principles, those first true principles. And actually, religion played a key role in this. For instance, on the one hand, we find Douglass recognizes that America's past was inextricably connected with slavery and pervasive racism that, you know, oppress blacks everywhere in the Union. Because of this, Douglass in that famous speech, the Fourth of July speech, mentions that liberty, freedom, country, these things all belong exclusively to white inhabitants, and he lamented how American churches were complicit in this. He sometimes refers to this problem as either American theology or more often he refers to it as Southern theology. He says that it converted slavery from what Douglass argued was originally understood as perhaps a necessary evil into a positive good. And actually, Andrew references some of these problems in his book. In considering Simone, we might think that the problem laid squarely with America's institutions, its constitution, and that, unfortunately, when you infuse religion with public life, it only exacerbates the problem, if it's freedom. But in that same sense, we find Douglas lauded the founders of America. He venerated the nation's founding principles and admonished churches at that time for not being politically involved. It's, particularly in the anti-slavery movement. And he actually called on his audience to honor the legacy of the founding by realizing its first principles. And he believed this couldn't even be done effectively unless you had the help of the churches to draw a contrast on this. He actually noted how England, at least by Douglass's account, was successful in abolition because of the activity of its churches. He argued that they were effectively able to turn slavery into a religious question. And thereby, they're able to achieve abolition efficiently and in a timely manner. And so we could say, at least for Douglass, right, that patriotism or love for one's country and religion, these things are intertwined. And especially in the U.S., they were indispensable in the cause of freedom and justice. So I think, at least for Douglas, he would say the very problem of not achieving freedom, not achieving justice, is actually, let's say, that those religious peoples are staying silent and not doing anything in the public square. And I think maybe I'll leave it to Andrew. Maybe he can draw some comparisons of research that he has seen.

54:29

Yeah, I'd be happy to. And thanks, Bradley. Yeah, I think that you know, we find over and over as we look at different understandings and attitudes of the American public towards the racial issues and systemic racism we see today, whether it's policing and police violence, or social inequality. If you have a white American who embraces Christian nationalism, an ambassador, let's say, they're much more likely to say that, you know, police injustice and violence towards black Americans don't exist, that isn't an issue, there isn't systemic racism, you know, built within housing discrimination or education or anything like that. But if we have a black American who is an ambassador, or even accommodator, embraces Christian nationalism, we actually see that they answered directly opposite to white Americans. They're more likely to see systemic racism or police injustice towards black Americans. And

so, you know, we kind of see with this history of Frederick Douglass, to Martin Luther King, Jr., or today to Reverend Barber, this idea of highlighting, you know, the importance of Christianity and religion in the public sphere and in the history of the U.S., but calling the United States to account for not living up to those ideals, and using religion as a basis for that. And so, in the letter from the Birmingham Jail, or again, Reverend Barber today, to see Christians standing on the sidelines and not standing with the marginalized, or the oppressed, they would see that as abdicating what Christianity is about, but also, you know, if it's a truly Christian nation, it should be lifting the marginalized and the oppressed and doing right by them. And so we see that Christian nationalism, again, operates differently within those different social locations of the white Christian church, or the black Christian church here in the U.S. And as Jemar Tisby, you know, writes, there wouldn't be a black church without racism in the white church. And so, the Christian nationalism that is very prevalent within white Christianity is a lot to overcome. And that has placed, you know, a lot of the divisions not only within Christianity in the U.S., but social society, civil society, that again, they're calling to account for a more true representation, as they see, of the gospel of Jesus's message, as important. And too, I think, to kind of clarify on one thing, you know, as we talked about rejecters and resisters. Many of those Americans who are rejecters and resisters aren't necessarily rejecting or resisting religion in the public sphere, but the privileging of Christianity in the public sphere, I think is what they're resisting is objecting for many of them. And so even, you know, Americans that we talked with who are atheists and agnostics, they wouldn't say that Christians shouldn't play a role or shouldn't be involved, but that they shouldn't have the privilege position, that it shouldn't just be about their views or their desires, but that they should be among the many voices. And so I think that is a key, you know, made to understand exactly what the spectrum is about, that we highlight with our measures. But again, the racial aspect of Christian nationalism is very real and still very powerful in the U.S. today.

57:57

Can I ask Andrew a question, Professor Clark, if you don't mind?

Sure, absolutely.

So as an evangelical, I believe Matthew 25. And it says, nations will be judged by how you care for the sick, the hungry, those in prison---you know the chapter. And so, you know, what I wonder is, did the media, did you look at the media and the role that it had in, and I'm talking about conservative media and whipping up evangelicals to fear. Because, for example, historically the refugee issue, evangelicals have been at the forefront of that. Even immigration. But now all of a sudden, that's changed. I was amazed. I mean, we all have the picture in our mind of the little three-year-old Syrian boy washed up on the Turkish shore. And I mean, Christians were outraged. We've got to do something immediately. It was four months later. It was we've got to stop the refugees, or we're going to be onslaught by Muslims. I mean, it was like a cold front in Texas, coming off the prairie. And I mean immediately it shifted. And so I'm wondering, give me a little hope. Tell me, I know, it's bad. I agree with you. Tell me it's a little bit of media that's driving some of this? Or maybe it's not. Did you look at that?

59:30

You know, we didn't look specifically or study specifically media representations. So throughout the book, you know, we highlight the voices that are pretty prominent within white Christianity. So Franklin

Graham and Robert Jeffress, and others who you know, play a role in kind of whipping up some of that fear and the defense that they believe America needs to have to protect itself. But you know, there are other books. So, Anne Nelson and *The Shadow Network*, I think, you know, she gets into that. And Catherine Stewart's new book, *The Power Worshipers*, looks at these ad networks of kind of power brokers and media, and the media conglomerates are part of that. But I think too, with some research that didn't show up in the book that we've collected, more resources that Americans who embrace Christian nationalism are much more likely to limit their intake of media to certain channels and sources that I'm sure we can all guess what those are. But also, then trusting only those sources. And so it has become a siloing effect. And it's not just the right, or political writer, or religious right that's doing that. There are others, you know, those on the left that will only go to certain news networks. But I think it isn't the same in terms of the types of, you know, whether, you know, actual scientific facts are being denied, that isn't equal across. And so that is a problem, I think, mostly in certain media networks, where Americans who embrace Christian nationalism are going. I think that is one of the key hurdles going forward. And so trying to give hope there, you know, it changes day to day for me of how hopeful I can be because you hear pastors, and maybe you might count yourself among these, that they're pastoring congregations where they say they get on for an hour or two on Sunday, but Fox News gets them for, you know, 20 hours during the week. And so, you know, what they're taking in and what is kind of shaping their worldview is very different. But I think even those in the pulpit for a lot of white Christianity, they're equally on board with some of those narratives, in conservative media. And so it's a lot to overcome. It'll be very difficult. And not just TV, but also radio. The radio networks that are prevalent in rural America are basically a steady diet of Christian nationalism, where they're celebrating people saying, yeah, I'm now working and a Christian. And it's more about that than any sort of religious belief or, you know, identifying with a particular religious tradition. So it's a big fracture line. And I think it'll be very difficult, but it's a key one to think through.

1:02:29

Now we're just about out of time. So I'd love to pursue this and move on to different areas as well. But maybe we can have you each take a minute or two, and think about what roles can religion play to help solve these problems that we've been identifying? Right?. What can religion do to create a kind of patriotism, or to help address concerns about racism, conspiracy thinking, and other issues associated with Christian nationalism? Hopefully, we can leave with some hope, as Bob suggested. Why don't we do the reverse order of when people spoke this morning, so start with Andrew, and then Brad, and then Barbara, and Bob Thanks, thanks.

1:03:12

Yeah, I think, you know, for me, I see basically a two-pronged approach. I think, in the immediate term, you know, for religious Americans, defending the right of all Americans to the democratic process, I think is kind of, you know, democracies in the ER, and what do we focus on first and that's key. Because for, you know, the voting restrictions that are going to affect, especially racial and ethnic minorities, we have to defend that. I think long term, it's forced, particularly within white conservative Christianity, I think wrestling with these issues. And so talking to a pastor, who himself you'd say he's probably a rejecter of Christian nationalism. But as he pastored he probably looked like an accommodator where he didn't want to rock the boat didn't want to bring up these issues or talk through how Christian nationalism can really warp people's views towards immigrants and those who are on the

margins of society, as Bob brought up, that Jesus goes to and loves and cares for. You know, I think in the long term within those spaces, there needs to be a reckoning with this cultural framework and challenging it. But I think that work, you know, will take decades. So right now, I think there are aspects of democracy that are under attack. And so, I think supporting the right and access to voting, I think in the near term, is something that religious individuals who want to live in an equal society should be aware of and support. And I think that could play a big role in helping support that.

Thanks.

So. I think a potential knee-jerk reaction to, let's say, images of the Capitol when you see, say there is Christianity is bad. Therefore we need to, we need to get rid of it. But it's actually been really refreshing to study Douglass and write about him at this time. Because in his very time, I mean, he's dealing with a lot of the same things. You have a lot of quote-on-quote "Christian churches" that are co-opting slavery and turning it into divinely ordained. And yet, Douglass was not deterred by that. He didn't abandon Christianity or churches or religion at all, but rather he reminded everyone to one, exercise their reason, and see those things which, let's say God himself had said. And I think we can take from that. And he was a fan of Tocqueville. And I think just his relationship with religion and how it fits in the public square, fits maybe quite well with some of the things that Andrew is proposing. He didn't want Krishna to have the privilege of place, or he didn't want there to be entertainment between government and religion or the church. But rather, he wanted it to be a sufficiently public institution that promoted and helped advance the causes of freedom. And I think he saw the tools there that were available even in his time. And I think we have some of those things equally available to us today.

Thanks.

1:06:34

So I'm in complete agreement with Bradley. And I think it's very, very important to move past this religion versus the secular idea. Rather, what needs to happen is, really, I'm right in alignment with what Bradley is saying. We need courageous Christians to be speaking out and making common causes with people who are secularized leftists, around things like caring for the neediest, etc. And also, I'm not great at citing chapters and verses of the Bible, but perhaps you can tell me Bob, which Matthew chapter and verse this is, but it's just coming to me right now. It's something that says, you can call me, Lord, Lord, all you want, basically, I'm paraphrasing, but get away from me, you evildoers. That's not what this is about. What it is about is taking care of the poor, the needy, that you were serving me when you were taking care of prisoners, etc. And I think that needs to be front and center on a common cause with Christians and secularists. And the other thing I want to say is, Bradley, you're so right about Douglass and abolitionists. But I think we also need to raise, that the people who were all over, keeping slavery as you said, making it divine. The work of Paul Finkelman is really important in this area, showing how that authoritarian trend in Christianity comes right out of the support of slavery through to the present. And so we really have to disentangle Christianity as a whole, and what is liberty Christianity, and what is that authoritarian Christianity? And I think there's a lot of common cause that can happen between conservatives and liberals, and religionists and people who are not religious, around those deep principles of Christianity that inspired the founding.

1:09:06

I think, in early Christianity if we'll go back to our roots, there's hope. Because in reality, our faith did not spread because we had a lot of religious nationalists as the gospel spread. I've come to believe it actually is healthier when it's almost in antagonism with the government, in the sense of we're having to build a faith apart from the government. And that's when we have the biggest voice. So I'm a pastor. So I'll give you three points straight out of Matthew 25. That's your quote, Barbara. That's where it is. It's a great chapter. So three things we got to do. Number one, we got to push spiritual disciplines. You did give me hope Andrew. I mean, the reality is people who are getting into the Bible, reading, praying, legitimately growing their spiritual disciplines, can have an opposite effect. So I think I've every pastor can do this. And pastors are struggling, they can't say it publicly, but I will. But I'm an old dude. But I would say, we've got to go back to spiritual disciplines if people are going to get free from this. Number two, this is going to be painful. I think as pastors, we've got to be prophetic. We've got to call our own tribe out. Jesus did. You know the sinners were the sinners. He didn't go after, you know, everyday sinners, he went after the Jewish sinners of which that was his tribe. And I think we have to call our tribe to something bigger, to Jesus and the kingdom of God, it transcends earthly kingdoms. So I think Christians have value to any and all governments. I work with communists and Muslims and Buddhists and all the rest. I don't keep it a secret. I'm a Christian. Yeah, I'd like to baptize all of them, but do they still bring value as human beings? And my answer is, yes, they do. The common good. So I think we have to be prophetic to our people and challenge them. Don't be caught in hate and all the warring that's going on. And then the third and final thing I would say is, we've got to serve to lead. That's in Matthew 25 to Barbara. Because you can't help the poor and have a harsh attitude towards people of different religions, or races, or socio-economic income. When you're really loving people, and you're in a gutter with them, and you're trying to love them, it's gonna affect your politics, it's gonna affect how you see things, because you're gonna want to help these people and it forever changes us. I'll conclude with this story. I was always afraid of Mormons, Elizabeth, because I was a Baptist. And we gave you guys holy hell. Now, I don't agree with you still on some of your theology, I want to fix you up. All right, but here's what I would submit to you, is this. No one has done more in terms of religious freedom in the last 25 years than the Mormons have, at Brigham Young University, specifically. And now when I get invited to go to different countries, who were the first people that I want to invite, I want you, I want BYU at the table. You know, and here's what I've learned. The idea that living separately is the way we keep people Christian, it's just crazy. We should bring back to the public square for all humanity. And if we do that, we're going to have to have a more free, more open view of all people, even if we disagree with them, theologically, and it makes life rich.

1:12:45

Thanks, Bob. That's a perfect note to end on. I appreciate it and love and appreciate you and your work and we can talk theology anytime. I'm grateful to be counted among you. And all of you, thank you. It's really a great group and its a pleasure and delight to have you here. Thanks.