Amanda Tyler interviews Frederick Clarkson about Project Blitz, a coordinated effort to draft and pass bills informed by Christian nationalism in state legislatures.

1. At 4:27, Frederick Clarkson talks about Project Blitz and its legislative influence on more than 35 state governments since 2015. According to Clarkson, one reason for Project Blitz’s initial effectiveness was its ability to run under the radar. Before listening to this podcast, were you aware of Project Blitz? Did you see the efforts of Project Blitz in your state legislature through “In God We Trust” bills, Bible literacy bills, Religious Freedom Day resolutions, or other proposals? Why do you think they placed their playbook on their website?

2. In 1993, Congress designated January 16 as “Religious Freedom Day” in part to celebrate the enactment of the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom from 1786. Clarkson argues, however, that Project Blitz’s Religious Freedom Day proclamation uses a limited, revisionist history to argue America was founded as a Christian nation (10:49). Do you think Religious Freedom Day proclamations based on Project Blitz’s recommendations are troubling? How do you think Thomas Jefferson or James Madison would respond to Project Blitz’s type of Religious Freedom Day proclamations? What do you think would be an appropriate way for state legislatures to acknowledge and celebrate Religious Freedom Day?

3. Clarkson credits much of Project Blitz’s effectiveness to its ability to drive the terms and language of the debate on issues, even when they lose. For instance, the Project Blitz manual is titled, “Report and Analysis on Religious Freedom Measures Impacting Prayer and Faith in America.” Clarkson, however, categorizes its contents as really focused on three things: reinterpretation of church-state separation issues, LGBTQ issues, and abortion. He argues that by reframing these cultural issues in terms of a “religious freedom” argument, Project Blitz changes the nature of the discourse. Where have you seen the discourse change the most in recent years about the meaning and importance of “religious freedom”? How does framing these cultural issues as “religious freedom” issues complicate the discourse for those religious freedom advocates who are of different opinions?
Clarkson states that the guiding force and driving energy behind Christian nationalism and Project Blitz is really “dominionism,” which is the idea that Christians must seek control over every aspect of culture, politics and government to fully infuse society with a Christian vision (19:50). What are the dangers of dominionism? Which parts of America’s supposed “Christian founding” do you think Christian nationalists are trying to focus on? Is it more about regaining power or religious freedom?

While not in direct response to Project Blitz, the Christians Against Christian Nationalism campaign provides an alternative avenue for Christians to show that not all Christians believe the same way or want to promote such efforts. Going forward, how can Christians who oppose Project Blitz shape the narrative on the debate? What are steps Christians can take to resist such efforts, which often infringe upon the religious freedom of non-Christians?