

DISCUSSION GUIDE

White Christian Nationalism: How Racism Undergirds Christian Nationalism

CHRISTIANS AGAINST CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM

This discussion guide is a companion piece for the July 2021 [Christians Against Christian Nationalism](#) webinar: “White Christian Nationalism: How Racism Undergirds Christian Nationalism.”

A recording of the event can be found [here](#).

This conversation between authors and scholars Drs. Jemar Tisby and Robert P. Jones shed light on ways white supremacy intertwines with Christian nationalism and how we can work to root it out of our churches and ourselves. The discussion focuses on the question: “How does Christian nationalism overlap with and provide cover for white supremacy and racial subjugation.” Moderated by BJC Executive Director Amanda Tyler, the discussion among the three highlights personal experiences with white supremacy and offers approaches for starting difficult conversations on this important topic.

CONVERSATION PARTICIPANTS



Robert P. Jones, Ph.D.

Founder and chief executive officer of PRRI (Public Religion Research Institute) and author of *White Too Long: The Legacy of White Supremacy in American Christianity*



Jemar Tisby, Ph.D.

Co-founder of The Witness: A Black Christian Collective and author of *The Color of Compromise: The Truth about the American Church's Complicity in Racism*



Amanda Tyler

Executive director of BJC and leader of the Christians Against Christian Nationalism campaign

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Robert Jones asserts that in the U.S. context, white Christians believe that America is their own private promised land, entrusted to them by God for their privileged usage and control. How might this premise fuel racist ideologies and practices? How could you reply to someone who believes that America is a Christian promised land?

2. Jemar Tisby states that symbols have power to shape narratives. The panelists discuss the symbolism of the words “In God We Trust” replacing the Confederate battle emblem on the Mississippi state flag. What did the Confederate battle emblem on the Mississippi flag communicate to white people in the state? What did it communicate to people of color? What do the words “In God We Trust” on the current Mississippi flag communicate to those with Christian affiliations, other religious affiliations, and no religious affiliation?

3. Robert Jones suggests that hospitality is a virtue that combats white Christian nationalism, defining hospitality as “making space for everyone.” What does it mean to make space for everyone? How does it feel -- physically, emotionally, or spiritually -- to be welcomed into someone else’s space? How does it feel to be excluded from someone else’s space? What practical steps could you take to make space for people from other backgrounds or with other experiences?

4. Jemar Tisby points out that for many white Christians, white Christian nationalism is the pervasive narrative they heard growing up and the viewpoint currently most voiced in their communities. How do false narratives become embedded in a particular community or culture? What are some ways you can identify and disrupt the false narratives being told in your communities?

5. Robert Jones and Jemar Tisby both talk about the importance of “witness” or “testimony” as a tool for disentangling white Christian nationalism from their churches. What is your personal story of how you came to learn or embrace new perspectives on race and Christian nationalism?

6. Jemar Tisby received pushback to his book when he talked about racist events in recent American history, such as in the 1970s and 1980s, more so than when he talked about history further in the past. He was disappointed that people failed to see more contemporary events as racist when they have personal memories of them. When have you heard a similar reaction? Why is it difficult for many to confront recent racist events in American history?

7. Jemar Tisby underscores Robert Jones’ position that “the more racist attitudes a person holds, the more likely he or she is to identify as a white Christian.” Why do you think this is true? How do congregations intentionally or unintentionally reinforce whiteness, white supremacy, and Christian nationalism?

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8. Robert Jones states, “Every church that has a white Jesus in its stained glass has work to do.” Jones calls these symbols “an explicit racialization of God and a statement of power -- white Christian power.” What does the term “racialization of God” mean to you? How might a depiction of a white Jesus reinforce white supremacy? Why are these images “a statement of power”?

9. One pointed criticism Tisby has for those who subscribe to Christian nationalism is their “fundamental misunderstanding of the problem of racism . . . [and how] it’s almost exclusively individual and interpersonal.” What is the difference between racism perpetrated by individuals and racism perpetuated by institutions and systems? Why do white Americans overlook or dismiss the systemic or institutional aspects of racism?

10. Jemar Tisby introduces the idea of the “Lost Cause” mythology following the Civil War. Groups like the United Daughters of the Confederacy advocated for a post-war narrative that preserved white supremacy and white power. To quote Bryan Stevenson, founder of the Equal Justice Initiative, “The North won the Civil War but the South won the narrative war.” Think of the most prominent narratives in American history. Whose perspectives are emphasized in those narratives? What are the ways that whiteness and white supremacy shape the American narrative? How does this continue into national conversations around social issues today?

11. Jemar Tisby notes that a by-product of theological racism is the notion that Black people and other people of color’s thoughts about God are subordinate or inferior to European or white thoughts about God. Black Christians have a deep and historic reservoir of wisdom, experience, and theology informed by their experiences with oppression. What can all Christians learn from those theologians who have experienced marginalization?

12. What was your most important takeaway from this conversation? What specific action or series of steps can you take to confront white Christian nationalism in your local community or in our national conversations?