

REPORT

FROM THE

CAPITAL

BJC Magazine



Rev. Dr. Jonathan C. Augustine outlines Christian nationalism's threat to democracy

AMANDA TYLER on the idolatry of Christian nationalism

HOLLY HOLLMAN explores problematic government-led prayers in schools

Fighting Christian nationalism

It will take generations to dismantle Christian nationalism, but the time for action is now. In this magazine, we're highlighting ways you can start to move the needle and take important steps.

Amanda Tyler looks at how tragedies spur calls for change and illuminate the dangers of Christian nationalism. Read more about the IDOLATRY OF CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM on page 3, including how false idols can detract from the love of God, neighbor and self.

During our 2022 lecture series, the Rev. Dr. Jay Augustine exposed CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM'S THREAT TO DEMOCRACY, including the suppression of voting rights. Read more about his presentations on pages 8-11 and his challenges to win in the court of public opinion even if you lose in a court of law.

Christian privilege is central in the U.S. Supreme Court case of a public high school football coach who demands the right to lead students in prayer while he is still on duty. Holly Hollman explores what's at stake in KENNEDY V. BREMERTON on pages 4-5.

A new book is working to increase our country's engagement with the dangers posed by Christian nationalism. Hear what the authors of THE FLAG AND THE CROSS have to say about the threats posed and steps we can take to make a difference on pages 16-17.

You can also make a difference by signing a letter to Congress to protect the sacred land of our Indigenous neighbors (page 13) and review the rules for houses of worship and political engagement during this election year (page 12). Take the time to get involved by calling out Christian nationalism and supporting faith freedom for all.

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For more information, contact Danielle Tyler, associate director of development, at dtyler@BJCOnline.org.

Fighting the idolatry of Christian nationalism

By Amanda Tyler, BJC Executive Director

I write to you with a heavy heart. Our country has recently endured many horrific mass shootings — the most deadly at the Tops Supermarket in Buffalo, New York, and at the Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas. Within a span of 10 days in May, 19 children and 12 adults were murdered in these two violent attacks.

In the midst of our mourning, these tragic events have spurred calls for change when it comes to gun laws and policy. They also make plain the urgency of our collective fight against Christian nationalism. The shooter in Buffalo spouted not just racist ideology but Christian nationalist ideas as well. According to survey data, adherence to Christian nationalism is strongly correlated with opposition to changing gun laws. A common refrain in these debates is a need to protect our “God-given Second Amendment rights.” Indeed, the day after the Uvalde shooting, Rep. Brian Babin, R-Texas, said, “The United States of America has always had guns. It’s our history. We were built on the Judeo-Christian foundation and with guns.”

Just two days after the shooting in Buffalo, I spoke with sociologists Samuel Perry and Philip Gorski for an educational program for Christians Against Christian Nationalism (see pages 16-17). They explained that the killer clung to what they call “the Holy Trinity of white Christian nationalism” — freedom, order and violence. What is obviously missing from this trinity is love — the centerpiece of the Christian life. When love is absent, hate moves in, and it festers and kills.

There are many barriers to love that the world puts up, including prejudice, racism, discrimination, violence and inequality. A common denominator to all of these is named in the Ten Commandments with the admonition against idolatry. In her book *Amazing Grace: A Vocabulary of Faith*, Kathleen Norris writes, “Idolatry makes love impossible.” Quite literally, our society’s idolatry of guns is killing our loved ones.

We also can recognize the false idols that detract from the love of God, neighbor and self, leading to utter ruin. These idols include nation and ethnicity. Sometimes our idols can look like religion itself, but instead it is our faith masquerading in the ideology of

white Christian nationalism — a cultural framework that distorts our religion into an ethno-national identity. It morphs God’s love into an ideology that subjugates our neighbors, creates an “us” versus “them” narrative, and can even threaten their lives.

We saw Christian nationalism turn deadly on January 6, 2021. This month, I submitted testimony on behalf of a number of Christian leaders to the Select Committee to Investigate the January 6th Attack on the United States Capitol. We understand that to criticize Christian nationalism is not anti-Christian. Indeed, it is our commitment to Christian values — like love — that leads us to work to dismantle Christian nationalism.

Our love of neighbor includes a commitment to protect their rights of citizenship and belonging as equal to ours, regardless of what religion we practice or whether we are religious at all. Our love of God reminds us of Jesus’ command to render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s and to God the things that are God’s and not to confuse political leadership with religious authority.

Love of God and neighbor provides both the impetus and the tools to advocate in response to urgent threats. Recommitting to speak up for the foundational values of religious freedom for all provides the kind of Christian witness that our world so urgently needs.

This kind of advocacy will stand in stark contrast to others who will call for government-led prayer and other official religious observance. In a press conference after the Uvalde school shooting, Texas Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick said, “In these other shootings — Sutherland Springs, El Paso, Odessa, Santa Fe — it’s God that brings a community together. It’s God that heals a community. If we don’t turn back as a nation to understanding what we were founded upon and what we were taught by our parents and what we believe in, then these situations will only get worse.”

Repeating mantras that tie God and country like this will only exacerbate the problems that we face. In the wake of tragedy and trauma, it is time to recommit to love of neighbor and stand firmly against Christian nationalism. Our lives and our children’s lives are at stake.



Students' and teachers' religious liberty rights are not the same

By Holly Hollman, BJC General Counsel



In April, the U.S. Supreme Court heard *Kennedy v. Bremerton School District*, a case out of the state of Washington about the speech rights of government employees and the freedom of religion in public schools. For nearly two hours, the justices asked questions reflecting the Court's intense interest in religion cases, evident from the number of those cases it has agreed to review in the last few years.

While parties perceived as representing the religious side are on an unprecedented winning streak, this case presents a complex choice. In this case, a government employee asserts a right to pray on the job that conflicts with decades of settled precedents that protect the religious freedom of students.

The case was brought by a former assistant football coach who had a history of praying with players in the locker room and on the field before the school district learned of the coach's practices and asked him to stop. The coach announced on social media that he thought he "might have been fired for praying," inspiring a flood of emails, letters and phone calls to the school.

The case is not about the school's objection to a "brief private prayer," as the coach's attorneys have tried to portray it. Instead, it involves a series of efforts by the school to meet the coach's religious needs while upholding the school district's interest in protecting religious freedom and maintaining order on the field.

"Central to these decisions is protecting voluntary religious liberty for students by avoiding school sponsored religious exercises."

The coach agreed to stop leading players in prayer in the locker room and giving overtly religious speeches after games, but he insisted he had a free speech and free exercise right to pray on the 50-yard line immediately after games — including with students if they wished to join him. When his contract expired, he didn't reapply. He sued the school district.

Lower courts ruled for the school district and the Supreme Court granted review to decide when a public-school employee who prays on the job is engaged in government speech that lacks First Amendment protection and whether the Establishment Clause prohibits such religious expression with students.

Protecting Voluntary Religious Liberty for Students

For more than 50 years, the Court's school prayer decisions have stood as a bulwark against government-imposed religious exercises in the public schools. Most recently in 2000 (*Santa Fe Independent School Dist. v. Doe*), the Court held that school-sponsored prayers at football games led by a student pursuant to a school election and delivered over the loudspeaker violated the Constitution's ban on an establishment of religion.

Central to these decisions is protecting voluntary religious liberty for students by avoiding school sponsored religious exercises.

In an obvious effort to avoid implicating the school prayer cases, counsel for the coach in *Kennedy* compared the coach's right to pray with those of students whose private, non-disruptive expressions of religion are protected speech.

When asked why the coach insisted on praying on the field immediately after the game where students could join him, counsel said it was like a soccer player scoring a goal or a football player scoring a touchdown and expressing religion immediately in that place on the field. The gathered audience does not make the student's expression that of the school, he argued.

While that may be so, the example ignores key differences between players and coaches. A coach's on-field prayers at the end of the game do not resemble the spontaneous or momentary religious exercise of student athletes.

Citing *Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District*, a case that protected students wearing armbands in protest against the Vietnam War, counsel for the coach repeatedly suggested that teachers and students are similarly situated, since neither "shed their constitutional rights at the schoolhouse gate."

Scenes from the Supreme Court on argument day

Coach's Claims Conflict With Long-Standing Consensus

Yet, it is fundamental that teachers and students are not the same when it comes to enforcing the First Amendment. The distinction between the private speech rights of students and governmental role of school officials is central to the protection of religious liberty in public schools.

In an *amicus* brief in support of the school district, a diverse group of religious organizations, including the group I represent, explained how the coach's claims conflict with a long-standing consensus about religion in the public schools.

Supported by a broad and diverse array of religious and civil-liberties groups, privately negotiated guidelines were developed beginning in the 1990s to help reduce conflicts and educate parents, students and public school officials about the law.

These guidelines, which recognized private rights to prayer and religious expression as well as limitations on the school and its employees, were substantially incorporated into presidential guidelines that remain today. Public school guidance from the Clinton administration and continuing through the Trump administration recognizes the distinct roles of teachers and students in order to protect religious freedom of students.

Teachers, coaches, and school administrators are representatives of the state, and they are properly prohibited from encouraging or discouraging religious activity when acting in those capacities. They serve diverse families from a variety of faiths and none without imposing religious exercises on their students.

In this case, the school simply sought to enforce its reasonable and constitutionally-sound policies. No coach or other school official should be able to avoid responsibility as an agent of the state by engaging in religious exercises on the job and simply claiming that it is personal.

This case could fundamentally change the expectations of parents and students who rely on the public schools to offer educational and extra-curricular opportunities without regard to religion. In short, allowing a school official to use the position of privilege, power, and influence to pressure students in matters of religion will harm religious freedom.

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On April 25, the U.S. Supreme Court heard oral arguments in *Kennedy v. Bremerton*, a case involving a public high school coach who demands the right to lead players and others in prayer on the field following games before his official duties have concluded.



That morning, BJC Executive Director Amanda Tyler broadcast live from the steps of the U.S. Supreme Court on BJC's social media channels, previewing the case and what's at stake.

BJC filed a brief in support of the school district, focusing on the role of public school teachers in protecting the religious freedom of students. The brief was co-authored by Professors Douglas Laycock and Christopher Lund, and it was joined by the American Jewish Committee, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, and General Synod of the United Church of Christ.



BJC Board Member Dr. Sabrina Dent joined Tyler and BJC Associate General Counsel Jennifer Hawks with others at the Court to show support for the religious freedom rights of public school students. Learn more about the case in Holly's column and at BJCOnline.org/Bremerton.



A conversation with Rev. Doug Avilesbernal

Serving as the executive minister of the Evergreen Association of Baptist Churches — headquartered in Washington state — the Rev. Doug Avilesbernal knows the Supreme Court case of Kennedy v. Bremerton as a local issue in his community. On the day of the arguments, he came to Washington, D.C., to speak out in front of the Supreme Court for historic Baptist principles of religious freedom for all. We asked him to share more about his passion and his experiences in the community surrounding this case.

How does your Baptist faith inspire you to defend faith freedom for all?

Baptists have always been active non-conformists. The constant at the core of our discontent has nearly always been institutionalizing any particular understanding of faith at the expense of our God-given diversity. Therefore, as a Baptist Christian, my faith is nurtured and colored by abundant examples of faithful Christians who chose to sacrifice power and safety for the sake of those the current culture pushes to the outskirts and strips of power. I find my faith home comfortably within the Baptist movement because of its understanding of Jesus’ ever-present call to limit oppressive power.

How are clergy and people of faith in the Bremerton area responding to the case?

Sadly, this took place so long ago that people in Bremerton thought it was a settled matter. There is very little discontent with the lower courts’ rulings in favor of the school district. Nearly everyone making noise in favor of Coach Kennedy is from outside of Bremerton.

Are you surprised that a situation from your local community is getting such intense national attention?

The biggest surprise for me is that we were all under the understanding that this matter had been settled years ago. So it is difficult to see people arguing about something when those most affected by it have agreed with how it was settled.

Why did you feel compelled to fly across the country to speak out at the U.S. Supreme Court?

The reason we Baptists have been able to thrive here is that non-Baptists with power made space for us by keeping our government and civic spaces free for all with the Establishment Clause and Free Exercise Clause. So I traveled to speak out and encourage the Court to uphold that which prior justices, on whose shoulders they stand, knew to be a necessary component of our freedom appropriately enshrined in our Constitution. Every time a particular faith is favored, we know that oppression is never far behind. I will therefore defend the right to private prayer for all — whatever our faith might be — especially when it seems like my side might be allowed to enforce our way on others. Let us not sully the sacredness of prayer by reducing it to just another tool of our very human culture wars.

“Let us not sully the sacredness of prayer by reducing it to just another tool of our very human culture wars.”

While we don’t know which way the U.S. Supreme Court will decide, we know all of our readers can take action to support faith freedom for all in their own communities. What kinds of actions would you suggest?

Reaching out beyond our cultural, thought and faith borders is annoying, difficult and often hurtful. But it’s also essential in this conversation.

Aware of that truth, then I think a good way to begin might be to intentionally think about how “I” am engaging with those who think differently than me. The Hobbesian understanding that every time we engage with the truly “other” we are also engaging in a power struggle does not work in a diverse environment.

Stay current on the Court with ‘Respecting Religion’

Amanda Tyler and Holly Hollman are providing up-to-the date analysis of Supreme Court decisions and other issues impacting religion and government on season three of the Respecting Religion podcast series. This year, the podcast was honored with the “Best in Class” award from the Religion Communicators Council for specialty programming.

Be sure you are signed up for the podcast series feed — **search for “Respecting Religion” on your favorite podcasting provider and subscribe.** For links to major providers and to see a list of episodes, visit BJCOnline.org/RespectingReligion.



Excerpt from Season 3, Episode 13: Ketanji Brown Jackson’s confirmation hearings: The historic, the outrageous and the awkward

Released April 7, 2022

HOLLY: We expect there to be questions about religious liberty law, about the First Amendment, but much less so about one’s personal religious belief or experience, but that depends on the actual nominee and perhaps where they’ve worked or what they emphasized in their own writings, and as we noted, religion is not an area that Judge Jackson has written about a lot ... and yet it was really brought front and center by Senator [Lindsey] Graham from South Carolina ...

[The clip is played of Sen. Graham asking Judge Jackson what religion she is and how faithful she is. Jackson replies that she is reluctant to answer because of the “no religious test” principle of Article VI.]

AMANDA: Yikes. That is the first word that comes to mind when I listen to that clip again, and when I saw it the first time. It is so outrageous and it is so awkward, and she gave the absolutely perfect answer — that idea that I am reluctant to answer that question — well, of course, because that question should have never been asked.

Looking at this in the most charitable light, Senator Graham had a completely inartful way of trying to re-litigate a past grievance that he had about how now-Justice Barrett was treated at her hearing to be confirmed to the 7th Circuit Court of Appeals back in 2017. There was this feeling — and I think, rightfully so — that some of the Democrats on the committee had been unfairly questioning her about her religious beliefs. It was wrong then, but two wrongs don’t make a right. He did the same thing to Judge Jackson here.

Excerpt from Season 3, Episode 16: Supreme Court decision roundup: *Shurtleff v. Boston*, *Ramirez v. Collier*, and the leaked *Dobbs* draft

Released May 5, 2022

HOLLY: The Court issued a unanimous ruling in favor of Camp Constitution and its leader Harold Shurtleff in the case of *Shurtleff v. Boston*. ... The decision [says] that Boston’s refusal to let Shurtleff and Camp Constitution raise [a Christian flag on a flagpole at Boston City Hall] based on their religious viewpoint abridged their freedom of speech. Well, Amanda, that is the outcome we predicted. ...

AMANDA: As we said at the time, this is about as straightforward of a religious freedom case that you can get, and it really wasn’t a religion clause case — it was a free speech case. And it really came down to what you thought about this flagpole. Was it government speech, or was it individual speech in a public forum? ...

HOLLY: [The decision] was really based on the facts that you’re in a forum — a flagpole associated with an event on the ground — where it looks like you’d have government speech, but instead the government didn’t have a policy that kept control over that forum. ... In a public forum where there are all kinds of speech and association and gatherings, the government must be viewpoint neutral. They can’t discriminate based on viewpoint in allowing access to such a forum.

But religious liberty is also protected by keeping government itself from endorsing religion. So, if this had been government speech — if it had been a situation where the government truly maintained and kept control of its message ... then the government, of course, does not have to advance or endorse religion, and in fact would be prohibited from doing so.

Breaking down the boundaries created by Christian nationalism

Augustine outlines threats to democracy and how to be heard

By Cherilyn Crowe Guy, BJC Content Strategy Director

“Democracy is nothing more than an ideal for which we must fight,” said the Rev. Dr. Jonathan C. “Jay” Augustine, as he showed how the treasured concept is under attack by Christian nationalists attempting to circumvent voting rights and re-write American history.

In March, Dr. Augustine brought his legal expertise, ministry experience and theological knowledge to the campuses of Mercer University in Atlanta and Macon, Georgia, giving three presentations for the 2022 Walter B. and Kay W. Shurden Lectures on Religious Liberty and Separation of Church and State.

A pastor, professor, author and advocate, Dr. Augustine is a multidisciplinary professional who serves in both ordained ministry and academia. He is part of a group of national social justice leaders who speak for the equality of all human beings, while advocating for policies of diversity, inclusion and belonging. In addition to serving as the senior pastor of St. Joseph AME Church in Durham, North Carolina, and as a missional strategist with the Duke Center for Reconciliation, he is also a law professor at North Carolina Central University. He has been published in law reviews throughout the country, and his latest book is *Called to Reconciliation: How the Church Can Model Justice, Diversity, and Inclusion* (Baker Academic, 2022).

“And Who is My Neighbor?” was the question posed by Dr. Augustine when he spoke at Mercer University’s McAfee School of Theology in Atlanta during chapel service on March 29. He discussed two texts: The sacred text of the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) and the secular text of a book on Christian nationalism called *Taking America Back For God: Christian Nationalism in the United States* by Dr. Samuel Perry and Dr. Andrew Whitehead.

He asked the audience that important question of who is their





Dr. Augustine speaks at the Mercer Medical School Auditorium.

“Christian nationalism, I believe, requires a prophetic response from the church. I believe it also requires a legal response from those who have legal training and care about the law.”

Rev. Dr. Jay Augustine

neighbor, pointing out that Jesus redefined the concept of neighborhood in the Good Samaritan parable, with “neighbor” having more to do with shared values and finding commonality. And, he pointed out how we’ve often gotten it wrong.

As Dr. Augustine shared, Dr. Whitehead and Dr. Perry’s work shows how the ideology of Christian nationalism is used to draw boundaries between groups.

“Jesus teaches us how to not draw boundaries of ‘us’ versus ‘them,’ and how to embrace the proverbial ‘other,’” Dr. Augustine said.

“Jesus shows us that a real neighbor is someone who will not marginalize you, because a neighbor will be deliberate in trying to identify with you.”

Dr. Augustine said your neighbor could be next door or in another city, your neighbor might be Black, white, male, female, cisgender or transgender, but none of those identifiers are the key to identifying a neighbor.

“Whenever you find commonality with someone and are deliberate in connecting with the ‘other,’ that person is your neighbor,” he said.

“This good Samaritan must have rejected differences to find a culture of commonality. He must have rejected those boundaries of Christian nationalism as defined

by ‘us’ versus ‘them’ that grow out of a civil religion — that has little to do with faith but has everything to do with power.”

Dr. Augustine believes this good Samaritan must have believed in racial reconciliation because he rejected the impulse of unconscious bias and was more concerned about things that unite people.

Dr. Augustine said he’s asking everyone one question: Will you be my neighbor? Doing so means to stop drawing boundaries, to reject the conflation of authorities, and to speak out for policies that allow everyone’s voice to be heard.

Of course, being a good neighbor and speaking up for others doesn’t mean people must give up our individual characteristics that make us who we are, Dr. Augustine noted. He suggested we move away from the idea of a “melting pot” — which speaks to assimilation and giving up part of yourself to fit in. Instead, he advocated for embracing a “gumbo” idea, where individual parts come together without losing their individuality.

In gumbo, “shrimp can be shrimp, sausage can be sausage,” he said. “You don’t have to be something you aren’t in gumbo — you can be your full and authentic self.”

The next day, Dr. Augustine moved to the Macon campus of Mercer University for two additional lectures. He first spoke to



Walter B. and Kay W. Shurden listen to Dr. Augustine at the Mercer University School of Law. Next to them is Karen J. Sneddon, Interim Dean and Professor of Law.



undergraduate students, faculty and guests at the Mercer Medical School Auditorium, sharing more detail about the political history and problematic reality of religious liberty and Christian nationalism.

Dr. Augustine explored how many of the divisions we have in the United States are correlated to or emanate from religion and the free exercise of it, sharing how the church has played a vital role throughout our country's history, often going hand-in-hand with both American progress and American regress.

Dr. Augustine provided a detailed history of the United States, pointing out seeds that were sown from Puritan theology to Manifest Destiny that led to the emergence of Christian nationalism. And, he showed how the "us" versus "them" dichotomy created by that ideology is destroying the concept of democracy by limiting the viewpoints of others.

In Colonial America, he said our country wanted people to have absolute religious liberty, but that cuts both ways: Religious liberty told some people to subjugate other people through slavery, and it told some to rise up from subjugation.

"Prophetic leadership rose up in the church during the period of enslavement," he said.

"Prior to emancipation, the Black Church was the place where liberation theologies were born as well as theologies of passive resistance and rebellion against the status quo."

Tracing history through the centuries, Dr.

Augustine said a turning point — particularly for Christian nationalism — was in the mid-1950s. That's a time period when "under God" was added to the Pledge of Allegiance, and it's when the modern Civil Rights Movement began.

Dr. Augustine says, no matter how you look at it, the Civil Rights Movement came from the church, whether you trace it as kicking off with the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision in 1954 that ended the "separate but equal" rule or the 1955 Montgomery Bus Boycott.

"Why am I saying the church? Brown who brought suit — her father was a minister at St. Mark's AME church in Topeka, Kansas," he said, pointing out that this "rising up" in a legal context was part of liberation theology. Meanwhile, the civil disobedience of Rosa Parks and the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in the Montgomery Bus Boycott also had a theological underpinning.

"Here was an undergirding of civil disobedience — a civil disobedience that is not so much traced to Henry David Thoreau, but a civil disobedience that is traced to Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego," he said in a reference to the biblical story found in Daniel 3 of the three men refusing to bow to an earthly king.

Part of religious freedom, Dr. Augustine said, is rising up to give freedom to those who have been marginalized.

"What does it look like when God moti-

vates you to put your physical self at issue for something that's greater than yourself to imitate the sufferings of Christ?"

He said it looks like lunch counter sit-ins or the Freedom Rides in the 1960s because Christ died for everyone, and people are equal to each other.

"Religious liberty undergirded this willingness to sacrifice in the course of the Civil Rights Movement for the concept of freedom and justice," he said.

In the wake of this, Dr. Augustine said we started to see Christian nationalism rise up to defend the "power structure," often using wedge issues — from abortion to Critical Race Theory — to maintain power and the status quo and create that "us" versus "them" dichotomy.

Dr. Augustine sees hope, though, that we are getting back to that prophetic work of breaking down walls and dismantling false barriers. One reason for his optimism comes from the diverse groups he saw during the Black Lives Matter protests in the summer of 2020, noting that those gathered were multi-cultural and multi-generational.

"They were people coming together embracing, if you will, the prophetic side of what we've seen in religious liberty that says if we hold these truths to be self-evident — says the great declaration — that all people are created equal, then all must mean all."

In his third lecture, Dr. Augustine addressed a room of law students and legal



Gathered for the presentation at Mercer University's McAfee School of Theology are (from left to right) Rev. Dr. Otis Moss III, visiting professor of preaching at McAfee School of Theology; Rev. Dr. Jay Augustine; BJC Executive Director Amanda Tyler; Rev. Dr. C. Gregory DeLoach, Dean of McAfee School of Theology; BJC Director of Education Charles Watson Jr.; BJC Director of Strategic Partnerships Rev. Dr. Dan Hamil.

scholars at the Mercer University School of Law as he discussed Christian nationalism and recent attempts to undermine democracy, including the 2013 Supreme Court decision of *Shelby County v. Holder* that gutted the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

Dr. Augustine stated that the Voting Rights Act was the most measurable indication of success in the Civil Rights Movement — it was legislation that allowed everyone to participate in the democratic process. But, that 2013 decision is devastating.

As he illustrated in his previous lecture, Dr. Augustine noted that religious freedom is at the heart of democracy, motivating civic participation.

“The Voting Rights Act is still on the books, but it might as well not be on the books,” he said. He compared it to a dog who can still bark but can no longer bite because the 2013 decision declared as unconstitutional the section that determined which states were subject to federal oversight based on their histories of discrimination in voting. In the years since the decision, he noted that we are seeing states outdo each other in their zeal to limit voting. He gave an example of a voter ID law in which the acceptable IDs are those that are more difficult for some people to obtain and listed the IDs those groups tend to have as unacceptable.

He said it’s just one in a list of examples of a Christian nationalism ideology that is creating a group of insiders and outsiders —

that “us” versus “them” idea.

“In a post-2020 election America, voter suppression now is legion. Almost every state is wrestling with laws that make it harder and more onerous for people to vote because the powers that be — those attempting to preserve power — don’t ever want as many people who voted in 2020 to vote *en masse* again.”

“If Christian nationalism is about anything, it’s about power and preserving the status quo,” Dr. Augustine said. He pointed out that we saw examples at the attack on the U.S. Capitol on January 6, which included rioters carrying flags that said “Jesus is my savior, Trump is my president.”

“How did we get to that point — where those two are so closely wedded?” he asked, noting that Christian nationalism conflates cross and country to achieve its purposes.

“It’s not about acceptance or inclusion, but it’s about ... tribalism. If you’re not in it, you’re against it, and you must be taken down, and anything against the status quo must be going against God,” he continued.

“So, to preserve power, Christian nationalism is destroying democracy,” Dr. Augustine said, referring back to the insurrection, voter suppression laws, and efforts to ban books and un-write history.

“Christian nationalism, I believe, requires a prophetic response from the church. I believe it also requires a legal response from those who have legal training and care about

the law.”

And then he challenged the audience to take action and care for others.

“What about you? What about you testifying in committee when laws are going through your general assembly or your state legislature?” he asked, encouraging citizens to make their objections known on the record.

He also asked listeners to consider partnering with faith leaders to challenge voter suppression laws. “Even if you lose in the court of law, you can win in the court of public opinion.”

Knowing how religious freedom has motivated others to take action, Dr. Augustine said it’s time to ask yourself how you can be involved and what you are willing to do.

The Walter B. and Kay W. Shurden Lectures on Religious Liberty and Separation of Church and State were established when the Shurdens made a gift to BJC in 2004 for this annual lectureship. Learn more online at BJCOnline.org/ShurdenLectures.

Watch the lectures online

Visit BJC’s YouTube channel to watch all three presentations.



Churches and nonprofits: Be ADVOCATEs, not PARTISANs

A guide for campaign season from BJC

During election years, leaders of houses of worship and other religious nonprofits often ask how to use their prophetic voice in the political process while maintaining their 501(c)(3) tax status. The Tax Code permits 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations to engage in a wide range of political activities, even connected to elections. The line for 501(c)(3) organizations is drawn at engaging in partisan activities to support or oppose candidates for public office.

*If your goal is to encourage voter participation and engagement with issues and to avoid violations that put your nonprofit status at risk, it is important to Be an ADVOCATE, Not a PARTISAN.**

ADVOCATEs engage in these types of permissible election-related activities:

- Allow** candidates to address the congregation, giving equal opportunity to all candidates for an elected position
- Drive** voters to the polls without making it dependent on who they will vote for
- Volunteer** your ADA-compliant facilities to be a polling station
- Offer** candidate forums
- Create** nonpartisan voter guides, allowing candidates to express their position on issues pertinent to the position being sought
- Assist** with voter registration
- Talk** about a variety of issues – such as abortion, Black Lives Matter, LGBTQ inclusion, military spending – from your theological lens, not tied to a candidate or political party
- Encourage** voting

PARTISANs may run afoul of the Tax Code if engaging in these types of activities:

- Pledge** the church's support or opposition to a candidate or political party
- Allow** candidates or political parties to fundraise during church services or through church resources
- Raise** money for a candidate or political party
- Tell** the congregation who to vote for or against
- Include** ads for a candidate or political party in church announcements, worship videos or other church publications
- Sell** or otherwise provide your church's membership list to only one candidate or political party without making it available for others on similar terms
- Assemble** and/or distribute campaign materials
- Narrow** the church policy on outside events to allow only one candidate or political party to hold campaign events on church property, such as the sanctuary, fellowship hall or gymnasium

The acrostics are not an exhaustive list of permissible and prohibited activities. They are drawn from examples in IRS Publication 1828 "Tax Guide for Churches & Religious Organizations," which contains helpful explanations about the potential impact of certain activities on an organization's 501(c)(3) tax status. Visit [BJCOnline.org/JohnsonAmendment](https://www.bjc.org/JohnsonAmendment) for additional resources on this topic.

The Oak Flat Challenge

How big is 1.8 miles? How can you describe it? It's the length of the Golden Gate Bridge and the length of the National Mall, and the 1.8 miles surrounding your home likely contains many places that are important to you.

To the San Carlos Apache and other Southwest tribes, 1.8 miles is the size of the crater that will swallow the sacred *Chí'chil Bítadagoteel*, loosely translated as "Oak Flat" in English, if Congress fails to act. The federal government is poised to transfer Oak Flat to a company that will mine the low-grade copper deposit underneath. This new mine would result in a crater roughly 1.8 miles in diameter and up to 1,100 feet deep, destroying this ancient sacred site. **The sacredness of *Chí'chil Bítadagoteel* is not lessened because no steeple marks it.** Learn more at BJCOnline.org/SaveOakFlat.

Many of us have a hard time imagining just how massive this devastating hole in the ground will be. That's why BJC created the [#OakFlatChallenge](https://www.instagram.com/OakFlatChallenge), asking supporters to travel 1.8 miles and show others how much would be destroyed if that fell into a sinkhole. On Earth Day, several BJC supporters took the challenge, sharing their journeys on social media. BJC Advocacy and Outreach Manager Jaziah Masters walked the National Mall, and he shares his journey here:



I did the Oak Flat Challenge and walked 1.8 miles in recognition of the crater that will be made in the destruction of the sacred site in Arizona.

It is incredibly humbling.

You start walking, then 5 minutes pass, then 10, then 15 and you realize you are only halfway through. It took me more than 30 minutes to walk the entire distance.

It's hard to fathom just how large a 1.8 mile crater would be until you actually walk it and see all the people, places and things you pass. They would all be gone.

Doing the Oak Flat Challenge really brought home the sense of loss our Indigenous neighbors are facing, and it makes even clearer the scale of what we are fighting to save.



Along his walk, Jaziah stopped to take a picture at the Washington Monument (above right). The crater would be deep enough that if the Washington Monument stands upright at the bottom, it barely reaches the midway depth of the destruction.

Take the [#OakFlatChallenge](https://www.instagram.com/OakFlatChallenge) and post pictures of what would be destroyed in your neighborhood, show us your path, and challenge others to join you! Share your journey with us on social media by tagging [@BJContheHill](https://twitter.com/BJContheHill) and using the [#OakFlatChallenge](https://www.instagram.com/OakFlatChallenge) hashtag.

Sign a letter to save Oak Flat

You can take action and add your name to a letter to Congress about saving the sacred land of *Chí'chil Bítadagoteel*. Scan the QR code to the right to read the letter and add your name. BJC will be sending it to Congress in October, and we need to show widespread support for saving this sacred land. If you can't scan the QR code, find a link to add your name at BJCOnline.org/SaveOakFlat.





Madison McClendon, BJC Board Treasurer, speaks to board members gathered in D.C. and those joining virtually.

BJC Board of Directors holds first-ever hybrid meeting

After two years of virtual meetings, the BJC Board of Directors met March 7-8, gathering both in Washington, D.C., and through video conferencing.

Composed of representatives of BJC's 16 supporting bodies, board members discussed BJC's work and looked toward the future of defending faith freedom for all.

The meeting included breakout sessions and committee meetings, focusing in on different departments and opportunities for the organization. The board also celebrated the 5-year anniversary of Amanda Tyler serving as executive director and belatedly — due to the pandemic — celebrated the 20-year anniversary of Holly Hollman serving as general counsel.

The next scheduled board meeting will be in the fall of 2022.

Editor's note: This page was scheduled to appear in the spring 2022 magazine but was omitted due to a printing error.



Rev. Dr. Lynn Brinkley, BJC Board Chair



Sofi Hersher, BJC Board Secretary



Dr. Sabrina Dent, BJC Board Member

Our Faith FULL Community: Working to dismantle Christian nationalism

By Danielle A. Tyler, BJC Associate Director of Development

Members of our monthly donor community are strong supporters of BJC's work combating Christian nationalism. Two of our Faith FULL Community members who pastor churches, Meriah Tigner and Brent Newberry, give monthly because they value BJC's work fighting Christian nationalism and organizing the Christians Against Christian Nationalism campaign.

BJC released a curriculum called "Responding to Christian Nationalism" last year, designed for churches and small discussion groups to explore the dangers of Christian nationalism and take steps to root it out in their members and their communities. We asked Meriah and Brent to share how BJC's curriculum has helped their local ministries.



"I love working in a church with a mixture of politics on both sides in rural Indiana. I'm finding that there's rhetoric used by progressives and conservatives, and it gets difficult to find common ground. It can be a struggle to write a sermon that speaks to both camps, especially if I want to be relevant to what is happening in the news.

I try to bridge the gap by talking about what we could learn from the people we disagree with, which makes for uncomfortable conversations at times. The hardest part is finding resources that keep people engaged in discovering a possible other side. Realizing that Christian nationalism isn't actually Christian or patriotic — it is hard to disassemble that. BJC's curriculum has proved a valuable tool for those discussions."

—Rev. Meriah Tigner

"I found the Christians Against Christian Nationalism curriculum on responding to the threat of Christian nationalism intriguing. It is a tremendous conversation-starter in my congregation and amongst my friends and interfaith council colleagues. I love that BJC is calling out Christian nationalism intentionally, saying why it's wrong, and working toward building a true faith freedom nation — I love it!

BJC is bold — I know it's not without repercussions — but they are helping others of us who need this to hear and consider this. That's why I'm happy to continue giving a recurring donation on a monthly basis."

—Rev. Brent Newberry



We want **ten people** to join Meriah and Brent in financially supporting the movement to dismantle Christian nationalism.

Join our Faith FULL Community at BJCOnline.org/give-monthly, or contact me for more information at 202-544-4226, ext. 308, or by email at dtyler@BJCOnline.org.

CHRISTIANS AGAINST CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM

Bringing more engagement to the fight against Christian nationalism

Authors of The Flag and the Cross share research and reactions to the dangers of white Christian nationalism

By Evie Bull, BJC intern

“Freedom for me and order for thee ... even if my freedom infringes upon the freedom of others to practice their faith or to give their opinions.” According to Dr. Philip Gorski, that’s often the mindset behind the discriminatory and violent nature of the white Christian nationalist movement.

Dr. Gorski and Dr. Samuel Perry are the co-authors of *The Flag and the Cross: White Christian Nationalism and the Threat to American Democracy*, and they discussed their research and new book in a webinar hosted by the Christians Against Christian Nationalism campaign on May 16. Moderated by BJC Executive Director Amanda Tyler, the conversation explored the current threat of white Christian nationalism.

Dr. Perry is an associate professor of sociology at the University of Oklahoma and Dr. Gorski is the chair of the sociology department at Yale University. Their goal with the new book is to unite people who may disagree on other issues.

They discussed the need to create a sense of urgency for people who do not view white Christian nationalism as a problem. Dr. Perry pointed out that we can be deceived by the loud voices we see on social media — research shows that most Americans are still somewhere in the middle and are not very engaged or aware of the danger of Christian nationalism.

When asked to describe white Christian nationalism, Dr. Gorski explained that the thought process of a Christian nationalist is often, “God gave the United States some kind of special mission and — in order to achieve that mission and to bless that mission — gave the United States incredible power and prosperity.” He said that mission and prosperity seem to be in danger “by the presence of non-Christians or non-whites or non-native-born people, whoever the ‘other’ of the day happens to be.”

Dr. Perry then explained that freedom, order and violence are three pillars of the white Christian nationalist movement.



“The people in power — white Christian men, primarily — get the freedom,” he said, noting that everyone else — people of color, people who aren’t Christian, women, sexual minorities — gets the order. He said if those other groups violate the order, white Christian men feel they are “justified in perpetrating violence,” noting that white Christian nationalism is associated with strong support for “authoritarian violence” that supposedly keeps the peace.

Dr. Perry and Dr. Gorski used this foundation to discuss the tragic shooting in Buffalo, New York, that took place just two days before the webinar. The shooter — who shot and killed ten people and injured three others — shared white Christian nationalist values in his writing, and those seemed to motivate his violent actions. “Replacement theory” can help explain these values, too, which can be described as the feeling that “other people” are taking over and “we” need to protect America from “them.”

Dr. Gorski elaborated on how best to engage a diverse audience in the conversation surrounding this movement, especially with those who may be at risk of falling into this

“Let’s talk about [Christian nationalism] as an ideology that is anti-Christian, that is anti-democratic.”

category.

“Pointing fingers to people usually is a conversation stopper,” Dr. Perry said. “Something that we have sought to do throughout all of our discussions is not to call people ‘white Christian nationalists.’” The ideology of Christian nationalism, he noted, can be described as a spectrum along which anyone may find themselves, which is a more helpful framing for dialogue and understanding than throwing around the label “Christian nationalist.”

“Let’s talk about it as an ideology that is anti-Christian, that is anti-democratic,” Dr. Perry said.

After discussing the pressing dangers of the spread of white Christian nationalism, Tyler asked the important question of what can be done now to push back on white Christian nationalism.

Dr. Gorski mentioned the importance of “intentionally fostering relationships and trust across some sort of deep differences that we have in contemporary society.” He continued, “There’s lots of good scholarship to show that one of the ways to break these cycles of polarization that lead to violence is to build in circuit-breakers.” These circuit-breakers, he said, can be anyone who acts as an ally to those in their own communities in ways that foster acceptance. According to Dr. Gorski, these individuals have a responsibility to help people who may feel at risk of becoming a victim of this violence to feel safe.

Both Drs. Gorski and Perry highlighted the importance of Christians and non-Christians to unite with the common goal of fighting against these harmful ideologies that are putting American democracy at risk. A recording of the full conversation is available on BJC’s YouTube page.

What can we do?

During the webinar, many asked what they could do about the dangers of Christian nationalism. Here are some ideas shared:

- Intentionally foster trust and relationships across lines of difference, such as race and religion.

- Become a circuit-breaker: a person who can take a stand in a moment and stop something from escalating, especially when someone is threatened.

- Talk about the dangers of conflating religion and patriotism, sharing where you stand on Christian nationalism and discussing its harmful impact. Research finds that many people are somewhere in the middle on this issue and not very engaged, so it’s important to raise awareness.

- From the Buffalo shooter to the insurrectionists on January 6, we’ve seen many claim “Christian values” when perpetrating acts of violence. Christians and others should denounce such acts and connections, and they need to remind others that the tenets of Christianity do not include such conflation.

Additional resources

Visit ChristiansAgainstChristianNationalism.org for a variety of resources, including curriculum and discussion guides for group conversation, a one-page resource defining Christian nationalism, and a statement you can sign and share online.



Visit BJC

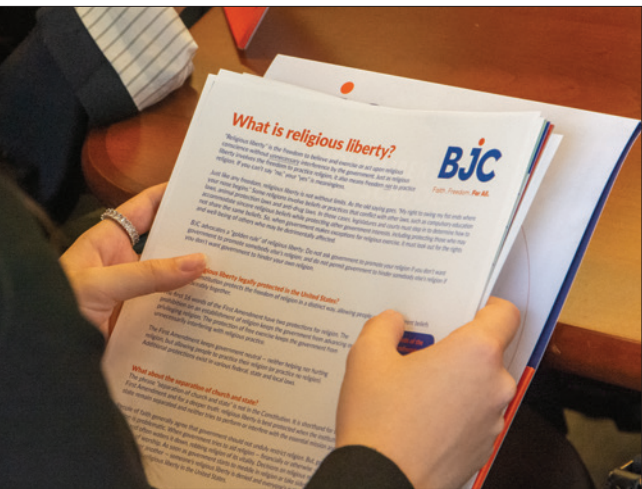
We are hosting students in our office throughout the year, welcoming new people to learn about our work protecting faith freedom for all.

BJC Director of Education Charles Watson Jr. and Associate General Counsel Jennifer Hawks lead students through discussions of religious freedom and what it means, including how it is expressed in our country. They also review current Supreme Court cases and have fun with questions and general discussion with the students about topics they are curious about, learning from one another.

If you are interested in bringing a group to BJC's office on Capitol Hill, go to our website at BJCOnline.org/visit-bjc.



Miami Dade College



Central Michigan University and University of Pikesville



Davis & Elkins College



Loyola University Chicago

Graves-Fitzsimmons joins BJC staff



GUTHRIE GRAVES-FITZSIMMONS joins the BJC team as communications director, leading the organization’s marketing and media strategies to grow, diversify and inspire BJC’s audience to advance faith freedom for all.

Prior to BJC, Graves-Fitzsimmons was a fellow at the Center for American Progress, where he worked on religious liberty policy and faith-based advocacy across CAP’s various issue areas. He previously served as associate director of the Rights and Inclusion Collaborative at ReThink Media and faith coordinator at the National Immigration Forum. He is the author of *Just Faith: Reclaiming Progressive Christianity* (Broadleaf Books, 2020) and has written for national news outlets including NBC News, CNN and *The Washington Post*.

Graves-Fitzsimmons earned his undergraduate degree from American University in Washington, D.C., and his Master of Divinity degree from Union Theological Seminary in New York City. Graves-Fitzsimmons has served as a deacon and Bible study teacher at Highland Baptist Church in Louisville, Kentucky. Originally from Houston, Texas, he lives with his husband in Washington, D.C. Connect with him at guthrie@BJCOnline.org.

Engage with BJC online

The communications team at BJC works to bring you the latest news about BJC’s work on faith freedom for all across many channels. In addition to *Report from the Capital*, we produce the Respecting Religion podcast, manage the BJC website, and create content for our social media channels.

We love that social media allows us to engage directly with you on Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and LinkedIn. We appreciate you following us on these platforms, and we hope you will comment and interact with us. Our ideal form of communication isn’t a one-way street from the BJC office to you. We want to help foster interactive and dynamic conversations among all of us in the BJC community.



Leave a lasting legacy with a planned gift

You can further your financial goals and continue to defend faith freedom for all by including BJC in your will or other estate plans, creating a “planned gift” to BJC.

Planned giving offers an opportunity to include charitable giving in your financial and estate plans, providing support for causes you care about beyond your lifetime.

There are several ways to make a planned gift to BJC. You can include or modify language in your will or trust, specifying a gift to BJC as part of your estate. Or, you can include BJC as a beneficiary in your insurance or retirement accounts.

A planned gift of any size makes a difference, extending our work protecting faith freedom for all into the future. Once you let us know about a planned gift in your estate, you become a member of the James Dunn Legacy Circle, which includes BJC supporters of all ages.

If you’d like additional information about planned giving — or if you want to notify BJC of a gift you have planned already — contact BJC Associate Director of Development Danielle Tyler by email at dtyler@BJCOnline.org.

BJC welcomes interns

Get to know our summer semester interns working with our staff.



EVELYN BULL, from Columbus, Ohio, is a student at The Ohio State University, majoring in public policy analysis with a specialization in nonprofit management and a minor in economics. She worked as a legislative page for the Ohio House of Representatives and later became the democratic constituent aid for the caucus. She is a volunteer with Young Life, where she leads weekly events, Bible studies and community activities.

Bull is the daughter of Eric and Amy Bull. Following the internship, she plans to continue her education by pursuing a Master of Public Administration and Leadership degree at Ohio State.

GEORGIA MCKEE, from Frisco, Texas, is a graduate student at the Wake Forest University School of Divinity. She earned her B.A. in Faith & Social Justice from Belmont University. Previously, she worked for The Dietrich Bonhoeffer Institute and local political campaigns, and she recently co-founded Christian Athlete Circles.

McKee is the daughter of Alicia and Michael McKee. She plans to continue studying matters of religious liberty and religion in athletics during her final two years of divinity school.

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We are attorneys, Capitol Hill insiders, ministers, mobilizers and scholars. We file briefs in pivotal Supreme Court cases, advocate for and against legislation, testify in Congress and unite with others across faiths to ensure that all Americans have, and will always have, the right to follow their spiritual beliefs.

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REPORT FROM THE CAPITAL

Amanda Tyler EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
Cherilyn Crowe Guy EDITOR

MORE FROM BJC

CHRISTIANS AGAINST CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM

United against a threat to faith

Join thousands of Christians across the country who are calling out the dangers of Christian nationalism to the faith and to our country. Read more on pages 16-17.



Subscribe to our podcast series

Get the latest analysis from BJC's Amanda Tyler and Holly Hollman by subscribing to the Respecting Religion podcast on your favorite provider. See page 7 for more.