

REPORT

FROM THE

CAPITAL

BJC Magazine

Indigenous voices lead the conversation at the BJC Luncheon

Meet our newest class of BJC Fellows

AMANDA TYLER reviews a consequential summer

HOLLY HOLLMAN explores the Supreme Court's shifts in religious liberty law

Faith freedom for ALL

What does it look like to stand up for the faith freedom of everyone? It includes listening to voices often silenced, supporting the rights of those who believe differently than you do, and remembering that people of all faiths and people who choose not to practice a faith have the same rights of citizenship. Join us in listening, learning and sharing with others.

On page 3, Amanda Tyler looks at this **SIGNIFICANT SUMMER** in many facets of our work defending faith freedom for all.

The Supreme Court's new term begins this fall, and the country is still reeling from decisions earlier in the summer. Holly Hollman explores the two decisions that show the **SUPREME COURT'S SHIFT ON RELIGIOUS LIBERTY LAW** on page 5.

Colonialism has not ended for Indigenous people, and understanding Manifest Destiny is essential to understanding the history of the United States. Hear **INDIGENOUS VOICES** share their experiences with faith freedom on pages 8-11, and learn how you can make a difference by signing a letter to save sacred land.

Members of the LGBTQ community have a variety of experiences in religious communities. Listen to **VOICES OF LGBTQ FAITH FREEDOM** on pages 21-23.

The members of our newest class of **BJC FELLOWS** share their views on what faith freedom means and how they plan to advocate for the rights of everyone. Get to know them on pages 26-29.

Listen to the various voices in this magazine and learn how you can be part of defending everyone's faith freedom.

How can you make a difference?

BJC is grateful for your support. Your financial contributions allow us to produce and send out this magazine, file Supreme Court briefs, speak out in the media about faith freedom for all, expand the Christians Against Christian Nationalism campaign, host student groups in our offices, and more. You support all of our work in Washington, D.C., and beyond, and you can make a gift to BJC at any time to continue our efforts. Here are ways you can give to BJC. Want to use a method not listed here? Contact us!



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REFLECTIONS

A significant summer for BJC and the country

By Amanda Tyler, BJC Executive Director

This summer was an eventful one in the life of our country and in the life of BJC, as reflected in this extended issue of our magazine.

The Supreme Court finished its most significant — and possibly also the most controversial — term in more than 50 years. A six-justice super-majority of the Court seems to view any different treatment of religion when it comes to state benefits as *per se* discrimination, while abandoning long-standing doctrines that have supported “no establishment” principles to ensure a government stays neutral when it comes to religion.

The Court’s rulings depart from the American religious freedom tradition in ways that will harm the religious freedom of public school students and their families, lead to even greater discord over religion and could even threaten the system of public education itself. While the full impact of these rulings is still uncertain, our advocacy as defenders of religious freedom for all remains vital at both the Court and in our communities.

BJC returned to in-person programming this year. We had a full ballroom in Dallas for our annual luncheon, which featured Indigenous voices on faith freedom. Holly and I wrapped up season three of our award-winning podcast “Respecting Religion” in front of a live audience. After more than two years, we welcomed back interns to learn and work alongside our staff in our Capitol Hill headquarters.

We also continued to provide a witness in the public square as Christians fighting Christian nationalism. Public interest in Christian nationalism ballooned — we saw more attention on the topic this summer than in the three years BJC has been working on raising awareness and action through the Christians Against Christian Nationalism campaign. Hearings before the Select Committee to Investigate the January 6th Attack on the United States Capitol spurred some of this conversation. But most media attention came in response to extremist rhetoric from political leaders like Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene, R-Ga., who said in July that the Republican party needs to become the party of Christian nationalism.

I’ve had the opportunity to write and be interviewed on the

topic of Christian nationalism many times in the past couple of months, and one consistent message I tried to convey is that this moment is a crucial one for us to speak up. We could very well be at a turning point in this movement, but it’s not one for the better. With more people explicitly embracing Christian nationalism as something to aspire to, we risk normalizing this harmful ideology at a time when it is becoming militaristic and violent.

While the mainstreaming of Christian nationalism is absolutely a threat, we can also seize this moment as an opportunity to galvanize the majority of Americans who oppose it and want to defend religious freedom for all. I have been overwhelmed by the supportive comments I continue to receive from people who are encountering BJC’s leadership of Christians Against Christian Nationalism for the first time. They are grateful to hear their perspectives on the issue portrayed in the media — namely, that Christian nationalism is a gross distortion of the teachings of Jesus. They also see the importance of separation of church and state as something that is good for both institutions, a principle in the DNA of BJC.

Those who are most ardently pushing Christian nationalism as an organizing principle for our government and politics are blatant in their aims. Rep. Lauren Boebert, R-Colo., said this summer that “it is the church’s job to direct the state.” Andrew Torba, the founder of the online platform Gab that has hosted extremist content — and someone who has spouted anti-Semitic rhetoric himself — said this summer, “This is an explicitly Christian movement because this is an explicitly Christian country.” He also said religious minorities will have to learn to live in a “Christian society under Christian laws.”

Alarming comments like these have contributed to my view that Christian nationalism is the single biggest threat to religious freedom that our country faces today. The fact that we see this rise of Christian nationalism in the culture at the same time that the Supreme Court is eroding legal protections for religious freedom is even more concerning and makes our strong advocacy all the more necessary. Thank you for joining our fight and supporting our work at this critical time.



BJC, others appeal to DHS to stop harassing Sikhs seeking religious asylum in U.S.

BJC and two of its member bodies — the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and Fellowship Southwest — joined 160 other civil rights and faith groups to demand American border agents stop confiscating religious items and other personal property from migrants seeking asylum in the United States.

“These practices not only affect Sikh individuals, but they also harm Muslim, Hindu, Jewish, and Christian migrants, among others,” the letter states. “Furthermore, the unnecessary and cruel confiscation of migrants’ personal belongings extends beyond religious items: CBP [Customs and Border Protection] officials frequently force migrants, including those seeking asylum, to discard nearly all of their belongings, including important medications, identity documents, records relevant to individuals’ asylum cases, and items of sentimental value.”

These practices are a blatant violation of border patrol policies and American law and religious freedom values, according to the letter also signed by the American Civil Liberties Union, the Sikh Coalition, Refugees International and the Black Alliance for Just Immigration.

“Alarming, these abuses have gone on for so long that they appear to have become standard operating procedure at the border, supplanting CBP’s own rules — which require religious sensitivity and the safeguarding of migrants’ personal property,” the letter continues.

Media reports and official complaints have identified border patrol sectors in Yuma and Tucson, Ariz., as “flouting the law with apparent impunity” by routinely confiscating the possessions of Sikhs and other asylum seekers.

“In addition, Tucson border officials also are denying Sikh migrants vegetarian meals; some who have complained have reportedly been ordered to eat meat or starve. These practices blatantly violate the law and are contrary to the fundamental religious freedom principles on which our country was founded,”

the letter says.

In an Aug. 22 letter to Alejandro Mayorkas, secretary of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, the organizations referenced recent reports of agents routinely seizing and throwing away the turbans of Sikh migrants and denying them vegetarian meals after crossing the border from Mexico.

A few days before the organizations sent their letter, three members of Congress wrote to U.S. Customs and Border Protection officials urging that the agency stop selectively targeting Sikhs for mistreatment at the southern border.

“We are greatly alarmed by continuing reports that people are being indiscriminately forced to give up their religious items and other possessions — which are then trashed in many cases. According to multiple entities working directly with Sikh migrants, communication and cooperation with CBP officials specific to this issue has been difficult, making it even more urgent to address this situation as soon as possible,” the letter said, which was signed by Rep. Joaquin Castro, D-Texas, Rep. Raúl M. Grijalva, D-Arizona, and Rep. Judy Chu, D-California. Rep. Chu also serves as chair of the Asian Pacific American Caucus.

The message also explained why Sikhs are pursuing asylum claims: “As you may be aware, many of the Sikh individuals making their way to the United States border are seeking asylum on the basis of religious persecution.”

In a separate statement released by Castro’s congressional office, Sikh Coalition Legal Director Amrith Kaur Aakre said the mistreatment, initially reported earlier this summer, has continued well into August.

“We continue to demand a full accounting of how the seizure of turbans and other such misconduct still persists at various border entries and what steps will be taken by the Department of Homeland Security to ensure that it stops permanently,” Aakre said.

—Jeff Brumley, *Baptist News Global* with BJC staff reports

Things to watch during the new Supreme Court term

A change in the court makeup

Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson begins her service on the Supreme Court bench in October, following the retirement of Justice Stephen Breyer. She is the first Black woman in our nation’s history to serve as a U.S. Supreme Court justice.

A free speech case with religious claims

The Court will return to the issue of whether a business can refuse to provide wedding-related services to customers in protected classes based on the owner’s religious beliefs. *303 Creative v. Elenis* will be heard on free speech grounds.

New cases to be announced

At press time, the Supreme Court had not accepted a case for the 2022 term based explicitly on religious freedom grounds. Several petitions are pending and more will be appealed to the Court. Look for updates on new cases accepted this term.

Court continues to shift religious liberty landscape

By Holly Hollman, BJC General Counsel



The U.S. Supreme Court's term that ended in June has been described as one of the most consequential in history. Decisions immediately affected abortion access, gun regulation and environmental protections. The Court also decided two important cases that reflect an ongoing shift in church-state law. Because the cases implicate two broad areas — government funding and religious expression — the decisions will likely have an impact far beyond the settings in which they arose.

First, in *Carson v. Makin*, the Court held that the state of Maine could not exclude religious schools from a tuition assistance program that allowed a state-funded education through private schools for the most rural districts. One of the state's criteria for participating private schools was that they are nonsectarian, which is consistent with the state's public school standards. Some parents sued seeking state funding to send their children to private, religious schools.

Though the Supreme Court previously upheld a state-funded voucher program that was intended to give parents a broad range of school choices including religious schools in *Zelman v. Simmons-Harris* (2002), none of the justices suggested that states were required to include religious education.

The *Carson* decision, however, follows a recent line of cases rejecting “no establishment” principles and holding that the Free Exercise Clause prohibits discrimination against religious institutions in government funding programs. In both *Trinity Lutheran v. Comer* (2017) and *Espinoza v. Montana* (2020), the Court rejected state efforts to avoid funding religion. Despite state constitutions that prohibited tax support for religious institutions, the Court held that the states could not exclude entities based on their religious **status**. In *Carson*, the Court went further, striking an exclusion that was more clearly geared to avoid state funding of an explicitly religious **use**: religious education.

The decision does not require states to fund religious schools absent a program that funds other private schools. It allows more opportunities for state funding of religious institutions, reducing expectations for the separation of church and state. The decision ignores the distinctiveness of religious education that has historically justified its different treatment.

In *Kennedy v. Bremerton*, decided by the same 6-3 majority, the Court held that a public high school football coach had a free speech and free exercise right to pray on the 50-yard line after games, and it held that the facts did not violate the Establishment Clause. The Court's ruling rested on a narrow set of facts after the coach had been disciplined and stopped leading religious practices with his players. The Court dismissed the contention that the coach's prayers at midfield were a continuation of prior practices or a government endorsement of religion. Instead, the majority stated: “The contested exercise before us does not involve leading prayers with the team or before any other captive audience.”

Viewed on those facts alone, the decision may be explained as simply upholding a line between individual prayer that is protected by the First Amendment and government-sponsored prayer that is prohibited by the same amendment. It provides no support for official school-sponsored religious practices. Nor does it support religious exercises by school officials that expressly coerce student participation.

Yet the opinion fundamentally changes expectations about how the government will protect religious liberty. Justice Neil Gorsuch's majority opinion didn't discuss the important school prayer cases that have provided guidance to schools for nearly seven decades. It didn't address the distinct roles and relative positions of influence of students and teachers that should matter in this school context, as urged in a BJC-led *amicus* brief in the case. Instead, the Court explicitly abandoned the long-standing *Lemon* test often used in Establishment Clause cases. That test from a 1971 case has helped avoid government interference in religion by requiring that government actions have a secular purpose and a primary effect that neither advances nor inhibits religion, and it requires that the government avoids becoming entangled with religion.

Leaving lower courts with little guidance (other than reference to “historical practices and understandings”), this Court is reshaping religious liberty without deference to principles that have protected it for decades. Whether its approach results in greater conflict over religion or simply more religion in government spheres seems something the Court is willing to risk.

A Christian athlete's response to the 'coach prayer' case

By Georgia McKee

The moment I put on my jersey as a NCAA division 1 college athlete, my childhood dreams came true. I spent my middle and high school years fervently and diligently mastering my craft of softball, building my strength, and impressing coaches. But, being an elite athlete wasn't the only identity I wanted to master — I wanted to be an elite *Christian* athlete.

Growing up in Texas, I noticed a hyper-fixation on loud, bold declarations of Christian faith in sports. It seemed expected to kneel in the end zone after scoring a touchdown, point to the sky after a home run, or give God all of the credit in the post-game interview. The face of religion in sports was an altar-call, conversion-focused, Tim Tebow-brand of Christianity. As an athlete, I wanted to express my religious identity within my sport, but I did not know how to do it other than in an overtly public and — looking back at it — obnoxious way.

But, I tried my best. I engraved a cross into my glove, purchased Bibles for my teammates, and joined the leadership team for the Fellowship of Christian Athletes. Surely this was how you practiced religion in sports!

I attended a Christian university and never blinked an eye when my coach talked about his Christian faith. Although many of my teammates didn't identify as Christians, they knew The Lord's Prayer and prominent Bible stories because our coach made it a regular part of our training. I didn't see the harm of integrating the Christian faith into our team until one day when we gathered for a huddle before playing our local rival.

"My biggest fear is that I won't see all my players in Heaven. Will I see you there?" my coach asked, looking down at all his players aligned on a bench.

This struck me as an odd way to motivate a group of 18-to-22-year-old women before one of the most important games of the season. The air was heavy, and silence never felt so loud. I watched as my teammates avoided eye contact with our coach and sat uncomfortably on the bench. Some were angry, and others just wanted the conversation to end so we could focus on the game. No one dared to speak up because, well, you didn't want to be the person to upset our former Green Beret coach. Before anyone could break the silence, the umpire came to our dugout, "It's time for us to start the game."

What would it look like if Christian athletes and coaches expressed their faith by listening to each other's stories, praying behind closed doors, dedicating themselves to radical love, and taking the overall mental, psychological, and physical health of athletes seriously instead of coercing people to pray and believe as they do? It's a big question, but it's one that we need to ask in light of recent Supreme Court decisions and the national conversation around faith in public life.



In *Kennedy v. Bremerton*, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in favor of a public school coach named Joe Kennedy who claimed a right to pray on the 50-yard-line immediately after football games. He had a history of praying with players, and while those facts were not part of the Court's ruling, the decision ignores that history and the power disparity between coaches and players when it comes to the protection of religious liberty.

Regardless of the constitutionality of any particular act by a coach, I'd like to hear more concern about the well-being of athletes and the integrity of the Christian faith. Surely, Christian coaches and athletes should find ways to express their faith that respects the autonomy of all people, regardless of what the Supreme Court says is potentially permissible.

Too often, Christianity in sports is limited to how many verses you can write on your sporting equipment and how loud you can pray after games. Don't get me wrong: I'm not against displaying Bible verses and praying; I'm against using elements of the Christian faith to divide one of the only places left where people from all walks of life can unify for the common good. Athletes should be able to bring their whole selves to their sport without feeling pressured to leave anything at the door.

I like the way former Justice Sandra Day O'Connor explained religious liberty and the idea of being equals. She said that government endorsement of religion "sends a message to nonadherents that they are outsiders, not full members of the ... community, and an accompanying message to adherents that they are insiders, favored members of the primal community."

When you pray at the 50-yard line after a game, you're saying, "Those of you who are here are in, and those who aren't are out."

Coach Joe Kennedy was my coach. Not literally (although I like to think I'd make a pretty good quarterback), but he represents many of the coaches I experienced during my 15 years in athletics. I've watched handfuls of athletes leave Christianity — and athletics — because of the way Christianity is portrayed by their coach or teammates. I want to believe there is a better way of being Christ's hands and feet than praying on the 50-yard line.

Georgia McKee is the co-founder of Christian Athlete Circles, a second-year student at Wake Forest University School of Divinity, and the digital communications associate at BJC.

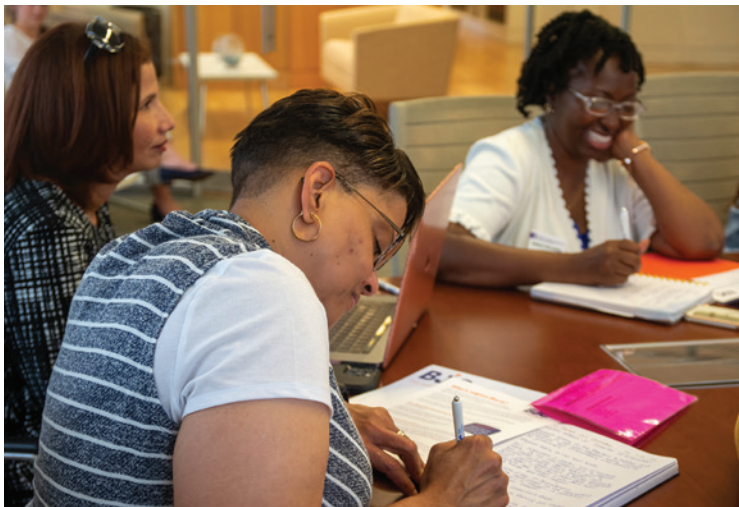
Visit BJC



Throughout the year, BJC opens our doors for groups who want to learn more about our work protecting faith freedom for all.



BJC Director of Education Charles Watson Jr. and Associate General Counsel Jennifer Hawks lead groups of all sizes and backgrounds through discussions of religious freedom and what it means, including how it is expressed in our country. They also review current Supreme Court issues, providing insight on the major religious liberty cases and how the Supreme Court works. The students ask questions on topics they are curious about, and the sessions include a great deal of general discussion and learning from one another.



We hosted several groups this summer, including students enrolled in the University of Mary Hardin-Baylor's Doctor of Education Program; youth groups from both First Baptist Church of Austin, Texas, and Union Congregational Church of Montclair, New Jersey, who were in town doing projects with Reach Beyond Mission; students spending a semester in D.C. from The Ohio State University; and students spending a semester in D.C. from SUNY Brockport.

If you are interested in bringing a group to BJC's office on Capitol Hill, we'd love to have you here! Get additional information on our website at BJCOnline.org/visit-bjc.

BJC also offers educational sessions through video conferencing, and we are able to come to your community (see page 34 for more). We're open to connecting with your group in the way that is best for you!





Colonialism continues, Indigenous leaders say

Indigenous voices share their experiences with faith freedom

By Cherilyn Crowe Guy, BJC Content Strategy Director

From the continuing impact of the Doctrine of Discovery to the crisis of missing and murdered Indigenous women, Indigenous voices are sharing the ongoing impact of colonization on communities across this country.

Hundreds of faith freedom supporters gathered in Dallas on June 30 for the 2022 BJC Luncheon to listen and learn. Held in conjunction with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship General Assembly, the annual gathering was a virtual event the past two years, due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

This year, the event was held in-person and featured Indigenous voices discussing faith freedom and persecution, as the Rev. Dr. Mitch Randall moderated a wide-ranging conversation with Dr. Kyle T. Mays and Mariah Humphries.

Dr. Randall, the CEO of Good Faith Media and a citizen of the Muscogee Creek Nation, began by reminding the audience that before 1492 — the famous year Christopher Columbus came to

North America from Europe — the continent already was full of thriving communities and nations.

“Many, unfortunately, have the misnomer that the Indigenous people of North America were one step above the Neanderthals. I mean, we were called ‘savages’ after all,” Dr. Randall said.

Dr. Mays, an Afro-Indigenous (Saginaw Chippewa) writer and scholar of U.S. history, urban studies, race relations and contemporary popular culture, explained why Europeans felt they had the religious right to “conquer” lands that were in no need of assistance. He traced the idea back to the Crusades in 1095, when Pope Urban II issued a decree declaring that European rulers had the ability to seize the lands of non-Christians.

“That really set the stage for taking over the land of non-Europeans and non-Christians as well,” Dr. Mays said, pointing out that this “right” was just made up arbitrarily.

The ideology continued with new decrees from Pope Nicholas

V in 1452 and Pope Alexander VI in 1493, which established the Doctrine of Discovery.

“At its basis, the Doctrine of Discovery argues that Christians have the right to conquer, seize and occupy any lands of non-Christians at their discretion. This is what we call today ‘settler colonialism,’” Dr. Mays said, explaining that the term includes non-Indigenous peoples seizing and appropriating the land of Indigenous peoples.

A professor at UCLA, Dr. Mays said the ideology persists today — he sees it in the displacement of people in urban areas of downtown Los Angeles and in changing the names of urban neighborhoods.

Dr. Mays also said it’s important to focus on the narratives we hear about Indigenous people, including the incorrect framing of them as “savages.”

Panelist Mariah Humphries expanded on the importance of the stories we hear and the “mind shift” that happens to justify genocide. A Mvskoke Nation citizen, writer and educator, she said that we have to think about how our country — and our classrooms — teach a narrative that was used to justify violence against Native Americans and stealing their land.

“I think for the most part, Native Americans — we’re going on our way,” she said, referring to the time before Europeans came to the Americas. “We have this way of life, and then all of a sudden we’re the ones who are suppressed, we’re the ones who are oppressed, and we’re the ones who are removed; we’re the ones who were killed, and we’re the ones who disappeared: language, culture, et cetera,” she said.

“And it’s all because we had to become the issue in order for someone to quite literally put a stake in the ground and say ‘No, this is now mine, because you’re the enemy.’”

“Religion is always used as a tool for oppression when it is supported by government dollars. And, like our families experienced, religion was used to assimilate them not to a place of faith, but to a place of colonialization.”

Rev. Dr. Mitch Randall



Today, Humphries pointed out that people often go into communities to see how God is already at work, but that was not the case earlier in history. Instead, colonizers often needed to shift their minds to view Native Americans in a specific way to justify taking what they had.

“We became ‘heathens’ in order to justify Christianity,” she said.

After the United States declared its independence from England, the marginalization and genocide of Indigenous people continued, including in the form of “Manifest Destiny” and western expansion, where the government appropriated billions of acres of land.

“The whole notion of Manifest Destiny is simply this: It was their God-given right — they’re invoking God here — to take over land from Indigenous peoples,” Dr. Mays said, pointing out that it

became codified in law, and the violence that occurred because of Manifest Destiny is a central part of how we should understand our government’s democracy.

“Colonialism for us has not ended at all. We are separate nations, sovereign people, et cetera, but we’re still living under an occupied territory. It’s difficult for some people to accept that,” Dr. Mays said.

He asked what it might look like if the United States government honored its treaties and also returned land to the Indigenous people.

Humphries discussed how so many of the issues facing Native Americans today are historical, including the current reckoning with government-run boarding schools. Between 1869 and the 1960s, the U.S. government removed thousands of Native American children from their homes and placed them into government-run

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Dr. Kyle Mays



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Mariah Humphries



schools, stripping them of their heritage and culture. The children found themselves in new surroundings with other Native American children, but that did not mean they had any common language or customs.

“We aren’t a monolith,” Humphries said, pointing out that there are hundreds of tribes, all with different languages and traditions.

Humphries also noted that many people involved with setting up and running the schools were Christians. “That is hard to accept as a Native American Christian,” she said.

Dr. Randall shared that he had ancestors who were forced into boarding schools. “Religion is always used as a tool for oppression when it is supported by government dollars. And, like our families experienced, religion was used to assimilate them not to a place of faith, but to a place of colonialization,” he said. “That’s why it’s so important for us today to know those stories about boarding schools — so we don’t repeat them.”

The panel also discussed contemporary issues facing Indigenous people, from headline-making protests to underreported and ignored crises.

The San Carlos Apache Tribe and others are working to save their sacred land of *Ch’chil B’idagoteel* — loosely translated in English as “Oak Flat.” Currently protected within Tonto National Forest, the federal government is poised to transfer the land to the mining company Resolution Copper, which could permanently destroy it with destructive mining practices. BJC will send a letter to Congress this fall asking lawmakers to save that sacred land, and those at the luncheon had a chance to sign the letter. Go to bit.ly/oakflatletter to add your name.

The discussion shed light on the widespread crisis of murdered and missing Indigenous women, which often goes unreported by media or unnoticed by other cultures.

Humphries mentioned the book *Mohawk Interruptus*, where Dr. Audra Simpson wrote that Native women have been deemed “killable” and able to be raped without repercussion.

“Historically, our Native female body and — I will say — historically the Black female body in our country have been deemed dispensable, and the violence against our bodies has been justified,” Humphries said. The crisis of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women is often referred to by the acronym “MMIW.”

“We [Native American women] are 2.5 times more likely to experience sexual assault and rape than any other ethnic group in the United States,” Humphries said, adding that most Native American victims experience violence at the hands of a non-tribal individual. She pointed out that the community has to fight each year to make sure Indigenous women are included in the Violence Against Women Act because there are other legal protections for the non-tribal perpetrator over the victim.

Humphries noted that having statistics to understand violence against Native Americans is important, and the community — as opposed to the government — is digging into these issues and providing resources for important discussions.

“We’re becoming doctors and sociologists and lawyers so we can take on these conversations to be able to represent our people,” she said.

Learn more and watch the entire conversation by visiting BJC’s YouTube channel.

Opportunities for action



The BJC Luncheon included an opportunity to sign BJC’s letter to Congress in support of the Save Oak Flat Act. Visit bit.ly/oakflatletter to add your name, and read more about our advocacy efforts in this area on page 31.

You can engage in additional conversations on this topic by joining BJC’s fall book club. Participants will read and discuss *Oak Flat: A Fight for Sacred Land in the American West* by Lauren Redniss. Visit page 35 for details.



At the event, BJC Executive Director Amanda Tyler shared how we are all living through a “seismic change in our society,” which includes threats to freedom. “I believe that Christian nationalism is the single biggest threat to religious freedom as we know it today,” she said, “and the only way to dismantle it is a national recommitment to the foundational values of religious freedom for all.”

Thank you to our table sponsors at the BJC Luncheon!

Our event listening to and learning from Indigenous voices on faith freedom wouldn't have been possible without you!

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PNBC restores faith and labor alliance, elects woman to key role

Home of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. makes history at annual convention

The Progressive National Baptist Convention's 61st annual session included the restoration of a consequential alliance and the election of a Black woman to a key leadership position.

On August 11, the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) joined PNBC in Orlando, Florida, for a town hall to kick off the restoration of their faith and labor alliance.

In the 1960s, the two organizations' collaboration undergirded many of the advancements in both civil rights and labor rights, such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (which included the creation of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission) and the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

"The Progressive National Baptist Convention knows the importance of ensuring all voices are heard and all votes are counted," said the Rev. Dr. David Peoples, president of PNBC. "We are excited to return to our energetic partnership with the AFL-CIO that led to such a consequential sea change during the 1960s. Together, we can re-energize efforts to protect the right to vote and stand up for everyone."

"We share a mission of justice, fairness and opportunity for all people, especially those in underserved communities," said AFL-CIO Secretary-Treasurer Fred Redmond. "Our movements are uniquely connected. And now more than ever we need to strengthen that connection, come back together and rebuild the bond between faith and labor."

In 2021, PNBC launched a national voter engagement campaign, calling individuals to take action to protect our country's democracy and voting rights for all. The campaign includes supporting the John Lewis Voting Rights Act, supporting the Protecting the Right to Organize (PRO) Act, and an initiative to register 500,000 new voters in 11 key states: Arizona, Florida, Georgia, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nevada, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania



PNBC officers elected at the convention in Orlando: 1st VP Rev. Dr. Keith Byrd, President Rev. Dr. David Peoples, and 2nd VP Rev. Dr. Jacqueline Thompson.

nia and Wisconsin.

The alliance with AFL-CIO and PNBC will create a national Faith and Labor Table, a working group to look at long-term and short-term projects to accomplish their shared goals of engaging voters, protecting workers, and standing for social justice. The millions of individuals affiliated with the two groups will be instrumental in engaging and mobilizing voters across the country.

Later that day, PNBC's elections included a historic first: the delegates voted to name the Rev. Dr. Jacqueline A. Thompson as 2nd Vice President.

The Senior Pastor of the Allen Temple Baptist Church in Oakland, California, Dr. Thompson is the first woman to hold an elected leadership role in PNBC's six decades of existence.

"It is my hope that women and girls working in our churches and conventions today know that God has given them the gift of service and the gift of leadership," Dr. Thompson said. "Progress often occurs at a place slower than we had hoped, but — as Dr. King reminded us — though the arc of the moral universe is long, it bends toward justice."

"We are excited about what Dr. Jacqueline Thompson brings to our convention as well as what she brings to the leadership of religious organizations throughout this country," Dr. Peoples said. "Dr. Thompson's elevation tells others in this country — young boys and girls — that

your gift makes room for you."

"Women are serving faithfully in ministry across this country, and they are continually breaking new ground," said the Rev. Dr. Lynn Brinkley, associate director of Baptist Women in Ministry who also attended the PNBC session. "I am excited to see this historic election and new frontier for the Progressive National Baptist Convention. Dr. Thompson not only brings wisdom and expertise to this role, but she'll be a shining example for little girls wondering about the ways they can serve Christ and the church."

Dr. Thompson's duties as the 2nd Vice President include providing leadership to the Pastors and Ministers Division and Women in Ministry Division of PNBC.

Delegates also elected the Rev. Dr. David R. Peoples, pastor of Jabez Missionary Baptist Church in Lexington, Ky., to be president of PNBC, and the Rev. Dr. Keith Byrd, pastor at the historic Zion Baptist Church in Washington, D.C., to be 1st Vice President. Both had been serving in those roles after the death of the Rev. Dr. Timothy Stewart in September 2021, who was serving as president of PNBC.

PNBC is one of the country's leading Black Protestant denominations. It was the denominational home of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., and it is a supporting body of BJC. Executive Director Amanda Tyler and Director of Education Charles Watson Jr. also attended this year's convention.



Respecting Religion podcast wraps season three in front of live audience

Subscribe today so you don't miss season four!

BJC's Respecting Religion podcast closed out season three with a live episode, recorded during the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship General Assembly in Dallas, Texas. Amanda Tyler and Holly Hollman walked through the *Kennedy v. Bremerton* decision in front of a packed room, and they took questions from the audience. Visit BJC's Facebook page to watch a live recording of the first segment.

Season four of the popular award-winning podcast series is set to premiere later this year. Look for new conversations, a new photo of Amanda and Holly on the podcast icon and new ways to hear these conversations, including on BJC's YouTube channel.

This fall is a great time to catch up on previous episodes and make sure you are subscribed to our podcast feed with the name "Respecting Religion." Step-by-step instructions are available in the orange box on this page.

Have a question for Amanda and Holly? Is there a topic you want them to discuss in season four? Drop us an email any time at RespectingReligion@BJCOnline.org, and you might hear your question on a show!

Miss an episode? Want to hear more? Have a friend who would benefit from hearing these conversations? Catch up and share the podcast with others by visiting [RespectingReligion.org](https://www.bjc.org/RespectingReligion.org).

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1. Open the Podcasts app. If you don't have it, you can download it for free.

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Problems? Email RespectingReligion@BJCOnline.org.

Excerpt from Season 3, Episode 19:

Gun culture and Christian nationalism in America

Released June 16, 2022

HOLLY: It's actually kind of shocking to me that someone would blame the lack of school prayer for mass shootings. It used to be quite common in the 1990s and earlier times. BJC has seen this in a lot of debates: people periodically call for prayer in schools, and they would say the lack of school-sponsored prayer led to teenage pregnancy or more drug use or whatever the social ill of the day was that someone was focused on.

And, as you said, not only are these not causally connected, but all they do is let people off the hook, to deny our personal and communal responsibility to care for each other and to come up with legitimate policy responses and community responses to problems that we want to address as a society.

AMANDA: It also presumes that the government has authority in matters of religion. ... Religion flourishes best when the government stays out of it. It's so galling to use a national tragedy to have just one more inroad to try to get more government sponsorship of religion. It's adding insult to incredible injury.

Excerpt from Season 3, Episode 21:

Not solving a problem, but creating one: Dissecting the *Kennedy v. Bremerton* decision

Released July 7, 2022

HOLLY: As we predicted, this Court ruled for Coach Kennedy.

We predicted that not because he was right, but because this Court is very interested in religious expression — I mean, we are, too — but, this Court is very interested in religious expression and **not** very interested in government efforts to maintain the separation of church and state.

AMANDA: I think that characterization is charitable, Holly, that they're not very interested in the separation of church and state [audience laughter], and it's fair.

And, also to be fair, most people expected this result, particularly after oral argument.

Even the fact that the Court took this case after Coach Kennedy repeatedly lost in the lower courts made it seem like this Court was looking to reverse the decisions below.

You can listen to any episode from season three on your favorite podcasting provider!

- Ep. 21: Not solving a problem, but creating one: Dissecting the *Kennedy v. Bremerton* decision (LIVE)
- Ep. 20: Forcing states to fund religion: *Carson v. Makin* decision
- Ep. 19: Gun culture and Christian nationalism in America
- Ep. 18: Christian nationalism and election season 2022
- Ep. 17: Religious freedom and our Indigenous neighbors: Save Oak Flat
- Ep. 16: SCOTUS decision roundup: *Shurtleff v. Boston*, *Ramirez v. Collier*, and the leaked *Dobbs* draft
- Ep. 15: The coach is the loudspeaker and the field is his classroom: *Kennedy v. Bremerton* arguments
- Ep. 14: #NoPrayToPlay: Previewing the *Kennedy v. Bremerton* case
- Ep. 13: Ketanji Brown Jackson's confirmation hearings: The historic, the outrageous and the awkward
- Ep. 12: Christian nationalism and January 6
- Ep. 11: Race and religious freedom
- Ep. 10: Supreme Court roundup
- Ep. 09: Reviewing the Biden administration's first year in religious liberty
- Ep. 08: Flying the flag and Christian nationalism: Previewing *Shurtleff v. Boston*
- Ep. 07: Is religion really like soccer or book club? Responding to oral arguments in *Carson v. Makin*
- Ep. 06: Challenging misinformation: How to have productive conversations with friends and family
- Ep. 05: What's the problem with government funding religious education? A preview of *Carson v. Makin*
- Ep. 04: Searching for sincerity and standards: SCOTUS on religious rites in the execution chamber
- Ep. 03: What's going on with religious exemptions to COVID-19 vaccine mandates?
- Ep. 02: Out of the shadows and into the courtroom: Religion in the execution chamber
- Ep. 01: The fondness of magistrates: Is religion really winning at the Supreme Court?

Hiding in plain sight: Christian nationalism's threat to faith freedom for all



By Rev. Jennifer Hawks
BJC Associate General Counsel

The U.S. Constitution was enacted “in Order to form a more perfect Union,” and serves as the founding generation’s clarion call to all succeeding generations: The union isn’t perfect, and we must do our part to make it more so. When it comes to protecting religious freedom for all, that means building on the promise of Article VI of the Constitution (No Religious Test Clause) and the Religion Clauses of the First Amendment (No Establishment and Free Exercise). These provisions were monumental steps towards a government that protects religious freedom for all. They were the product of a debate among a founding generation who sought to forge a new path that would save the young republic from the devastating effects (which they had seen firsthand) of combining the coercive power of government with the zeal of religious authority.

Each generation has the chance to expand religious freedom so that all people may share in the promise that we are equal without regard to religion. Each generation also has its challenges. Unfortunately, the biggest threat to religious freedom in the United States today strikes at the very heart of our country’s bedrock commitment to the idea that we are a country devoted to religious freedom for all. This threat is Christian nationalism. Religious nationalism is not unique to the United States or Christianity, but its expression in the United States is harming the foundation of our constitutional system, as well as the health and vitality of the Christian faith.

Broadly speaking, Christian nationalism is a political ideology that seeks to merge Christian and American identities. It suggests that “real” Americans are Christian and that “true” Christians hold a particular view of America and share opinions on certain issues. In reality, the Christian gospel transcends political ideology, and students of American history know that since our colonial days people of various faith traditions and the nonreligious have contributed to the success of the United States.

The “Christian” in Christian nationalism is more about ethno-national identity than religion. “Nationalism” goes beyond patriotism to demand loyalty to a political leader, party or system above all else — including one’s theological beliefs and family ties. It is helpful to think of Christian nationalism as a sliding scale that influences Americans to different degrees as opposed to a binary choice between either being a Christian nationalist or not.

“Christian nationalism is not a branch of Christianity. It is not a fringe theology. It is an insidious political ideology that uses the language of Christianity to hide its attack on religious freedom.”

Christian nationalism is not a branch of Christianity. It is not a fringe theology. It is an insidious political ideology that uses the language of Christianity to hide its attack on religious freedom. It seeks a preference in law and culture for a narrow subset of Americans and justifies disenfranchisement and violence against others. Christian nationalism co-opts Christian imagery and language to spread a gospel of power instead of a gospel of love.

This article cannot address all expressions and nuances of Christian nationalism, so it will focus on three that most directly threaten religious freedom: reliance on the “Christian nation” myth, the blending of religious and political authority, and the legitimization of personal and political violence.

Saying the U.S. is a “Christian nation” is a persistent American myth, and it is not a harmless rhetorical trope. Demographically, 63% of Americans self-identify as Christian, but there is a wide gap between stating that the country has a majority-Christian population and that the country is a “Christian nation.” The myth is used to claim that government advancement of Christianity is what the founders intended, and that claim tends to undercut the freedom of others.

Here’s one way researchers describe the “Christian nation” myth:

America was founded as a Christian nation by (white) men who were “traditional” Christians, who based the nation’s founding documents on “Christian principles.” The United States is blessed by God, which is why it has been so successful; and the nation has a special role to play in God’s plan for humanity. But these blessings are threatened by cultural degradation from

CHRISTIANS AGAINST CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM

“un-American” influences both inside and outside our borders.

The myth of the U.S. being a Christian nation is easily dispelled by a cursory review of American history, but it perniciously persists. Its threat to religious freedom is not simply the repeating of a false history — the myth is fundamentally incompatible with the Constitution. Unlike state constitutions, the U.S. Constitution contains no references to God or a supreme being. The federal Constitution also broke with the tradition of religious tests contained in many of the colonial charters and state constitutions when it explicitly banned religious tests for federal office in Article VI. Additionally, the freedoms encapsulated in the First Amendment are not limited in any way to Christians. While there are plenty of constitutional controversies, on this point there is only clarity: the text of the U.S. Constitution created a secular government for citizens, regardless of their religious beliefs.

Peddlers of the “Christian nation” myth try to muddy this clarity by creating an idyllic world in which all of the founders shared the same Christian beliefs and never contemplated the religious pluralism of our modern society. Article VI, however, sparked much controversy in the state ratifying conventions, precisely because it opened the door to a future in which “A Turk, a Jew, a Rom[an] Catholic, and what is worse than all, a Universal[ist], may be President of the United States.” Those in the founding generation who wanted a “Christian nation” lost the debate, and we should not allow a false narrative to change the outcome.

Christian nationalism’s second threat to religious freedom is its merging of religious and secular authority. Political power needs legitimacy to maintain control, and legitimacy can be drawn from different places. Religious nationalism provides a unique source of authority by giving a leader or gov-

ernment unwavering moral support for its policies. Since it ultimately pursues power, religious nationalism does not have room for prophets who seek to hold the government to a higher standard, only yes-men interested in blessing government action. The veneer of Christianity is the tool of Christian nationalism, not the robust religion with teachings that challenge secular governments. For example, the Christian Bible contains numerous teachings that would be difficult to implement as public policy, including lending at no interest to fellow citizens (Deuteronomy 23:19), offering your shirt to someone who has taken your coat (Luke 6:29), ending all wars between nations (Isaiah 2:4), and forgiving a wrong seventy-seven times (Matthew 18:22).

One expression of this merging of authorities in the American context is the use of Christian language to compel political unity. Religious language and imagery is common in American civic life, and not all examples are harmful. Politicians and nominees should be as open as they want about

“Religious nationalism is not unique to the United States or Christianity, but its expression in the United States is harming the foundation of our constitutional system, as well as the health and vitality of the Christian faith.”

their faith and religious practices. While they should never be forced to disclose a religious affiliation, it can be appropriate for voters to ask how the religious viewpoints of office-holders might influence their decision-making while in office.

The line is potentially crossed when politicians use a personally moving religious practice as a call to unify the country. One example of this is prayers and hymns at important government events like the presidential inauguration. Religious hymns have been sung at many inaugurations over the years, including at the most recent one [for President Joe Biden], which featured Garth Brooks’s moving rendition of “Amazing Grace.” “Amazing Grace” is one of the most beloved Christian hymns because it is a beautiful story of salvation for a slave trader turned abolitionist that somehow remains relevant 250 years later. It is not a song of patriotism or American values. This makes it difficult to say what its role was at the ceremony peacefully transferring civil power from one duly elected president to the next. It appears to be using a Christian message of God’s redemption to unify all Americans in the political sphere, regardless of their personal religious beliefs.

The line is definitely crossed when politicians misquote Scripture, redirecting verses that should apply to God or Jesus to American civic life. In his August 2020 speech at the Republican National Convention, Vice President Mike Pence removed “Jesus” from a verse to substitute a reference to the American flag. Instead of “Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith,” Pence said, “Let’s fix our eyes on Old Glory and all she represents. Let’s fix our eyes on this land of heroes and let their courage inspire. And let’s fix our eyes on the author and perfecter of our faith and freedom.”

Like President Biden, Vice President Pence is a man of deep faith, which made the decision to replace

Marking three years of calling out Christian nationalism

In July 2019, BJC joined with other ecumenical leaders to launch the Christians Against Christian Nationalism movement, bringing together Christians across many lines of differences to speak together against the dangers of Christian nationalism to our faith and our country.

Over the past three years, more than 28,000 Christians have signed our statement of principles. Many thousands more — Christians and others — have used and shared our resources to help their communities better understand and then work against this poisonous ideology. BJC thanks all of you for your courageous action in standing up to the growing threat of Christian nationalism.

We need to do more. Talk to your friends, neighbors, family and people in your churches about this movement. Use the discussion guides and resources on our website. Christian nationalism infects so much of our politics, and we see elements of it in many churches and denominations. Together, we can advance faith freedom for all and confront this political ideology in ourselves, in our communities and in our churches.

“Jesus” with “Old Glory and all she represents” all the more noticeable. It is also one of the best encapsulations of the language of Christian nationalism: using a Scripture reference that sounds familiar and may ring true to insiders (“let’s fix our eyes ... author and perfecter of our faith”) but switches the allegiance from the sacred to the secular. This reinforces the idea that “you and I are part of the same tribe,” and manipulates the audience in a way that equates political objectives with religious devotion.

2018 featured an even more troubling misuse of Scripture

“In order to succeed, Christian nationalism needs a carefully curated version of history that tells a story of a country founded by Christians to protect Christian values. ... [I]t must downplay the stories and contributions of Native Americans, Black Americans, immigrant communities, religious minorities, those without a religious affiliation, and all others who undercut this narrative that places white Christians front-and-center for the nation’s founding and future success.”

when Attorney General Jeff Sessions included Romans 13 in a speech about why people should obey the laws of the government. In his capacity as chief law enforcement officer for the federal government, Sessions told a room full of law enforcement officials: “I would cite you to the Apostle Paul and his clear and wise command in Romans 13, obey the laws of the government because God has ordained the government for his purposes.” At the time, the Trump administration was under intense criticism, including from some religious leaders who were typically allies, over its immigration policy that required the separation of families at the southern border.

Sessions seemed to be using Romans 13 as a cudgel to end the criticism of the controversial policy. To question the policy was now to question God. A secular democracy that draws its authority from “We, the people” cannot function if “the Bible says so” is used to cut off policy debates and dialogue. People of all faiths and none have the right and responsibility to bring their worldview into the public square to advocate for and against policies, but the government cannot co-opt the language of the majoritarian faith and then use it to demand compliance with its unpopular policies.

Christian nationalism’s third threat to religious freedom is its legitimization of personal and political violence. Like other “isms,” Christian nationalism is pervasive, insidious and infects all aspects of American life. It often overlaps with racism and authoritarianism and can be used to justify violence against religious or political others. The problems of racism and white supremacy are bigger than Christian nationalism, but they cannot be defeated without dismantling it.

This more sinister expression of Christian nationalism was part of the motivation for shootings at several houses of worship, including those at Mother Emanuel AME Church in Charleston, South Carolina, and Chabad of Poway synagogue near San Diego, California. Both shooters belonged to Christian churches and wove Christian language into their writings justifying their violence against worshippers at a Black church and Jewish synagogue.

When Christian nationalism threatens the physical safety of those simply seeking to worship with their community of faith,



Amanda Tyler marks three years of the movement in new video

BJC's Amanda Tyler, the lead organizer of the Christians Against Christian Nationalism campaign, talks about its success over the past three years and the work that lies ahead. Watch the video on BJC's YouTube channel or Twitter.



New curriculum released from Vote Common Good

In August, our partners at Vote Common Good released a new curriculum for churches looking to engage Christian nationalism in a small group setting. The resources are free and available on their website at VoteCommonGood.com.

religious freedom is obviously threatened. We also cannot turn a blind eye to the political violence inspired, at least in part, by Christian nationalism.

One of the most shocking features of the January 6 insurrection was the prominence of Christian imagery and language juxtaposed against the actions of the rioters, which included vandalizing the Capitol and calling for the hanging of the sitting vice president. Rioters signed the impromptu gallows erected at the Capitol with “amen,” “God bless the USA,” and “in God we trust.” Wooden crosses, cross necklaces, and crosses on flags and posters were ubiquitous throughout the violent mob. When a prayer was offered in the Senate chamber to bless their actions, several attackers bowed their heads in prayer; some even removed their hats; others paused their rifling through the Senators’ desks and belongings (which had been abandoned as the Senators fled the chamber for safety).

The mass murderer at the Tops grocery store in Buffalo, New York, wrote that he was not a Christian, did not believe in Jesus and did not seek God’s forgiveness. But he also wrote that he sought to live out “Christian values,” which for him apparently included committing a massacre in a grocery store in a predominantly Black neighborhood. Christian nationalism explains some of this violent disconnect between the values of Christianity and “Christian values.” The Buffalo shooter is perhaps the most explicit example of Christian nationalism providing cover for white supremacy. The shooter’s manifesto makes clear that, for him, an essential element of “whiteness” is defending white culture, which is inextricably tied to a view of Christian values that justifies white supremacy and hatred of others.

This decoupling of Christian values from the Christian faith is not new. Christian leaders and religious polls have discussed the disconnect between Christian identity and Christian belief and what that means for churches. Secular polling data confirms this secularization of religious labels in American society. In a recent survey, more than 15% of those who checked the box identifying as “Christian” and nearly 19% of those who specifically claimed to be “born-again” or “evangelical” also said they belonged to a non-Christian religion or

“Christian nationalism co-opts Christian imagery and language to spread a gospel of power instead of a gospel of love.”

were secular. Christian nationalism provides one way to follow “Christian values” without believing in the resurrected Christ.

In order to succeed, Christian nationalism needs a carefully curated version of history that tells a story of a country founded by Christians to protect Christian values. It must ignore the clearly secular nature of the U.S. Constitution that gives no favoritism to Christians in citizenship or ability to hold office. It uses religious language to redirect religious devotion to an unquestioning commitment to the civil government and to bind all Americans, regardless of their personal religious affiliation, under the banner of Christian nationalism. Finally, it must downplay the stories and contributions of Native Americans, Black Americans, immigrant communities, religious minorities, those without a religious affiliation, and all others who undercut this narrative that places white Christians front-and-center for the nation’s founding and future success. Christians have a unique role to play in dismantling this ideology that seeks to transform the gospel of God’s love for humanity into a gospel of earthly power over humanity. All Americans, regardless of religion or political persuasion, have a role to play in defending democracy against this threat to religious freedom, which is not confined to the courtroom or legislative chamber. We all must learn to recognize and confront Christian nationalism in our classrooms, churches, and communities so that the United States may remain a beacon of religious freedom for all.

This article was first published by Canopy Forum, a digital publication from the Center for the Study of Law and Religion at Emory University. It is reprinted here with permission.

January 6 hearings include appearances of Christian nationalism

Political ideology apparent in hearings and video from the day

By Cherilyn Crowe Guy, BJC Content Strategy Director

The influence of Christian nationalism was evident in images shown and statements made during this summer's hearings on the January 6 attack.

The House of Representatives established the Select Committee to Investigate the January 6th Attack on the United States Capitol last year, designed to investigate and report on the facts, circumstances and causes relating to what happened on January 6, 2021.

After starting its work in the summer of 2021 with interviews and depositions, the committee held high-profile public hearings this summer, each involving in-person testimony, clips of video depositions and video from the day of the attack. According to news reports, the committee has interviewed more than 1,000 people.

While Christian nationalism has not been called out by name during the hearings, the ideology and its impact did make many appearances.

For example, at the end of the first prime-time hearing on June 9, video shown of the attack included an attacker waving the Christian flag. During the June 13 hearing, a person interviewed in video footage was wearing a shirt that said, "I stand for the flag, I kneel for the cross."

The idea that the U.S. Constitution has been "divinely inspired" was mentioned several times.

"Let's hope for less of this rhetoric in upcoming hearings, especially when Christian nationalism helped drive and intensify the January 6th attack."
—Amanda Tyler

During his testimony on June 21, Arizona House Speaker Rusty Bowers said a tenet of his faith is "that the Constitution is divinely inspired," calling it one of his most foundational beliefs. Rep. Liz Cheney, R-Wyo., repeated the idea in her closing remarks as vice chair of the committee. She thanked Bowers for reminding everyone that "our Constitution is indeed a divinely inspired document."

Greg Jacob, who served as the top White House lawyer to Vice President Mike Pence, noted during his June 16 testimony that the vice president talked about a conversation he'd like to have with the Framers when he gets to heaven. While the conversation would focus on the lack of detail written in the Constitution about the vice president's role in overseeing the electoral count, it would include telling them, "The work that you did in putting together our Constitution is a work of genius. Thank you. It was divinely inspired."



The Christian flag is seen in a video montage of the attack on the U.S. Capitol. (Screenshot of video presentation from the committee on June 9, 2022)

As BJC Executive Director Amanda Tyler wrote on Twitter in response to using such religious terms for a secular document, "Let's hope for less of this rhetoric in upcoming hearings, especially when Christian nationalism helped drive and intensify the January 6th attack."

Tyler also submitted testimony on behalf of a number of Christian leaders to the committee, naming the role Christian nationalism played in emboldening and justifying the attack. She and several others have spoken publicly in the media, too, about the importance of discussing Christian nationalism when taking a look at January 6.

"I hope that the committee members will name instances of Christian nationalism and explore how that ideology inspired the violence," Tyler wrote in an op-ed published by Religion News Service. "How did white supremacist groups such as the Proud Boys use the language of Christian nationalism to attract more support for their extreme views? How did political leaders such as President Donald Trump and Mark Meadows conflate religious authority with political authority in their communications?"

BJC and the Freedom From Religion Foundation released a comprehensive report in February 2022 on the role of Christian nationalism in events leading up to January 6 and the attack itself.

At the very first public gathering of the committee on July 27, 2021, D.C. Metropolitan Police Officer Daniel Hodges testified, "It was clear the terrorists perceived themselves to be Christians," noting he saw the Christian flag and a flag saying "Jesus is my savior, Trump is my president" in the hands of the attackers as he and his colleagues defended the Capitol.

The committee's next round of hearings is scheduled to begin this fall. At press time, the date had not been announced.



Voices of LGBTQ Faith Freedom

During Pride Month in June 2022, BJC hosted conversations with members of the LGBTQ community. They shared about faith freedom in their community and contexts, including their variety of experiences in faith communities.

Each conversation with BJC Director of Education Charles Watson Jr. is available on BJC's Facebook page and YouTube Channel. You also can watch them on our website by visiting BJCOnline.org/facebook-live.

The following pages contain just a few moments from the rich conversations.

We encourage you to go online to listen to the full conversations. And we encourage you to continue listening in the months and years ahead. November 20 is the annual Transgender Day of Remembrance, honoring the memory of those killed in acts of anti-transgender violence.





“I want my neighbor to have freedom to express themselves as they see fit, but I also want folks to keep that same energy for me.”

—Rev. Kristan Pitts

“Arguably, the people doing the biggest and most inclusive work in the church are queer Christians.”

—Jaziah Masters

“[White supremacy] puts us in this space where we feel like we have to fight over who can get free first, when the reality is white supremacy and patriarchy don’t have anything good for any of us.”

—Rev. Kristan Pitts

“I personally think the Black queer experience is fundamentally different from the white queer experience.”

—Jaziah Masters



Rev. Kristan Pitts
2021 BJC Fellow



Jaziah Masters
BJC Advocacy and Outreach Manager



Rev. Alex McNeill
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) pastor
and a member of Americans United for
Separation of Church and State’s
Faith Advisory Council

“LGBTQ folks are saying, ‘As people, as creatures of God, we simply want to be able to enjoy the blessings of liberty just like everybody else. We believe that is God calling us into our full being.’”

“[Jesus] embraced and claimed [the Samaritan woman at the well] as his own, as one worthy of his attention and engagement. **What more do we need, particularly as Christians, by way of example of how we are to broaden this effort and bring more people in than that story? And we keep getting it wrong because we want to circumscribe folks as opposed to liberating them and giving them full expression of who God intended them to be.**”



Rev. Fred Davie

Senior Strategic Advisor to the President at Union Theological Seminary and Senior Advisor for Racial Equity at Interfaith America

“Faith traditions still are a major source of oppression for LGBTQ folks, but they are also a major source of inspiration.”



Charles Watson



Rev. Fred Davie

“God changes people’s names, God puts people in situations where they’re suddenly understanding and seeing differently than they had moments before ... my identity helps me find those stories more and more throughout the Bible and see that as part of the human experience.”

“Church had been such a home for me, I was called to help it feel like a home for everybody.”

“Faith freedom can be an incubator for LGBTQ inclusion. It’s not always the place of discrimination, although we know the stories of places where it has been. But churches and religious communities have the ability to almost be ahead of where national and state laws are in terms of policies of inclusion, and that’s a beautiful thing.”



Honorary and memorial gifts to BJC

In honor of Loyd Allen
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In honor of Amanda Tyler, Jennifer
Hawks, and Holly Hollman
By Michael Lieberman

In honor of Mark and Rebecca Wiggs
By Rev. Carol and Dr. Greer Richardson



In memory of Dr. Jimmy Allen
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In memory of Charlotte Longino
By Minerva Longino

In memory of Gail Sisson
By Emily Martin

In memory of M Thelma Strauss
By M. J. Strauss

BJC is grateful for all who attended our recent BJC luncheon in Dallas, and we are especially grateful to those who gave donations and those who signed the letter to Congress on behalf of Oak Flat. Your support and advocacy make a difference.

You can honor someone at any time with a gift to BJC. Send a note with your check or make a gift at BJCOnline.org/give.
For more information, contact Danielle Tyler, associate director of development, at dt Tyler@BJCOnline.org.

Have you made a will?

By Danielle Tyler, BJC Associate Director of Development



August was national "Make-A-Will" Month, emphasizing the importance of individuals and couples preparing or reviewing their wills or estate plans. If you missed the opportunity to join others in August, fall is a great season to ensure you have a will or trust in good order. Not only can you designate who will receive your financial assets and properties, but you can name guardians for your minor aged children and set out funeral instructions. Wise estate planning may also help save on estate taxes or provide other financial benefits.

A planned gift is one of the most impactful ways you can support BJC's critical

work of defending the separation of church and state. Planned gifts bolster the work of BJC as it continues to respond to legislative initiatives, Supreme Court cases and the increasing threat of Christian nationalism.

Supporters of BJC often share their dedication to ensuring that future generations will be born into the faith freedom world they leave for them. A gift, planned in advance, is for those of all and no faiths, so that they might secure the same and greater freedom in a country that maintains and expands its commitment to free souls, free people and free consciences.

There are many ways to make a

planned gift to BJC. You can include BJC as the beneficiary of insurance policies, retirement accounts, and your will or trust. As we move into fall, this is a great opportunity to review your will and trust documents and ensure you are a part of a steadfast organization that believes in shining a light and speaking truth to those resigned to silencing the voices of faith and freedom.

I'd like to invite you to reach out to me if you are interested in getting additional information on planned giving or have already included BJC in your estate plans. Contact me by phone at 317-523-4076 or by email at dt Tyler@BJCOnline.org.

Chaplaincy as a calling

The Rev. Megan J. Pike knows firsthand the importance of religious liberty. A board certified chaplain, she serves at Gundersen Health System in La Crosse, Wisconsin. Megan is a member of the 2016 class of BJC Fellows, and she is part of BJC's Faith FULL Community, donating each month to support BJC's work. Megan often says her faith identity calls her to defend religious freedom and serve as a chaplain, and we asked her to share about her calling.



What's your role as a hospital chaplain?

I like to say that chaplains are the best kept secret. I'm not necessarily there to offer prayers. Rather, I'm a part of the clinical care team to provide spiritual care or emotional support to patients, caregivers, and staff typically in crisis. As a chaplain, I get the opportunity to impact the lives of perfect strangers from a variety of spiritual backgrounds or no religious affiliation and regularly affirm each person in their personal faith or spiritual practice. On a daily basis, I walk into many different rooms and create safe spaces for patients and their families to process the situation as they need to do so at the moment.

I feel called to do this sacred work. I've grown more and more comfortable going into patients' rooms or waiting rooms to provide care because the heart of chaplaincy and spiritual care does not include evangelism. I consider part of the Hippocratic Oath to be do no *spiritual* harm as a chaplain.

What does faith freedom look like on a daily basis?

Thanks to BJC and my affiliation with and chaplaincy endorsement by the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, I am able to be part of advocating for and practicing religious freedom each day. As a spiritual care provider, I routinely integrate support of the separation of church and state into my approach, believing in the freedom of religion, freedom for religion, and freedom from religion. I invite patients, family members or staff members to guide the conversation in regard to where they are, both spiritually and emotionally.

During a particular encounter, a patient shared that he is agnostic, and I asked how I could be of support as a chaplain. At first, he was skeptical of my presence, yet through conversation he was receptive as I affirmed him in his agnosticism and approached the encounter as a learner.

Why do you choose to support BJC each month?

BJC reinforces the call to lift up my individual faith while also celebrating other faith traditions and those who do not identify with a faith tradition. I'm grateful to BJC for their consistent and ongoing work, and that's why I support them financially with an automatic gift each month.

We invite you to join Megan and others in our Faith FULL Community by giving a donation — of any size — to BJC each month in support of our ongoing work defending faith freedom for all and calling out the dangers of Christian nationalism.

For more information or to set up your gift, visit our website at BJCOnline.org/give-monthly or contact Associate Director of Development Danielle Tyler at dtyler@BJCOnline.org or by phone at 317-523-4076.





BJC Fellows answer the call for advocacy

The members of the 2022 class of BJC Fellows are ready to make an impact in their communities. Ten young professionals gathered in Colonial Williamsburg July 27-31 for the BJC Fellows Seminar, kicking off their experience as a BJC Fellow.

The class heard from BJC staff and other experts as they explored the historical, legal and theological underpinnings of religious liberty. After embarking on a tour of Colonial Williamsburg led by the Rev. Dr. Nathan Taylor of the Virginia Baptist Historical Society and BJC Director of Education Charles Watson Jr., classroom time included a deep dive into Baptist history with the Rev. Dr. Pam Durso, president of Central Seminary; an exploration of the Founders' views on religious liberty with Michael Meyerson, professor at the University of Baltimore School of Law and author of *Endowed by Our Creator: The Birth of Religious Freedom in America*; and a conversation about African Americans and Religious Freedom with Dr. Sabrina Dent, the president of the Center for Faith, Justice, and Reconciliation.

The class also engaged with Colonial Williamsburg interpreters portraying George Wythe, a delegate to the 1787 Constitutional Convention who made contributions to the American legal system, and the Rev. Gowan Pamphlet, a freed Black preacher in Colonial Virginia. The BJC Fellows also received instruction from staff members, including the legal foundations of religious liberty from Associate General Counsel Jennifer Hawks, tools for effective advocacy with Executive Director Amanda Tyler and Advocacy and Outreach Manager Jaziah Masters, media training with Content Strategy Director Cherilyn Crowe Guy, and ongoing engagement opportunities with Director of Strategic Partnerships Dan Hamil.

The BJC Fellows Seminar prepares young professionals for a lifetime of religious liberty advocacy. Hear more about the experience from our 2022 class in their own words, and visit BJCOnline.org/fellows for more on the program.



“Before I was accepted to the BJC Fellows Program, I certainly understood that our country was supposed to be a place for all people of any and no religious identity. I understood that our country throughout history both strived toward this ideal and fell far too short, often in the same moment. After attending the BJC Fellows Seminar, I understand more clearly that it is the details of how we form our ‘more perfect union,’ establish justice, and the ‘blessings of liberty’ where the beauty and strength of our commitment can be found. ...

The history we waded through was filled with examples of individuals and government both restricting and restoring religious liberty.”

Cassandra Lawrence
Washington, DC



“BJC provided a different way to look at things, both in and outside of religion. As a Believer, I came with my own beliefs and was interested in seeing how similar or dissimilar the beliefs and experiences of others were to mine. ...

Many historical individuals that we learned about (and heard from, in the form of interpreters like the Rev. Gowan Pamphlet and George Wythe) allowed us to gain a deeper understanding of the history of the Baptist church and how their impact contributed to what we know it as today. ... The tours gave us great insight on the history of Colonial Williamsburg as well as what individuals had to go through during this time period. ... It was a new perspective and something I will not forget.”

Grace Agbadou
Newark, New Jersey



“This program offered a chance to learn about the Baptist legacy of standing against Christian nationalism, the historical and contemporary challenges to religious liberty, and how everyday people are fighting for faith freedom for all.

The thing that I valued most about the BJC Fellows Program was the ability to ask difficult questions and have real discussions about why we value religious liberty, how we defend it, and if this is a battle that can be won.”

Rev. Chris West
Raleigh, North Carolina



“I am a Baptist pastor, and my people forget a time when their type of Christianity was not in power. We forget that our way of practicing our religion today was at one point not allowed in this very land. We forget the many Baptists who were jailed for practicing their faith and we forget the Baptists who advocated for the separation of church and state. ... The BJC Fellows Program, for me, was a call to remember. A call to remember our country’s history, a call to remember the nuances that have shaped us and brought us to this day. ...

To forget religious freedom is to make our country unsafe for the Sikh, the Muslim, and the Jew. But I think we all have selfish tendencies at times, and so I remind my fellow Baptists and Christians at large that to forget religious freedom is also to make the country unsafe for us as well.”

Rev. Caitlin Childers Brown
Norfolk, Virginia



“Religious liberty always is the product of constant labor and effort. At its founding, the United States rejected having a national church or implementing religious requirements for federal elected office, which was both controversial and remarkable. It was a measure that paid off, and the stunning range of spiritual vitality and diversity in the United States today is evidence of the success of this model.

The past gives us no easy solutions to how to live out religious liberty today. Nor is the solution to venerate the founders, whose faults are well documented and known. Yet I take inspiration from the long-held national commitment to religious liberty for people of any faith.”

Dr. Isaac Barnes May
New Haven, Connecticut



“In his book, Professor Michael Meyerson explains that ‘nearly 5,000 people signed petitions asserting that the assessment [a federal tax to support the Christian church] violated the “Spirit of the Gospel.”’ That is to say, Christians, particularly Baptists, were against governmental support of Christianity precisely because they believed it was unchristian. ...

Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene and others like her would have us believe that Christian nationalism is the only way we can be faithful to God and loyal to country. That it is both our true history and our only hope for a future. But then how do you explain those 5,000 signatures? How do you explain John Leland, a revolutionary era Baptist minister who fought for the religious liberty of all? His sincere devotion inspired him to declare “There is no such thing as a Christian nation!”

Amy Hayes
Atlanta, Georgia



“I believe in faith freedom for all because I fully believe in the right for all humans to show up and exist as their full, embodied, and authentic self. As human beings, we exist at the intersection of a multitude of identities, whether that be our race, our gender identity, our sexual orientation, our socio-economic status, or our religion. To oppress one part of our identity is to oppress the whole of us.”

Summer Hyche
Birmingham, Alabama



“The BJC Fellows Program showed me ways to engage with our political structures to bring good and positive change. This advocacy seminar taught me how to have conversations with our elected officials, share my concerns, push for support of laws, and hold leaders accountable to the religious freedom of all people. I will hold onto the thought that I love my religious freedoms so much, that each person (whether they claim a religion, are spiritual, or claim nothing) deserves the same freedoms. In pursuit of this reality, I am reminded to love the person in front of me because, like me, they are a human created in the image of God. Each of us deserves dignity, respect, and acknowledgment for who we are.”

Rev. Dane Martin
Winston-Salem, North Carolina



“As an immigrant from West Africa living in the United States, I have come to enjoy civil liberties amongst which includes religious freedom. I now know that this is only so because ordinary people set out to do the work of ensuring that all peoples can freely exercise faith according to the dictates of their conscience.

Being part of the BJC Fellows made all the difference. It gave me the opportunity of truly acknowledging and appreciating the gift of being in a space where freedom of conscience is guarded and protected. The Seminar at Williamsburg, Virginia, was not only inspiring and purpose-enhancing, but thought-provoking and transforming. I now hold a deep conviction that religious freedom is not only a fundamental human right but a way of life for people of all faiths and none.”

Kelvin Mbi
Laurel, Maryland



“What hasn’t changed since participating in the BJC Fellows Program is my investment and belief in religious freedom for all. What has changed is the number of reasons why.

Behind my beliefs, there is now an honest view of history, the influence of diverse perspectives, confidence in education, a sense of urgency, a passion for advocacy, and still room to grow.”

Rev. Kelsey Stillwell
Macon, Georgia



What young people can teach us about faith-based advocacy

By Jaziah Masters, BJC Advocacy and Outreach Manager

I'm used to getting puzzled looks when I tell people about my work.

Whenever I introduce myself as the advocacy and outreach manager at BJC, the response is usually something along the lines of, "Wow! You're so young!"

As a 27-year-old, I am honored to coordinate advocacy efforts for such a historic faith-based education and advocacy organization. BJC works on ensuring that faith freedom extends to all people and leads the Christians Against Christian Nationalism campaign.

Over the ensuing conversation, acquaintances have remarked that they wished more young people could be involved in politics, voting and church. They see me at the intersection of all three and think of me as an exception to a well-established rule.

There are numerous articles asking why younger generations that are so diverse and well-educated have such apathy toward civic engagement and religion. These conversations are my opportunity to recalibrate the narrative that young people are unengaged.

I'm not the exception to the rule about youth civic engagement, and my peers and I have some insights to share about living out our faith in the public square

My generation's distinction is that we came of age alongside the internet. This revolutionary tool has opened avenues for innovation.

For example, it provides several lenses to see the lived reality of others, hear their stories and share their success, grief and outrage. It also raises awareness about the issues we care about and advocate for.

"Advocacy is not tied to the constraints of what is politically viable; through faith, we are challenged to move beyond conventional politics to solve the issues that have plagued our society for generations."

In the past, the realities of marginalized individuals and those in historically underserved communities were hidden and painted over because they did not fit the whitewashed

American narratives. Those perspectives are now fully available to us and, because of that, the demands to respond to these more visible injustices grow louder.

So why the apathy? My observation is that young people are looking beyond "conventional" politics to solve the issues that have plagued our society for generations.

Some understand political action within the confines of our current two-party system and voting in elections. But beyond those parameters, there are many other forms of advocacy: mutual aid funds and organizations, co-operatives and bail funds.

Many of my peers choose to pursue those methods of direct action and organizing, arguing that the impact is more direct and immediate to the marginalized. I see the growing popularity of these efforts pushing the boundaries of what is defined as "political action."

Though none of these methods are new, the rise of the internet has made them more accessible and valuable than ever before.

At this point, you may be asking, "What does this have to do with faith?"

Faith asks us to think outside of ourselves, dream bigger and reimagine the world. Faith-based activism, therefore, asks us to work to achieve those righteous goals.

Advocacy is not tied to the constraints of what is politically viable; through faith, we are challenged to move beyond conventional politics to solve the issues that have plagued our society for generations.

Does this sound familiar? It's exactly the kind of advocacy that my peers and I are currently doing.

The perceived disconnect between faith and justice activism comes from seeing a single type of faith activism dominate the public square.

How many times have we seen a certain kind of "faith" advocating for "law and order"? How many times has that same faith been co-opted by the state to sanction violence and discrimination against the very people that our faiths call us to protect? How long will we let this religious narrative dominate?

I would like to see another, more responsible, faith-based activism shine in the public square.

I envision a type of faith-based advocacy that works to



Legislative Advocacy

What to Expect

- You'll likely meet with a young staffer, be respectful, they are often the expert on this issue in their office
- Arrive early
- Be flexible
- Remember—you're the expert on your own story, and it's ok to say I don't know or I'll find out and get back to you
- Bring leave-behinds and writing utensils

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achieve its ends of providing freedom and justice for all while still respecting religious differences, puts the marginalized and underserved at the forefront and expands the possibilities of our democracy.

That is the type of faith worthy of passing down to the next generation.

I've seen firsthand that many young people view the American political landscape with helplessness; they question if the end of discrimination, bigotry and prejudice will ever come to pass.

Some would describe it as if the appetite for justice in our very souls is being starved. Even as an advocacy professional, I have sometimes found myself discouraged beyond words.

In moments of desperation for our democracy, I'm reminded that at the core of my Christian faith is the idea of overcoming insurmountable odds and facing down presumably certain doom. I remember that giants do fall.

Faith gives us something to hold on to in those moments of profound sorrow and, at the same time, gives us the endurance and perseverance to continue against unseemingly difficult odds. These meditations restore me.

Many of you know first-hand the positive and inclusive impact faith can have in the public square. If you know that to be the case, do not shrink from the challenge.

Bring that faithful approach to activism because people need to see that type of faith witness.

Use it to restore the hope in yourself and others that this "Great Experiment" is worth fighting for — and not just for those who were protected at our nation's founding. We can expand their vision, together, to truly include everyone, as our faith calls us to do.

*This article was first published by Good Faith Media,
and it is reprinted here with permission.*

Opportunities for action

Support the Save Oak Flat Act. There are currently three ways you can help us protect the sacred land of our Indigenous neighbors.

1. Add your name to the letter to Congress asking lawmakers to pass the Save Oak Flat Act. Go to bit.ly/oakflatletter or scan this QR code to read and sign the letter.



2. Share the letter with your friends and neighbors, and get them to sign!

3. Call your members of Congress to ask them to co-sponsor the Save Oak Flat Act. Or, if they are one of the 100+ co-sponsors, thank them and share why this is important to you. For a sample script, visit our website at BJCOnline.org/SaveOakFlat.

Join the BJC Advocacy team! Subscribe to BJC's email list at BJCOnline.org/subscribe, and make sure to click the box to join the BJC Advocacy Team so you'll get special updates for action. If you are already on our email list, you can update your profile by clicking a link at the bottom of emails you receive from us.



MSNBC on Peacock

July 29, 2022

Amanda Tyler to Ayman Mohyeldin:

Christian nationalism operates a lot like racism. It's so embedded in the culture of the United States that we cannot divorce ourselves from it. That's why I don't label certain people as "Christian nationalists." Instead, I talk about Christian nationalism as an ideology that impacts us all.

So, in order to get at the root causes in some of these culture wars and this war against education and information and truth, we have to understand Christian nationalism. We have to learn to spot it in our culture, and that was one of the main motivating factors of launching Christians Against Christian Nationalism — to help Christians and others learn to recognize Christian nationalism for what it is and to learn to spot it when it comes up in their communities, in their churches, in their social media feeds.

Los Angeles Times The Washington Post

"I think you first have to recognize there is no legal reason for the court to have taken this case [*Kennedy v. Bremerton*]. That decision is part of this newly constituted court's endeavor to rewrite major areas of constitutional law — and especially defanging the Establishment Clause, making it mean less," [Holly] Hollman said.

From "Under right-leaning Supreme Court, the church-state wall is crumbling"

by Michelle Boorstein for The Washington Post, Published July 17, 2022



"Our concern is that this reordering of constitutional values harms religion and will cause more conflict," said Holly Hollman, [general] counsel for the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty. "The effects on religious minorities will be felt most acutely. But the more the government is allowed to promote religion, the more it will distort religion. Christians should be concerned that religion will become just another tool in a politically divided nation."

From "News Analysis: Supreme Court likes separation of powers, but not of church and state"

by David Savage for The Los Angeles Times, Published July 7, 2022

The distorted gospel of the Charlottesville rally keeps spreading

By Amanda Tyler

Published by Sojourners on August 11, 2022

SOJOURNERS

The tiki-torch-wielding marchers who shouted, "Jews will not replace us!" were an extreme manifestation of white Christian nationalism, a political ideology that implies one must be a Christian to be a "true" American and that the growing presences of non-whites and non-Christians are a threat to "traditional" values. People who espouse this ideology believe "real" Americans are Christians who have a specific policy perspective; they feel the need to "take back" their country from those who they believe threaten it.

Hateful rhetoric and violence targeting people of differing religious beliefs are serious threats to religious liberty; actions like these demand responses. The measure of our commitment to religious liberty for all is not how horrified we were after Charlottesville, but what we've done since to take on white Christian nationalism.

Marjorie Taylor Greene's words on Christian nationalism are a wake-up call

By Amanda Tyler

Published by CNN on July 27, 2022



Until recently, the public figures who most embrace Christian nationalism in their rhetoric and policies have either denied its existence or claimed that those of us who are calling it out are engaging in name-calling. But Greene is evidently reading from a different script now — explicitly embracing the identity as her own and urging others to join her.

...

I care about dismantling Christian nationalism both because I'm a practicing Christian and because I'm a patriotic American — and no, those identities are not the same. As Christians, we can't allow Greene, Boebert or Trump to distort our faith without a fight.

We must speak loudly when our faith is used as a political tool, we must uproot it from our own churches and communities and we must form alliances with religious minorities and the nonreligious — who suffer the impact of Christian nationalism the most.

Las palabras de Marjorie Taylor Greene sobre el nacionalismo cristiano deberían ser una llamada de atención

Por Amanda Tyler, CNN en español

Hasta hace poco, las figuras públicas que más abrazan el nacionalismo cristiano en su retórica y en sus políticas han negado su existencia o han afirmado que quienes lo denunciamos nos dedicamos a insultar. Pero es evidente que Greene está leyendo ahora un guión diferente, adoptando explícitamente la identidad como propia e instando a otros a unirse a ella.

...

Me preocupa desmantelar al nacionalismo cristiano tanto porque soy una cristiana practicante como porque soy una estadounidense patriótica, y no, esas identidades no son las mismas. Como cristianos, no podemos permitir que Greene, Boebert o Trump distorsionen nuestra fe sin luchar.

Debemos hablar en voz alta cuando nuestra fe se utiliza como herramienta política, debemos desarraigarla de nuestras propias iglesias y comunidades y debemos formar alianzas con las minorías religiosas y los no religiosos — que son los que más sufren el impacto del nacionalismo cristiano.

CBS News

June 17, 2022

Amanda Tyler to Catherine Herridge:

Seven years ago today, nine Black worshippers were murdered in the Mother Emanuel AME Church. This is a tragic example of how Christian nationalism in the hands of a violent extremist can turn deadly. We saw that again at the Tree of Life synagogue outside of Pittsburgh, and we saw it on January 6.

Christian nationalism feeds white supremacy, it feeds anti-Semitism, it feeds anti-Muslim sentiment, and all of these factors threaten the religious freedom of our neighbors. But, it also threatens religious freedom for Christians as well, because a government-sponsored religion has never been a good thing for religion or religious liberty.



"Christian nationalism leads to idolatry: worship of the nation over worship of God," [Amanda Tyler] told VICE News. "It confuses religious authority with political authority and leads people to abandon their theological convictions in service of nationalism."

From "Christian Nationalism Drove These People Out of Their Churches"

by Tess Owen for VICE News
Published July 18, 2022

But wait! There's more!

These are just excerpts from many media appearances over the past few months. Visit our website for links to these stories and others, including in USA Today, RELEVANT magazine, the American Bar Association, The Daily Beast, Interfaith Voices radio, Education Week, Baptist News Global, the Guardian, Word&Way, and more. For a full list, go to our website at [BJOnline.org/archives-in-the-news](https://bjonline.org/archives-in-the-news).

Bring BJC to you!

BJC continues to speak in churches and community groups across the country, either in-person or via Zoom. We're always glad to talk about our work defending faith freedom for all. Interested in a BJC speaker? Go to BJCOnline.org/invite-bjc-to-your-community.



BJC Communications Director Guthrie Graves-Fitzsimmons on a panel at the Aspen Institute in Washington, D.C.



BJC Associate General Counsel Jennifer Hawks at the Baptist World Alliance Annual Gathering in Birmingham, Alabama.



BJC General Counsel Holly Hollman on a webinar about SCOTUS hosted by the Episcopal Office of Government Relations.

New study: State support for a religion usually makes that religion decline

Achieving the status of a government-backed religion usually creates a dependence on state political and financial support that erodes the ability of faith groups to attract new followers and foster participation, a new study has found.

“Further, the involvement of the state in the affairs of the favored religion — which often goes hand-in-hand with official status and fiscal support — runs the risk of stripping that institution of its theological distinctiveness and spiritual vitality by essentially turning it into a branch of government,” scholar Dan Koev reported in *The Influence of State Favoritism on Established Religions and their Competitors*, published by Cambridge University Press.

Koev, an associate professor and chair in government, history and criminal justice at Regent University in Virginia, analyzed the effect of government backing on religious traditions around the world from 1990 to 2010.

“My findings suggest that ... religious institutions that receive favorable treatment from the state lose ground relative to those that do not,” he summarized.

In a post on the “Latest News” section of BJC’s website, Don Byrd described Koev’s research as especially relevant in an era when Christian nationalists seek to have their brand of conservative religion recognized as exclusively legitimate in the U.S.

“The results of this study confirm what many proponents of religious liberty have long held: that religious favoritism by the state does religion no favors,” Byrd wrote. “We don’t need data to recognize that when the state supports religion, either through the nudge of indirect funding or the pressures of government endorsement or the outright establishment of a state religion, the soul freedom necessary for a truly free act of faith is jeopardized.”

Byrd noted that the research makes it “increasingly clear on a large scale that state support of religion does not make the supported faith more attractive; if anything, state support enhances the allure of other faiths.”

BJC has emphasized that religion must be voluntary to have vitality. “This data seems to show that, when placed on the pedestal of state favoritism, a faith’s vitality fades,” Byrd wrote.

Koev’s project analyzed 34 nations where a single faith or religious institution enjoys constitutional establishment and preferential access to government resources. Those included Muslim nations like Afghanistan, Egypt, Jordan and Pakistan, and Christian countries like Argentina, Denmark, Greece and the United Kingdom, among others.

“In only 10 (29.4%) of those states did the favored religion perform better than other religions in the state (i.e. it gained more adherents or lost fewer adherents) in the period 1990–2010. The remaining 24 states (70.6%) saw the relative decline of the favored religion.”

In general, majority religions in countries without such governmental support fared better than those who enjoy state funding, Koev reported. “The analysis reveals some striking differences between states with and without policies favoring a single religion. In states with an established and preferentially funded religion, the dominant religion of the state declined as a share of population by 3.4%.”

Religious groups that fell outside officially favored and funded recognition, however, often benefited from their outsider status in terms of adherents. The study found non-dominant faiths in those nations grew by nearly 27% on average, compared to only 12% growth in countries without a state-supported denomination or faith.

—Jeff Brumley, *Baptist News Global* with BJC staff reports

BJC welcomes interns

Get to know our fall semester interns working with our staff in Washington.



HARRISON DICKERSON, from Bentonville, Arkansas, is a senior at Texas Christian University, majoring in Political Science with a minor in Religious Studies. He worked at the TCU bookstore throughout college and is a former camp counselor for Kanakuk Kamps, mentoring youth by leading Bible studies and teaching a variety of sports. Dickerson is the son of Clay and Janene Dickerson, and he plans to attend law school after graduation.

ELIZABETH TADLOCK, from Birmingham, Alabama, is a graduate of Mercer University, where she double-majored in Religion and Law and Public Policy with a minor in Political Science. While at Mercer, she was involved in Student Government and Alpha Delta Pi Sorority, and she was a Peer Advisor to first-year students. She previously worked for the Public Affairs Research Council of Alabama and for Alabama Forward, a nonprofit for civic engagement. The daughter of Dale and Laura Tadlock, she is a member of Vestavia Hills Baptist Church in Vestavia Hills, Alabama. Tadlock plans to attend law school to pursue a J.D. and a Master of Public Policy and Administration.

Join BJC online and help us reach new milestones

Be sure you are following BJC's social media channels for the latest news from our team. We continue to see new followers across all platforms, and we are close to having 1,000 subscribers on YouTube. Spread the word about our channels, and be sure you are following us, too!

We love that social media allows us to engage directly with you on Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and LinkedIn. We hope you will comment and interact with us. We want to help foster interactive and dynamic conversations among all of us in the BJC community.

We also want to hear from you! Saw a post that you appreciated? Know of a post you think would be helpful? Let us know by sending a direct message or emailing us by sending your message to bjc@BJCOnline.org.



Sign up for the BJC Book Club

The fall session will be Tuesday nights, October 11-November 1

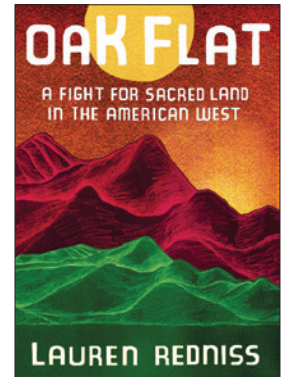
Sign up today for BJC's Book Club, and you'll join fellow supporters of faith freedom in deep and challenging conversations. Participants read through one book at a time, and they gather weekly for online discussions in large and small groups to talk about that week's readings.

The fall 2022 selection is *Oak Flat: A Fight for Sacred Land in the American West* by Lauren Redniss.

The book tells the story of the work to save *Ch'chil Bít dagoteel* — loosely translated in English as "Oak Flat."

It follows two families with connections to the site: the Nosies, an Apache family whose teenage daughter is an activist and leader in the work to save the land, and the Gorhams, a mining family whose patriarch was a sheriff in the early days of Arizona statehood.

The book club is open to all who are interested. You have to purchase the book on your own, but there are no other costs. Sign up by visiting our website at BJCOnline.org/BookClub. The registration deadline is October 7. Contact BJC Programs Assistant Christine Rigodon at crigodon@BJCOnline.org for questions or more information. Plus, you can learn more about BJC's work to save this sacred land on page 31.



Tyler, others, discuss 'structural aspects of bigotry' in new report

"The practice of religious bigotry ... is a signal that a democracy of rights and liberties is not working as it should, and that authoritarianism is entrenched, and possibly advancing."

That is the conclusion of an important essay co-authored by BJC's Amanda Tyler and published by the Boston University Center for Anti-Racist Research in a landmark report in June. The report follows the center's Antibigotry Convening, which brought together a number of scholars and advocates to discuss several categories of bigotry, and it consists of essays on each category.

In the essay entitled "Religious Intolerance," Tyler and co-author Dr. John Corrigan, Professor of History and Religion at Florida State University, explained that "religious bigotry, like all structural bigotry, is exercised in order to hold power."

The essay goes on to lay out a critical path forward for fighting religious bigotry — not by seeking to eradicate religious views we regard as intolerant, but by opposing white Christian nationalism and bolstering the institutional separation of church and state in order to keep bigotry away from levers of power.

—Don Byrd



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