

# ***How to End Christian Nationalism—***

## **Book Discussion Questions: Part 1**

**Introduction:** Gal. 5:13-14

*“You were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only don’t let this freedom be an opportunity to indulge your selfish impulses, but serve each other through love. All the Law has been fulfilled in a single statement: Love your neighbor as yourself.”*

1. “We will not end Christian nationalism if Christians don’t actively work to dismantle it: rid it from ourselves, our congregations, and our larger communities.... We must accept that a problem that has gone unaddressed for centuries will take several generations to resolve.”

Were you surprised to hear how deeply entrenched Christian nationalism is within U.S. society? Why is it particularly important that Christians take the lead in dismantling this pernicious ideology?

2. What does the commandment “To do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God (Micah 6:8)” mean to you? How might that be incompatible with Christian nationalism?

### **Chapter 1**

#### **Name and Understand the Threat of Christian Nationalism**

Matthew 5: 33-37 from *The Message*

*“And don’t say anything that you don’t mean. This counsel is embedded deep in our traditions. You only make things worse when you lay down a smoke screen of pious talk saying, ‘I’ll pray for you’, and never doing it, or saying, ‘God be with you’, and not meaning it. You don’t make words true by embellishing them with religious lace. In making your speech sound more religious, it becomes less true. Just say ‘yes and no.’ When you manipulate your words to get your own way, you go wrong.”*

1. At the beginning of this chapter, the author recounts her reaction to the events of January 6, 2021, particularly the images of Christian symbols displayed by the rioters as well as the prayers being said on the Senate floor by those same individuals.

If you watched those events unfolding, what was your reaction to the juxtaposition of the “Jesus” flag with chants of “hang Mike Pence”? How has your awareness of Christian nationalism helped to explain the behavior of the participants? Give examples.

2. “Christian nationalism transfers religious devotion from the worship of the divine to worship of earthly power. Because of it, there has been an ever-widening gap between the teaching of Jesus and the religion of Christianity.”

What are some instances of people being persecuted because they weren't Christians? Have you ever heard of the Doctrine of Discovery? How is that related to the institution of slavery, the genocide of indigenous people, and the removal of hundreds of thousands of Native American children from their families to be placed in church-run boarding schools?

3. On page 32, there is a list of characteristics that can be identified with those who embrace Christian nationalism.

Were you surprised to see the findings of the study by Perry and Whitehead? What other traits associated with Christian nationalism do you find particularly troubling?

4. "The myth that the United States is a Christian nation asserts that our country was founded on Christian principles and has a special role to play for human kind."

How might you argue against that myth?

## Chapter 2

### Ground Yourself in God's Love

1 John 4: 7-8

*"Dear Friends, let's love each other, because love is from God, and everyone who loves is born from God and knows God. The person who doesn't love does not know God, because God is love."*

1. "Christian nationalism replaces the gospel of love with a false idol of power. An idol is anything that is not God and that claims our total allegiance, devotion, and worship. Specifically, it bows down to three idols in particular: power, fear, and violence."

How do you see those idols currently on display within our society?

2. According to Bishop Michael Curry, "If you look at the history of Christianity, when it has gone astray....there is a consistent pattern that Jesus of Nazareth—his example, his spirit, the sermon on the Mount, Matthew 25, the parable of the sheep and the goats, the Good Samaritan—that Jesus of Nazareth gets moved aside and suppressed for a broad, ambiguous 'Christ' figure who can be adapted to any cultural contest or adapted to anybody's whims."

Do you agree with Bishop Curry? Why or why not? What are some ways that we, as individuals, can reclaim our faith which rests in Jesus of Nazareth? How can we speak up and stand up?

## Chapter 3

### Denounce Violence

Luke 6:27-29

*“But I say to you who are willing to hear: love your enemies. Do good to those who hate you. Bless those who curse you. Pray for those who mistreat you. If someone slaps you on the cheek, offer the other cheek as well.”*

1. One of Christian nationalism’s most blatant distortions of the of the gospel of Jesus is its embrace of violence and the use of scripture to justify violent means.

What are some examples mentioned in the book that you found particularly troubling? How do ideologies such as “the great replacement theory”, which suggests that white people are being “replaced” by Jewish people, immigrants, and racial minorities, help to fuel violence?

2. There is a growing approval of politically motivated violence among Americans as well as an increase in rhetorical violence.

How are the two related? What recent events can you think of that provide examples of that violence?

3. Christian nationalism has caused many Christians to minimize or abandon tenets of their faith to align themselves with political power. One glaring example of Christian complicity with violent power was the rise of Nazism in Germany.... Hitler fused nationalism, authoritarianism, and a corrupted version of Christianity, which gave a certain legitimacy to his delusions about racial, moral, and global supremacy.

Do you see parallels between Germany in the 1930’s and events currently occurring in the United States? If so, give examples.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Commit To The Separation Of Church And State**

Matthew 22: 19-21

*“Show me the coin for the tax.” And they brought him a denarius. Then he said to them, “Whose head is this and whose title?” They answered, “The emperors.” Then he said to them, “Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor’s and to God the things that are God’s.”*

1. Separation of church and state is shorthand for the way the founders envisioned the independence of the institutions of religion and government. Far from creating a government that would be controlled by religion, the wise and imperfect framers of the Constitution set up a system that would favor no group among religions. The Constitution is secular, not a religious charter.

What are some of your assumptions about the separation of church and state? What are the benefits? Were you surprised to learn that the United States was the first nation to offer such separation? Do you agree that this was an intentional choice by framers?

2. What is the difference between religious freedom and religious tolerance? How does power figure into the equation?

3. According to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., "The church must be reminded that it is not the master or the servant of the state, but rather the conscience of the state. It must be the guide and the critic of the state and never its tool."

What, if anything, concerns you about the growing incursions on church and state separation? How might this incursion relate to the decline in religious affiliation among younger people? What impact does the intoxicating proximity to power have on those religious leaders who align themselves with those in power?