Persuasive Communications

Derrick Snow

Omega Graduate School

December 2, 2023

Professor

Dr. McClane

Essay Title:

An Argument Against Christian Nationalism from a Christian Sociological Perspective

Assignment #3 – First Draft

1. Write a 5-page argumentative essay on your selected topic.

2. Paper Outline

a. Begin with an introductory paragraph that clearly states your topic, its importance, and your position has a succinct thesis statement.

a. Address the topic of the paper with critical thought. Include logical arguments and literature references to support the main points and sub-points of your position. Include counterarguments, along with logical reasons for rejecting them.

b. Add section headers to your paper that match your outline.

b. End with a conclusion that reaffirms your thesis.

c. Use a minimum of eleven scholarly research sources (two books and the remaining scholarly peer-reviewed journal articles).

**Introduction**

Christian nationalism is a framework that advocates a fusion of Christianity with American civic life, consisting of civil laws, social customs, traditions, symbols, narratives, and value systems, to procure earthly and heavenly good for the nation. (Whitehead & Perry, 2020) & (Wolf, 2022) This paper intends to bring about the concerns of Christian nationalism from a Christian sociological perspective and seeks to persuade well-intentioned Christian Americans not to join the movement of Christian nationalism, believing they are pursuing their Christian duty while undercutting the true teachings of Christianity. (Whitehead & Perry, 2020) Christians are called to impact the world mainly through the gospel, however, we can also impact society through civic engagement promoting human well-being based on Christian principles, however, this does not necessitate through means of Christian nationalism.

Christian nationalism is harmful to the people of a nation and to Christianity itself, where it is a political movement that seeks to establish a system of political and legal power in the name of Christianity that yields a system of Christian legalism, which is counter to the Christian principles of the gospel. It is not necessary to have a ‘Christian nation’ sought by Christian nationalism for Christians to make positive social change in society.

**The United States of America was not meant to be a Christian Nationalist Nation**

There has been debate as to whether the intent of colonization and the establishment of the United States was based on building a Christian nation. Some of the colonizers and founders may have seen it that way, but not all. Christian nationalism holds the belief that the U.S. has been and should be distinctly Christian in its identity (Corbin, 2019) “Those Americans who cling strongly to Christian nationalist ideology tend also to believe in an idealized American history centered around Christian heritage and preeminence” (Davis, 2019 p. 7) The First Amendment in the Bill of Rights states “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.” (National Archives) Meaning that our founders directly called out that they did not seek a distinct “Christian” or other religion nation. Countries are sometimes identified by their predominant religion, such as India as a Hindu nation, or the U.S. as a Christian nation. This means that the majority of people within that particular country identify as a given religion, not necessarily the political system and religious system are one.

**Christian Nationalism is a Political System, not a Religious System**

There are various views of Christian nationalism and various groups supporting Christian nationalism, such as God-and-country conservatives, evangelical Christian culture warriors, politicians, MAGA, QAnon, Proud Boys, white supremacists (Smietana, 2023), and well-meaning Christians. Though they all claim to be pursuing the same thing, their motives may be very different. Yet this is the phenomenon of political cooperation, where people with various motives could be in support of the same political power. However, some may argue that there are distinct differences between these groups, “Conservative Christians who oppose abortion and same-sex marriage, and seek to use the political process to have these preferences enacted into law, may potentially be vindicated from the charge of Christian nationalism. Although Christian nationalists may have similar religiously grounded issue attitudes…” (Smith & Adler, 2022, p. 8) Nevertheless, it appears that conservative Christians and right-wing hate groups are joining together in support of each vision of a “Christian Nation”. Christian nationalism is an ideology that seeks a certain view of Christianity to have greater influence in America’s elections and public policies. (Perry, 2022)

It becomes very difficult for non-believers to distinguish between the different fractions of Christian nationalists, for example on January 6th, 2021, “On display among the crowds during the attack on the Capitol were numerous flags and signs with “Jesus Saves” in bold letters, and other Christian symbols proudly displayed alongside numerous blatantly racist ones, including a Confederate flag paraded through the halls of Congress.” (Cooper-White, 2023, p. 1) We as Christians should be cautious of religion and the political system coming to be unified, history has shown the negative results. For example, the 20th-century German pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer resisted the German Christian nationalist movement that sought a union with the protestant church in Germany with the Nazi government, Bonhoeffer wrote, “The fight which we are bound to fight is not for subtle reasonings nor opinions of particular groups which might become reconciled through a certain amount of good-will. Nay, the fight is being fought for ‘dividing asunder the spirits’ for drawing the line between Life and death, between obedience and disobedience to our very Lord Jesus Christ.” (Slocum, 2023, p.17) We as Christians need to stand against Christian nationalism, it is not a religious movement but a political one, using the name of Christianity to gain political power for its own sake.

**Christian Nationalism a System of Christianized Legalism**

As a proponent of Christian nationalism states “Christian nationalism is a totality of national action, consisting of civil laws and social customs” (Wolf, 2022, p.7), meaning that Christian nationalists seek to legislate “Christian” morality. Some Christians argue making a nation’s laws in agreement with Christian principles is good for all people of that nation, God’s laws are inherently good and thus good for society, believers, and non-believers alike. (Delehanty et al., 2019) God’s laws are certainly good, the problem is that no one can obey them, hence the need for Christ. We as Christians cannot obey God’s laws, so why would we expect non-believers to obey them? Some Christians believe that Christian nationalism is a religious movement seeking the favor of God upon our nation (Braunstein, 2021), because “God has a special plan for America, and that to live up to it, the country must govern itself according to God’s will.” (Delehanty et al., 2019, p.9), believing God’s will for that nation is within the political and legal system. As one author puts it, “The main tenets of Christian nationalism are that God established the United States as a Christian nation, and, therefore, the country should essentially be a theonomy (= rule of laws) shaped by Christian values (as interpreted by an alliance of conservative Christian leaders and right-wing political activists)…” (Cooper-White, 2023, p.2) It may seem appealing to Christians to have the nation's laws in sync with Christian morality, however, it creates a “… process of othering, then, serves to create a moral distinction between the “us” (Christian nationalists) and “them” (criminals and deviants) …the creation of this moral barrier not only increases one’s distance from the “other,” but also fosters beliefs that the other deserves to be punished. Thus, in so far as one adheres to Christian nationalist ideology, one is more likely to draw moral distinctions between oneself and those perceived as outsiders, and therefore be more apt to support punitive responses to their deviance.” (Davis, 2018, p. 303) Hence, Christian nationalism in its pursuits to legislate Christianized morality, yields a Christianized legalism system, which legalism was strongly preached against by Christ Jesus.

**Christian Civic Engagement Outside of Christian Nationalism**

By all means Christians can and are encouraged to participate in civic society, engage in the political system, and lobby to enact legislation, based on their religious convictions, this is not the problem. Christian nationalism is the problem. Many Christians hold that Genesis 1:28 is a cultural mandate that Christians are called to make an impact in society, however, this does not mean Christians need to pursue Christian nationalism to make changes in society. Schmidt's 2004 book “How Christianity Changed the World”, these changes were not done because of the political power of a Christian nation but were done in love by Christians who had a genuine concern for people. By all means, let us as Christians make positive social change throughout the world, but let us rely on the power of Christ and not on the political power of humankind.

**Conclusion**

Christian nationalism is a political endeavor to make a nation “Christianized” by legislation, this is counter to the gospel of Christ, and results in a manmade system of legalism, which non-believers and believers cannot abide by. Christian nationalism is not about bringing Christianity to the society or nation, Christian nationalism is a political movement seeking political goals. We as Christians want to spread the gospel throughout our nation, so people may come to the saving and living faith of Christianity through Christ not based on an imposed obedience to a political and legal system of Christian nationalism.

The English historian Lord Acton of the 19th century pinpointed the issue with power, in particular the political power sought by Christian nationalists, "Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Great men are almost always bad men.”, when Christianity is politicalized, it no longer becomes the Christianity of Christ, it is a man-made political system using Christianity as a means to legitimize the sword of the state. Christians do not need to be in political control to enact positive social change in our nation, most of our impact on positive social change will be from others coming to Christ and submitting to the gospel of Christ. Where people submit to God’s law not because they are forced to, but because they live in Christ and Christ’s love takes us beyond the laws.

WORKS CITED

Braunstein, R. (2021). The “Right” History: Religion, Race, and Nostalgic Stories of Christian America. *Religions*, *12*(2), 95. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12020095>

Cooper-White, P. (2023). “God, Guns, and Guts”: Christian Nationalism from a Psychoanalytic Perspective. *Religions*, *14*(3), 292. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14030292>

Corbin, C. M. (2019). Christian Legislative Prayers and Christian Nationalism. *Washington and Lee Law Review*, *76*(1), 32.

Davis, J. (2018). Enforcing Christian Nationalism: Examining the Link Between Group Identity and Punitive Attitudes in the United States. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, *57*(2), 300–317. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jssr.12510>

Davis, J. T. (2019). Funding God’s policies, defending whiteness: Christian nationalism and whites’ attitudes towards racially-coded government spending. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, *42*(12), 2123–2142. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2018.1527939>

Delehanty, J., Edgell, P., & Stewart, E. (2019). Christian America? Secularized Evangelical Discourse and the Boundaries of National Belonging. *Social Forces*, *97*(3), 1283–1306. <https://doi.org/10.1093/sf/soy080>

National Archives. The Bill of Rights: A Transcription. Retrieved December 2, 2023, from <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/bill-of-rights-transcript>

Perry, S. L. (2022). American religion in the era of increasing polarization. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 48, 87-107.

Slocum, R. B. (2023). Thrown into God’s Arms: The Sacrificial Grace of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, *58*(1), 16–30. <https://doi.org/10.1353/ecu.2023.0001>

Smietana, B. (2023, January 6). Who are the Christian nationalists? A taxonomy for the post-Jan. 6 world. The Washington Post. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/religion/2023/01/06/christian-nationalism-groups](Smietana,%20B.%20(2023,%20January%206).%20Who%20are%20the%20Christian%20nationalists?%20A%20taxonomy%20for%20the%20post-Jan.%206%20world.%20The%20Washington%20Post.%20https://www.washingtonpost.com/religion/2023/01/06/christian-nationalism-groups/)/

Smith, J., & Adler, G. J. (2022). What *Isn’t* Christian Nationalism? A Call for Conceptual and Empirical Splitting. *Socius: Sociological Research for a Dynamic World*, *8*, 237802312211244. <https://doi.org/10.1177/23780231221124492>

Whitehead, A. L., & Perry, S. L. (2020). *Taking America Back for God: Christian Nationalism in the United States*. Oxford University Press.

Wolf, S. (2022). *The Case for Christian Nationalism*. Canon Press