

Responding to Christian Nationalism in the 21st Century

Theology Committee of The Episcopal Church's House of Bishops

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Foreword

In the 1981 film *Chariots of Fire*, there is a powerful scene in which one of the main protagonists, Eric Liddell, is confronted by the British Olympic committee for his refusal to run on a Sunday because of his faith. Lord Cadogan angrily criticizes him and proclaims, "In my day, it was King first, and God after," to which the Duke of Sutherland, another member of the committee, replies, "Yes, and the War to End All Wars bitterly proved your point."

It is always a dangerous thing to mix up our priorities, whether on the personal level or the national level. For those of us who dare to call ourselves followers of Jesus of Nazareth, the challenge is how to order our priorities so as to put God first. "Give to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's" (Mark 12:17) allows us to be patriotic and love our country, but not put it before the God who is over all the nations and whom Isaiah says "brings princes to naught and makes the rulers of the earth as nothing" (Is. 40:23).

We who follow Jesus of Nazareth are called individually and as a Church to live out his Way of Love. As Dr. King said in the first of his ten commandments for nonviolence, "Meditate daily on the teachings and life of Jesus." More than this, sometimes this means calling our country to account for its words and actions, not for lack of love of it but because we love it enough to point out its failings. The 18th-century philosopher and Member of Parliament, Edmund Burke, in watching the excesses of the French Revolution, remarked, "To make us love our country, our country ought to be lovely."

The following document created by the House of Bishops Theology Committee offers both profound and practical responses to the Christian Nationalism that today threatens our country's soul. It is because we love God, and it is because we love our country, that we want to respond in ways that are healthy, holy, and true. I commend this wonderful work to all individual Episcopalians, congregations, dioceses and, indeed, to all people of good will who seek Blessed Community.

The Most Rev. Michael B. Curry
Presiding Bishop of The Episcopal Church

Introduction

Prayer for our Country

Almighty God, who hast given us this good land for our heritage: We humbly beseech thee that we may always prove ourselves a people mindful of thy favor and glad to do thy will. Bless our land with honorable industry, sound learning, and pure manners. Save us from violence, discord, and confusion; from pride and arrogance, and from every evil way. Defend our liberties, and fashion into one united people the multitudes brought hither out of many kindreds and tongues. Endue with the spirit of wisdom those to whom in thy Name we entrust the authority of government, that there may be justice and peace at home, and that, through obedience to thy law, we may show forth thy praise among the nations of the earth. In the time of prosperity, fill our hearts with thankfulness, and in the day of trouble, suffer not our trust in thee to fail; all which we ask through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.¹

At the House of Bishops gathering in March 2022, Presiding Bishop Michael Curry charged this committee to study the issue of Christian nationalism, which has increasingly become an urgent issue especially since the insurrection on January 6, 2020, and now perhaps the greatest threat to our democracy. Since then, Christian nationalism has come to the forefront of national news and conversations in both social media and scholarly studies. The committee held the first meeting online in the fall of 2022 and the second meeting in person in Indianapolis, with some joining online, in January 2023. The first interim report was submitted to the House of Bishops gathering in March 2023.

As we began our conversation, we quickly recognized the complex and elusive nature of the term, *Christian nationalism*. We grappled with how to define it and found ourselves disagreeing on the semantics of nationalism. The large scope of this issue easily took our conversations in many different directions. To keep our exploration theologically focused, we agreed on the Anglican framework of scripture, tradition, reason, and liturgy as our methodology. We also recognized the deep connection between white supremacy and Christian nationalism in the context of the United States and our previous work on white supremacy.

In our publication *Realizing Beloved Community*, we learned that “Whiteness is essentially the passport into the exceptional space that is American identity, as defined by the Anglo-Saxon myth.”² It has been recognized that Christian nationalism in the U.S. context has deep roots in white supremacy, even though it cuts across all racial, ethnic, and cultural groups today.

Andrew Whitehead and Samuel Perry, in their comprehensive study of Christian nationalism, describe it as “an ideology that idealizes and advocates a fusion of American civic life with a

¹ *The Book of Common Prayer* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1979), p. 820.

² Allen Shin and Larry Benfield, eds., *Realizing Beloved Community* (New York: Church Publishing, 2022) p. 21.

particular type of Christian identity and culture” that “includes symbolic boundaries that conceptually blur and conflate religious identity (Christian, preferably Protestant) with race (white), nativity (born in the United States), citizenship (American), and political ideology (social and fiscal conservative).”³ Thus, “Christian” in Christian nationalism is not so much about a religious faith as an ideologically driven identity, even though religious beliefs are cleverly deployed to support its ideological stance on certain political and social issues.

The ideology of Christian nationalism in the U.S. context consists of assumptions about white supremacy, Anglo-Saxon nativism, patriarchy, and militarism. This ideology is a prime example of how white supremacy has morphed into and given energy to the systemic sin of Christian nationalism. Thus, the term *white Christian nationalism* is often used not so much to distinguish the white members of Christian nationalist adherence as to show the intersectionality between white supremacy and Christian nationalism in the U.S. context.

In Carter Heyward’s study of white Christian nationalism, she proposes the term as “a sinful movement rooted in seven interactive sins of a significant segment of white Christian Americans to superimpose their conservative religious values on the leaders and laws of the United States of America.”⁴ She rightfully emphasizes the collective dimension of sin that “undergirds our structures of systemic oppression and evil, and she names seven deadly sins of white Christian nationalism that are social, systemic and structural, not simply personal failures.”⁵

Christian nationalism is an idolatry of a white supremacist national ideology that uses the Christian religion as its justification. Thus, it is fundamentally an apostasy that violates the first and the second of the Ten Commandments. This is akin to the devil’s temptation of Jesus in which the devil demands that Jesus worship of him in exchange for the kingdoms of the world, and Jesus replies by quoting the first commandment to worship God and serve only him.⁶ “Sin is the seeking of our own will instead of the will of God, thus distorting our relationship with God, with other people, and with all creation.”⁷ Christian Nationalism puts its scio-political ideology before the rightful worship of God and distorts our relationship with God. It is a wolf in sheep’s clothing, “a disguise that passes (for many) for ‘innocence’ indeed, religious ‘purity.’”⁸ Therefore, the committee calls the Episcopal Church to stand against Christian nationalism, the gravest and the most dangerous sin of today.

A deepest gratitude is expressed to the Presiding Bishop for this opportunity to work on this urgent and important issue and to all the members of the House of Bishops Theology Committee for their faithful work and contributions.

³ Andrew L. Whitehead and Samuel L. Perry, *Taking American back for God: Christian Nationalism in the United States* (Oxford University Press 2022) p. x.

⁴ Carter Heyward, *The Seven Deadly Sins of White Christian Nationalism: A Call to Action* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 2022). p. 44.

⁵ *Ibid.* p. 45.

⁶ Matthew 4:8-10, Luke 4:5-8.

⁷ *The Book of Common Prayer*, p. 848.

⁸ George Yancy and Bill Bywater, eds., *In Sheep’s Clothing: The Idolatry of White Christian Nationalism* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2024). p. 7. This collection of essays gives voice to Christianity’s counter-voice, one predicated upon love, and its effectiveness to resist not just deep political pro-white forces at work, but also its capacity to focus emphasis upon Christian love.

Respectfully submitted by the House of Bishops Theology Committee:

The Rt. Rev. Jennifer Baskerville-Burrows
The Rt. Rev. Larry R. Benfield
The Rt. Rev. Thomas Breidenthal
The Rt. Rev. R. Williams Franklin
The Rt. Rev. Carol Gallagher
The Rt. Rev. Shannon MacVean-Brown
The Rt. Rev. Gretchen Rehberg
The Rt. Rev. Allen K. Shin

The Very Rev. Dr. Michael Battle
The Very Rev. Dr. Kelly Brown Douglas
The Rev. Dr. Altagracia Perez-Bullard
The Rev. Dr. Craig Geervarghese-Uffman
The Rev. Dr. Katherine Sonderegger

Ye are the light of the world.
A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid.
Matthew 5:14 (King James Version)

The God of Israel is among us, when tenn of us shall be able to resist a thousand of our enemies, when hee shall make us a prayse and glory, that men shall say of succeeding plantacions: the lord make it like that of New England: for we must Consider that wee shall be as a City upon a Hill, the eies of all people are upon us.

John Winthrop, from a sermon written on board the Arrabella, on a passage from Great Britain to New England, 1630.⁹

Lord God Almighty, in whose Name the founders of this country won liberty for themselves and for us, and lit the torch of freedom for nations then unborn: Grant that we and all the people of this land may have grace to maintain our liberties in righteousness and peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

*The Collect for Independence Day,
The Book of Common Prayer, 1979.¹⁰*

For four hundred years, the words of Matthew’s gospel, directed toward Jesus’ listeners as a part of the Sermon on the Mount, have been adopted by many people in the United States to support the belief that God has looked with a particular favor on the people who originally colonized and now live in the central part of North America. An early example was its use in a sermon by John Winthrop as he headed to America in 1630 to serve as first governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. Subsequent generations of political leaders, including Presidents John Kennedy, Ronald Reagan, and Barak Obama, have called upon its imagery. It is alluded to in The Episcopal Church’s Collect for Independence Day, with its image of a torch of freedom being lit by the founders of the United States. After all, torches as signals are lit on hills, on locations where they can be seen by all.

But four hundred years have also seen a troubling use of this saying of Jesus—as well as Winthrop’s quote—as justification for Christian nationalism, a claim that fuses church and politics. Christian nationalism defines national identity in terms of membership in a particular form of Christianity.¹¹ It is a story often based on Anglo-Saxon exceptionalism, and it reflects the desire of certain groups of Christians and specific church-based institutions to turn toward the state to protect, support, and continue the structures to which its members have become so accustomed. Either consciously or subconsciously, those accustomed structures revolve around white supremacy, a systematic structuring of society to advance and maintain the interests, opportunities, and power of white people. It fuses the interests of the nation (or at least a portion

⁹ John Winthrop, “A Modell of Christian Charity,” in *American Sermons* (New York: The Library of America, 1999), p. 42.

¹⁰ *The Book of Common Prayer* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1979), p. 242

¹¹ Philip S. Gorski, Samuel L. Perry, and Jemar Tisby, *The Flag and the Cross: White Christian Nationalism and the Threat to American Democracy* (Oxford University Press, 2022).

of it) and the interests of God. It blurs the differences between being a good American and being a good Christian. It puts its faith in the state, not in the gospel.

The conflation of the Christian's role in society and the identity of what constitutes a good Christian in the context of living in a particular community and nation have led to an emphasis on exceptionalism and the maintenance of the status quo of white dominance, whether through direct action or silent complicity. Robert P. Jones, reflecting on surveys of Christian attitudes as well as his own formation, notes that “[a]fter centuries of complicity, the norms of white supremacy have become deeply and broadly integrated into white Christian identity, operating far below the level of consciousness. To many well-meaning white Christians today...Christianity and a cultural norm of white supremacy now often feel indistinguishable, with an attack on the latter triggering a full defense of the former.”¹² This white Christian identity is often formed through the stories that people tell.

Nationalism as a People's Story

People in a community have stories. These stories, in both word and action, convey information to the community about who counts as members, how persons relate to the community and its local government, and how each community relates to its neighboring communities. Likewise, in any nation, multiple peoplehood stories compete in telling the nation's story. Once again, these stories describe who counts as members, how persons and communities relate to the body politic and the state, and how the nation relates to its neighboring nations.

Competing peoplehood stories, also called competing nationalisms, negotiate which citizens in some respect own the nation's founding, its present, and its future. Nationalisms that respect the rights and liberties of all peoples and communities are rightly ordered, but they become disordered when they “divinize” a particular community within the nation and render its claims to power absolute while marginalizing or even demonizing others. This divinization of one group over another is *religious nationalism*. When done in the name of Christianity, it is *Christian nationalism*.

The idea of religious nationalism is not unique to the American experience. Such religious movements have been experienced across the world. For example, in the era of South African apartheid, that nation dealt with *State Theology*, the theological justification of the status quo that misused theological concepts and biblical texts for a political purpose that “blesses injustice, (and) canonizes the will of the powerful,” in part through an interpretation of Romans 13:1-7 that gives an absolute and divine right to the State.¹³

¹² Robert P. Jones, *White Too Long: The Legacy of White Supremacy in American Christianity* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2020), p. 10.

¹³ John W. DeGruchy and the Kairos Theologians, *The Kairos Document: Challenge to the Churches* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1986).

Christian Nationalism as a Disordered People's Story

As previously mentioned, peoplehood stories are disordered when they divinize a particular community within the nation. These stories become destructive when they proceed to invite the state to enforce by law the primacy of one of its constituent national communities over others. For example, the British imperialism that subjugated and exploited peoples on every continent was fueled in part by the unquestioned conviction that England was the New Israel, called by God to be the world's pedagogue, teaching the nations what it means to flourish as one people under God.

A similar disordered story is how the movement of Christian nationalism has gained traction in the United States. Its more moderate proponents have called George Washington the “American Moses”¹⁴ and have asserted that Christian believers are to “reaffirm and reclaim our Christian educational heritage....It begins with a willingness to become engaged in the battle.”¹⁵ Some of its followers have relied on statements such as the one by John Quincy Adams that the “birthday of the nation is indissolubly linked with the birthday of the Savior....It laid the cornerstone of human government upon the first precepts of Christianity.”¹⁶ Its bolder proponents often justify violence if necessary to advance its extension.¹⁷

To understand what Christian nationalism is, it is important to understand what it is not. It is not Christian nationalism if a person's political values are shaped by the individual's Christian faith. The problem with Christian nationalism is not with Christian participation in politics, but rather the belief that there should be Christian *primacy* in politics and law.¹⁸

There are at least two varieties of Christian nationalism in the United States. The first, *church statism*, openly advocates theocracy: a government of, by, and for Christians, and ruled by scriptural mandates. The second variety, a colorblind *Judeo-Christian nationalism*, opposes theocracy, yet limits membership in the American people to those who embrace the primacy of Judeo-Christian culture.¹⁹

These disordered nationalisms—church statism and Judeo-Christian nationalism—require a response. It is not adequate to only think the right things, say thoughtfully worded prayers, or learn more about what troubles us about our society. Theological reflection should also lead to theologically based actions.

¹⁴ Richard G. Lee, *The American Patriot's Bible* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2009), p. 64.

¹⁵ Lee, p. 628.

¹⁶ John Quincy Adams, “Speech on Independence Day, 1837,” in *Teaching American History*, <https://teachingamericanhistory.org/document/speech-on-independence-day-2/>

¹⁷ Gorski, Philip S., *American Covenant: A History of Civil Religion from the Puritans to the Present*, 2nd edition (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019).

¹⁸ David French, “What is Christian Nationalism, Exactly,” in *The New York Times*, <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/02/25/opinion/christian-nationalism.html>.

¹⁹ Ruth Braunstein, “The ‘Right’ History: Religion, Race, and Nostalgic Stories of Christian America,” *Religions* 12 (2): 95, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12020095>

How Do We Respond?

A Biblical Response

A response to the destructiveness of Christian nationalism can begin with an understanding of the experience of communities in history that formed nations based on their own stories. For example, in Hebrew scripture, Israel's story narrates the liberation of its people, the calling and formation of them as a nation, and the conquest and settlement of a covenant nation. National identity and pride have often drawn on this archetypal story from Scripture. Every land that has been touched by the Bible, from England to the United States to South Africa, especially in times of crisis, reverts to the calling of Israel to be a holy nation before the Lord as a way to make sense of its situation.

But stories can be ordered or disordered, liberating or enslaving. Israel's scripture not only tells of its deliverance, but also tells of its judgment, its failure, the exile of its people, and its flourishing in lands far from home. No nation or empire exists apart from the all-powerful God. To recognize this truth is to place nation and empire within the Biblical call to holiness. For Israel, as for the gentile nations, to be holy is ultimately to serve God above all things: to welcome and befriend the stranger, protect the resident aliens and do justly by them, feed the hungry and clothe the naked, reject deceit in trade and honor a just wage, release from debt and return land to the landless, honor treaties, shelter the orphan and widow, provide refuge even for the criminal, and restore the unclean to the clean. The people of God will participate in Jubilee. The story of what it means to be a holy nation—and the actions necessary become one—is a story that is just as relevant today as it was three thousand years ago. Unfortunately, the radicality of this word of Jubilee does not fail to offend.

There is also an example in the New Testament of how human ideas on nationalism and the superiority of one culture over another are often a false assurance. In an illuminating essay on the Flight into Egypt, Linda Stargel argues that the Slaughter of the Innocents is a story that runs counter to the often-assumed primacy of one culture over another, which is at the heart of religious nationalism. Through a singular episode in the life of Christ, the Flight underscores the complexity and unpredictability of nationhood and national identity throughout the Holy Scriptures. Whereas Egypt had once been the land of slavery and Israel the land of promise, under Herod Israel now represents danger, while Egypt in effect becomes the land of promise and safety.²⁰ The Lord calls His Son out of Egypt (that is, Bethlehem) into safety and liberty in the Promised Land (that is, Egypt).

To be a nation under God is to take one's part in this complex interchange between covenant and the nations, to stand before a Holy God in good seasons and in evil days, to hear words of both promise and of judgment, and to seek to become a place where, as in the story of the Flight into Egypt, an immigrant child, in flight from murderous rage, may find refuge and rest. Nations that do this will be welcomed into the Heavenly City where healing will occur.

²⁰ Linda Stargel, "Exodus in Matthew's Looking Glass," in *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 43, no. 2 (August 2021): 166-186.

An Historical Anglican Response

People in the Anglican tradition should not confuse the rise of Christian nationalism with the rise of the nation-state, the latter being an idea that gained attention, at least in England, during the Reformation. Theologians at that time grappled with the concept of a nation-state as England was wresting control of its own church from foreign power. One such theologian was Richard Hooker (1554-1600), a major influence on John Locke and the framers of the US Constitution, as well as the theologian chiefly responsible for Anglicanism as a theological construct.

Hooker's key ideas regarding nationhood can be found in his *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*.²¹ He is led to the topic of nation as he considers why laws that differ from place to place may nevertheless be rooted in a more universal purpose, namely the securing of the conditions for human sociability, that is, for our need and capacity for peaceful and creative interaction with friend and stranger alike. Hooker insists that this need is what human nature boils down to.

In making this move, he is reaching behind the emerging nation-state of his time to a looser and much more fluid understanding of nations as relatively large collections of people that nevertheless are bound together by history, culture and (sometimes) land, in ways that transcend distinctions of class, wealth, gender, and race. It is this idea of nation as an organic phenomenon, distinct from politics or state, that captures Hooker's imagination.

Hooker argues that the Church of England, as the church *in* England, does not exist by virtue of state decree, or even by some sort of self-invention, but by virtue of its participation in the whole body of Christ, which he in turn sees as a universal society grown from the bottom up in love. In its global reach, this universal society mirrors the connection that binds all human beings to one another. In its local expression, it is called to model this redeemed connection for the nation it inhabits. At the national level, the church should be helping the nation realize its potential as an incubator of what we, in the twenty-first century, might call beloved community.

Contemporary Responses to Christian Nationalism

We need tools with which to navigate the tension we experience when our primary identity and loyalty to the kingdom of God are in tension with our identity as members of our own families, cultures, and nations. This challenge is not new or particular to this day and age. In the early church, gentiles had to renounce their allegiance and their participation in the Roman army when they became Christians. Each generation must explore and renew its understanding of life in Christ in its moment in history.

Being equipped to live faithfully in the world requires intentional formation, engaged in regularly. It means identifying leaders capable of learning and walking with others as they learn new ways of being together in the intimate, life-transforming practices of discipleship. Some readily available tools include Sacred Ground sessions, theological dialogue, and a united public religious witness.

²¹ Richard Hooker, *The Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1874), Book 1, ch. 10.

A Response: Sacred Ground

Many congregations have done the Sacred Ground dialogue series and can build on that experience for ongoing learning and exploration of issues of Christian Identity. Using small groups, Sacred Ground invites participants to walk through chapters of the United States' history of race and racism, while weaving in threads of family story, economic class, and political and regional identity.

Materials from popular culture can be utilized, including films, books, and news stories, to explore the theological implications they present, re-examine the ways we were taught to think about Christian identity, and how we feel God is calling us to renew our minds and grow together as the body of Christ. We need concrete examples of how we are affected by and complicit in the death-dealing forces at play in our society. These examples will strengthen the connection between the baptismal covenant we profess and the way we live. This is especially true of our renunciation of evil, our commitment to support each other in our life in Christ, the ongoing formation described in our practices of learning, fellowship, communion, and prayer, our commitment to ministry in the world through proclamation, service, and working for justice and peace.²²

A Response: Theological Dialogue

Mark Branson and Juan Martinez, working with leaders crossing cultural lines, provide a useful model for theological dialogue. It focuses on our “praxis” or conduct. This dialogue is essential for exploring and experimenting with new ways to conduct our lives. They write, “In order to shape an appropriate praxis for leaders and congregations, we propose five interactive steps for theological reflection. It is important that leaders engage these steps as personal, reflective work and with a team that participates in awareness, study, reflection, and discernment, all toward new praxes.”²³

Step 1: Name and describe your current praxis... starting with the knowledge and perspective of those interested, seeking to include diverse voices for a broader view of how a particular issue or practice has been lived into.

Step 2: Analyze your praxis and context, using the resource of your context and culture.

Step 3: Study and reflect on Christian texts and practices.

Step 4: Recall and discuss stories from your church, your own lives, and others in your community concerning the praxis under review.

²² The Book of Common Prayer, pp. 302-305.

²³ Mark Lau Branson & Juan F. Martinez, *Churches, Cultures and Leadership: A Practical Theology of Congregations and Ethnicities*, 2nd edition (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2023). pp. 38-40.

Step 5: Corporately discern and shape your new praxis through imagination, prayer, experiments, and commitments.²⁴

Whatever process is employed, it is important to provide an opportunity to name the specific aspect of Christian identity being reflected upon. After sharing personal understandings, these aspects of our identity are examined in light of scripture, the Book of Common Prayer, and other resources of our tradition, as well as resources from the social and natural sciences. The discussion is most fruitful when some action is identified that will support continued learning for the group.

A Response: United Religious Public Witness

“Hope is the power to keep focusing on the larger vision while taking the small, often undramatic, steps toward that future.”²⁵ Nothing could be more relevant and more necessary for the current Western world’s moment of crisis than the Christian message of hope. The Episcopal church has its own steps by which it expresses its hope for the future, as in the language used in the celebration of the Holy Eucharist within the walls of its churches. But there is also the hope that is expressed through participation in public life as people of faith publicly renounce the evil powers of the world which corrupt and destroy the creatures of God²⁶ and work for the day “when barriers which divide us may crumble, suspicions disappear, and hatreds cease.”²⁷ People across so-called religious divides are doing this public work, as seen in the following examples.

An example in Pennsylvania: Power Interfaith (*Faith in Action in Pennsylvania*) did a bus tour to twenty-one cities around the state: Christians, Jews, and Muslims going into parts of the state of Pennsylvania that could be hostile to the message that Christian nationalism is wrong. “We were showing a level of unity and showing a level of camaraderie that I think people are ultimately longing for and have been told cannot exist outside of the white race. And so we were modeling that for them,”²⁸ said Joe Flemming, a faith-based community organizer interviewed by the Bishop of Vermont.

An example in the Northwest United States: A disordered nationalism is sometimes centered on religion and at other times centered openly on racism. For example, in the Diocese of Spokane, situated in the Inland Northwest of eastern Washington and north Idaho, among the most pressing cultural and social issues are those that purposely divide one group from another.

The Aryan Freedom Network, a white supremacist group, at a gathering in March 2022, in Hayden Lake, Idaho, stated that part of its purpose was to identify “things we can do to make our communities a little better.” That a poster for this event included a swastika and the words “keep Idaho white” showed clearly that its vision for “a little better” was one that was in opposition to

²⁴ Branson and Martinez, pp. 38-40.

²⁵ Mitri Raheb, *Faith in the Face of Empire: The Bible Through Palestinian Eyes* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2014), p. 129.

²⁶ The Book of Common Prayer, p. 302.

²⁷ The Book of Common Prayer, p. 823.

²⁸ Shannon MacVean-Brown, “Transcript of Interview with Joe Flemming, faith-based community organizer,” 2024.

both the ideals expressed in the United States Declaration of Independence and enshrined in its Constitution, as well as the values of Christianity.

In response, to counter this disordered view of nationalism, area religious judicatory leaders, including the Bishop of Spokane, issued a statement, which included:

To state the obvious, the very notion of white supremacy depends upon the narrative of anti-blackness and all people of color. As Christians, we cannot support anything that denies the fundamental nature of the Beloved Community Christ calls us into, a Beloved Community that knows all as beloved of God and siblings to each other. We reject all forms of white supremacy and pledge to continue to actively speak and work against the structures that enable the quiet complicity in and tolerance for such practices. We pledge to actively work for that day when all are seen, valued, honored, and respected as children of God.²⁹

The religious leaders quoted here want the nation-state to become a better version of itself, because to do so brings a day when all people are respected, a day when the *shalom* of sacred scripture is achieved, a day of civic welfare. As Jeremiah told the exiles in Babylon, “Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.” (Jeremiah 29:7, NRSV)

What it Means to be a City upon a Hill

The sermon that John Winthrop wrote on his voyage to America was not centered on Anglo-Saxon exceptionalism or a desire to hold up the new dwellers in America as better than other people. Rather, his reminder to his fellow travelers was that the eyes of the world would be upon them to see if they lived up to the model of Christian charity that his sermon laid before them. More than once, he reminded his listeners of the Golden Rule of the Matthew 7:12, that they do unto others as they would wish done to them.³⁰ He reminded them that if they were to seek greatness for themselves, God would force them to pay a price. Instead, they were to follow the counsel of the prophet Micah to do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with God.

Being a city on a hill was therefore a responsibility, not a right. As Winthrop stated at the end of his sermon, if their hearts turn away and they do not obey, if they are seduced by their own pleasures and profits, they would perish out of the good land toward which they journeyed.³¹ Christian nationalism, which indeed seduces people away from justice and mercy and humility, will eventually lead to destruction. The call of the church in the 21st century is to proclaim in fresh ways what it truly means to be a light to the world and a city on a hill so that all people will be valued, honored, and respected.

²⁹ Gretchen Rehberg et al., “Letter to the Editor,” *The Spokesman-Review* (March 2, 2022).

³⁰ Winthrop, p. 33.

³¹ Winthrop, pp. 42,43.

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