



THE EPISCOPAL  
DIOCESE OF OHIO

# Christian Discipleship and Christian Nationalism

A Resource from the Office  
of Beloved Community

# Christian Discipleship and Christian Nationalism

## Introduction

Welcome to this curriculum on Christian Nationalism. During this time of widely-acknowledged division within our nation, turning and returning to the foundations of our faith helps to keep us grounded in the love of God that connects us. Studying the Bible and tenets of our faith together (whether in a gathered group or as individual members of the whole) can remind us of the transcendent truths that are not dependent upon the culture of the current moment, and to be generous with one another's experience of the world around us.

In his Foreword to the report to the House of Bishops on Christian Nationalism, former Presiding Bishop Michael B. Curry writes, "It is always a dangerous thing to mix up our priorities, whether on the personal or the national level. For those of us who dare to call ourselves followers of Jesus of Nazareth, the challenge is to order our priorities so as to put God first. ... 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."<sup>i</sup> The report that follows names Christian Nationalism as an urgent issue, even a crisis, that "distorts our relationship with God", as well as being a "threat to our democracy".<sup>ii</sup>

One of the writers quoted throughout this curriculum is Amanda Tyler. In *How to End Christian Nationalism*, she writes, "One of the most important starting places for conversation is a commitment to viewing Christian nationalism as an ideology, not an identity."<sup>iii</sup> That is to say, this curriculum is not designed to blame, shame, or correct any individual person, but to recognize how the currents of nationalism and populism that are strong in our present time can pull at the cohesion of the Body of Christ and distract our attention from the *fullness* of the love of God and neighbor to which we are called (Mark 12:29-31)

Perhaps one way to think of it is this word from Reinhold Niebuhr: "Nothing that is worth doing can be achieved in our lifetime; therefore we must be saved by hope. Nothing which is true or beautiful or good makes complete sense in any immediate context of history; therefore we must be saved by faith. Nothing we do, however virtuous, can be accomplished alone; therefore we are saved by love. No virtuous act is quite as virtuous from the standpoint of our friend or foe as it is from our own standpoint. Therefore we must be saved by the final form of love which is forgiveness."<sup>iv</sup>

*Rosalind C Hughes, Epiphany 2026*

## How to Use this Curriculum

These five sessions are designed primarily for use in community. They could be used in an hour-long weekly Lenten formation series, or at any other time. However, the information may also be useful and of interest to individuals. This series is not designed to resolve difficult conversations in the faith community, but may surface themes that would benefit from further discussion and mutual understanding, and may hopefully provide a theological and prayerful framework within which to do that.

Each session provides a guided Bible study. Some informational content on the week's topic follows, with prompts for reflection. Each session contains optional activities to build on the and deepen the learning experience. A self-guiding group may benefit from appointing a facilitator from within its members for each session to help keep the conversation moving and to time.

As always, it is recommended that you open and close your study in prayer. You may choose to pray the following prayers at the beginning and end of each session:

*Book of Common Prayer, Prayers and Thanksgivings, 28. In Times of Conflict*

O God, you have bound us together in a common life. Help us in the midst of our struggles for justice and truth, to confront one another without hatred or bitterness, and to work together with mutual forbearance and respect; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

*Book of Common Prayer, Prayers and Thanksgivings, 3. For the Human Family*

O God, you made us in your own image and redeemed us through Jesus your Son: Look with compassion on the whole human family; take away the arrogance and hatred which infect our hearts; break down the walls that separate us; unite us in bonds of love; and work through our struggle and confusion to accomplish your purposes on earth; that, in your good time, all nations and races may serve you in harmony around your heavenly throne; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

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## Session 1: What is Christian Nationalism?

“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hid. Nor do men light a lamp and put it under a bushel, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.”

*Matthew 5:14-16 (Revised Standard Version)*

- To whom were these words of Jesus addressed?
- What was the context?
  
- Where else have you heard the words, “A city on a hill”?
- To whom were they addressed?
- What was the context?

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In 2024 the House of Bishops Theology Committee published its report on Christian Nationalism. It began with Jesus’ words from the Sermon on the Mount, and continued with a reflection on how those words had been interpreted through four hundred years of American history, beginning with a sermon in 1630 on a ship sailing from Britain toward the new colonies ...

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.

For four hundred years, the words of Matthew’s gospel, directed toward Jesus’s 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 F. Kennedy, Ronald Reagan, and Barack 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 politic. Christian nationalism defines national identity in terms of membership in a particular form of Christianity. 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 interest, opportunities, and power of white people. It fuses the interests of the nation (or at least a portion 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. ...<sup>v</sup>

See also Michael W. Austin, *American Christian Nationalism: Neither American nor Christian*:

Do we trust in Jesus, or in the United States? We need to engage in some serious self-examination about this question, whatever we think of Christian nationalism. But a weakness of Christian nationalism is, oddly enough, that it puts its faith in the nation, including the government (once Christians control it) rather than in Christ and his kingdom.<sup>vi</sup>

and Andrew L. Whitehead & Samuel L. Perry, *Taking America back for God: Christian nationalism in the United States*:

... Christian nationalism ... is not synonymous with the Christian nation narrative... Black Protestants and white evangelicals, for example, throughout America's history have drawn upon the Christian nation narrative, but to very different ends. Frederick Douglass and Martin Luther King Jr. cited America's so-called Christian heritage as a form of rebuke, to challenge an unjust social order. White evangelicals in the South, by contrast, have more often cited the Christian nation narrative not to contest the unjust social order but to preserve it.<sup>vii</sup>

and Austin again:

In one sense, love of country is a good thing. But in another, it is deeply problematic. Love of Jesus and love of country can come into conflict. In fact, since every single nation is made up of fallen humanity and led by fallen human beings, love of Jesus and love of country will inevitably come into conflict.

Christians should reject Christian nationalism, because the demands of discipleship to Jesus conflict with the call of Christian nationalism on our lives.<sup>viii</sup>

The House of Bishops report quoted above suggests that Christian Nationalism "fuses the interests of the nation (or at least a portion of it) and the interests of God". Consider:

What is the effective message of binding civic documents, such as the Constitution and Pledge of Allegiance, in editions of the Bible alongside holy scriptures, or, conversely, branding the Bible with the American flag?

- What does it say about the United States?
- What does it say about the rest of the world (including other dioceses of the Episcopal Church that are not part of the United States or its territories)?
- What does it say about the Gospel?

Optional activity

Compare:



Ascension icon, mid-17<sup>th</sup> century  
<https://tmora.org/online-exhibitions/transcendent-art-icons-from-yaroslavl-russia/17th-century-icons/ascension/#jp-carousel-942>



The Apotheosis of Washington, 1685  
Constantino Brumidi,  
Capitol Rotunda, US Capitol Building,  
Washington, DC  
<https://www.aoc.gov/explore-capitol-campus/art/apotheosis-washington>

How does the iconography of our Capitol contribute to the “fus[ing] of the interests of the nation ... and the interests of God”?

In closing

The House of Bishop report concludes,

... 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 Matthew 7:12, that they do unto others as they would wish done to them. 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. 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 twenty-first 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.<sup>ix</sup>

During this conversation:

What, if anything, has changed about your understanding of Christian Nationalism?

Where have you heard the call of Jesus?

What/whom will you pray for?

## Session 2: The Bible and Christian Nationalism

For it is we who are the circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and boast in Christ Jesus and have no confidence in the flesh—even though I, too, have reason for confidence in the flesh. If anyone else has reason to be confident in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ. More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.

*Philippians 3:3-8a, NRSV*

There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free; there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.

*Galatians 3:28, NRSV*

- What citizenship(s) did Paul hold?
- What was/were Paul's relationship/s to political authority?
- What citizenship(s) did Jesus hold?
- What was Jesus' relationship to political authority?

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Clearly, the Bible does not address Christian Nationalism directly. However, we can notice when the culture of Christian Nationalism begins to affect our interpretation of scripture. For example: when we read about the Promised Land, or God's chosen people, or even the New Jerusalem, do we automatically envision the United States fulfilling that role?

Brian Kaylor offers a number of suggestions for reading the Bible in *The Bible According to Christian Nationalists: Exploiting Scripture for Political Power*.<sup>x</sup>

(A note: because this book addresses a particular political movement and its use of scripture, it will come across to many as partisan and will certainly not be to everyone's taste. However, I do find Kaylor's insights about reading the Bible to be sound and able to be applied from any political or theological point of view.)

These suggestions include:

- Avoid treating the Bible like a good-luck rabbit's foot. It won't transform our lives until we start seriously reading it; (p. 24)

- Avoid the temptation of proof-texting, where one flips through the Bible to find a verse to justify the politics or opinions one already supports. Instead, read more of the Bible and allow it to challenge, convict, or even shift your beliefs; (p.53-4)
- Push back against the “culture war” politicians and preachers who elevate a couple of verses ... over the words of Jesus and the full biblical witness; (p. 54)
- Attempt to read the Bible from the margins. If you’re like me, that includes thinking about what it might mean from a position with less political or economic status than yourself, and it necessitates reading more biblical perspectives from people who aren’t White men from the United States; (p. 70)
- Avoid the temptation to read biblical passages as specially about the United States (or any other modern nation state); (p. 86)
- Avoid the temptation to throw out the words of Jesus in favor of some other text; (p. 115)
- Watch out for efforts to weaponize scripture against political enemies. Much of the rewriting of the Bible is done to avoid clear teachings about loving others and doing unto other as you would want them to do unto you. (p. 115)

Can you think of any examples where you have heard political rhetoric or preaching that fell into one or another of the pitfalls mentioned by Kaylor?

Are there temptations that you feel called to resist in your own reading and use of the Bible?

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### Optional Activity 1: the “Jefferson Bible”

In 1904, Congress caused the publication of the “Jefferson Bible”, a version of the Gospels compiled by Thomas Jefferson a couple of hundred years ago by slicing and pasting together passages from six copies of the New Testament in order to create a single narrative of the life and teachings of Jesus, without any hint of miracle or wonder.

“Jefferson, who had suffered great criticism for his religious beliefs, once said that the care he had taken to reduce the Gospels to their core message should prove that he was in fact, a “real Christian, that is to say, a disciple of the doctrines of Jesus.”<sup>xi</sup>

Not long after a curator of the Smithsonian Institution discovered first the cut-up Bibles, and acquired the resulting text, *The Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth*, for the Smithsonian, a Congressman from Iowa introduced a Bill to reprint the volume through the US Government Printing Office.

The resulting debates, both within Congress and beyond, were illustrative of the ambiguous relationship of the government of the United States to the Gospel. Arguments as to whether the edition was theologically sound, and whether its publication would be pro- or anti-Christian, were interwoven with arguments as to whether the US government should be in the business of publishing

Bibles, thereby perhaps inadvertently giving the appearance of approval of Jefferson's conclusions as to the usefulness of the Gospels and their message about Jesus.

Eventually, the volume was published by the US Government Printing Office, and remains in the Library of Congress, presumably, under that imprimatur.

(All factual information above is from

<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smithsonian-institution/why-thomas-jefferson-created-his-own-bible-180975716/>)

- If you had had to weigh in on the publication of the Jefferson version of the Gospels by the US government, what would you say?

### Optional activity 2: Psalm 23

Pray Psalm 23 together (you can find it on p. 612 of the Book of Common Prayer. If you prefer the King James Version, that's on p. 476)

The Lord is my shepherd;

I shall not be in want.

He makes me lie down in green pastures  
and leads me beside still waters.

He revives my soul

and leads me along right pathways for his  
Name's sake.

Though I walk through the valley of the shadow  
of death, I shall fear no evil;

for you are with me; your rod and your staff,  
they comfort me.

You spread a table before me in the presence of  
those who trouble me;

you have anointed my head with oil, and my  
cup is running over.

Surely your goodness and mercy shall follow me  
all the days of my life,

and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for  
ever.

The Lord is my shepherd;

I shall not want.

He maketh me to lie down in green pastures;  
he leadeth me beside the still waters.

He restoreth my soul;

he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for  
his Name's sake.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the  
shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for thou art  
with me; thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me.

Thou preparest a table before me in the  
presence of mine enemies;

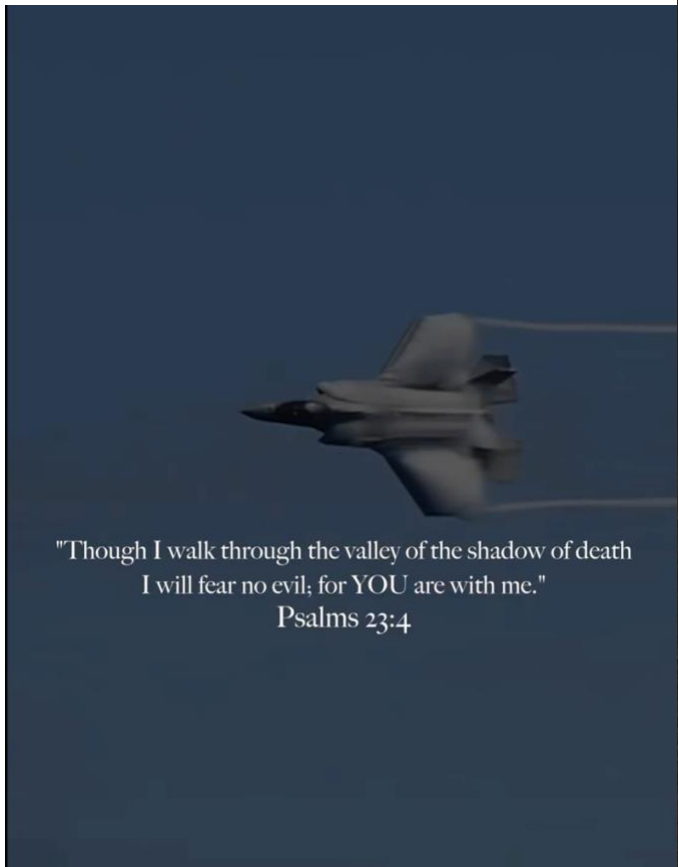
thou anointest my head with oil; my cup  
runneth over.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all  
the days of my life,

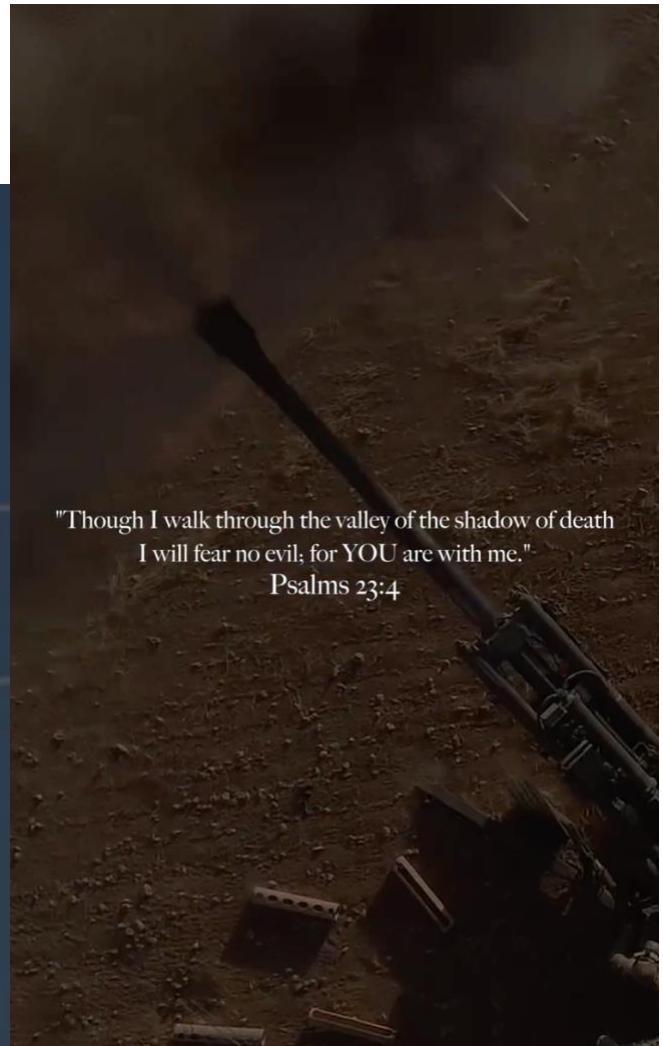
and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for  
ever.

What memories, feelings, images does this familiar psalm evoke?

Read the psalm again, then look at the following screenshots from a video posted on X by the Department of War.



"Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death  
I will fear no evil; for YOU are with me."  
Psalms 23:4



"Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death  
I will fear no evil; for YOU are with me."  
Psalms 23:4

<https://x.com/DOWResponse/status/1959748411483357402>

- What do you think is being conveyed here?
- Do these images reflect your relationship with the psalm? Why/why not?
- How do you feel about a department of government using biblical verses to illustrate their mission, and/or interpreting their mission through through biblical verses?

In closing

First, read the questions that lead to Jesus telling the story of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:25-29 (or the full story, through 10:37):

Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he said, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" He said to him. "What is written in the law? What do you read there?" He answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself." And he said to him, "You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.

But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" *Luke 10:25-19 (New Revised Standard Version)*

Michael W. Austin writes about this parable in *American Christian Nationalism: Neither American nor Christian*:

In answer to the question "Who is my neighbor?" Christian nationalism points to those in our homes, communities, and even nation. Yet the point of the parable of the Good Samaritan is to be a neighbor, and the point of the Great Commandment is to love all those whom we have the opportunity to love. While hard decisions have to be made, we accept too much of things as they are. In a nation with our wealth and vast resources, we can do so much more to help those running from oppression, grinding poverty, violence, rape, war, and forced conscription. Certainly, there must be standards and there will be limits to what we can do, but we are nowhere near those limits, given all the resources we possess.<sup>xii</sup> (p. 66)

and

... When your devotion to your nation leads you to ask "Who is my neighbor?" in order to avoid considering the needs and even the rights of others, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that some measure of idolatry is in play.<sup>xiii</sup> (p. 30)

During this conversation:

What, if anything, has changed about your understanding of Christian Nationalism?

Where have you heard the call of Jesus?

What/whom will you pray for?

## Session 3: Race and Christian Nationalism

Now the whole earth had one language and the same words. And as they migrated from the east, they came upon a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. And they said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly." And they had brick for stone, and bitumen for mortar. Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves; otherwise we shall be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth." The Lord came down to see the city and the tower, which mortals had built. And the Lord said, "Look, they are one people, and they have all one language; and this is only the beginning of what they will do; nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. Come, let us go down, and confuse their language there, so that they will not understand one another's speech." So the Lord scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city.

*Genesis 11:1-8, NRSV*

- What does the story of Babel teach about unity and diversity?
- What was God's purpose in creating diversity of language and culture? (Hint: compare Genesis 9:1 and 11:8)

After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. They cried out in a loud voice, saying, "Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!"

*Revelation 7:9-10*

- What does the picture that these words paint look like to you? What does it sound like?

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During their close examination of Christian Nationalism, Andrew L. Whitehead & Samuel L. Perry discovered that,

[M]uch of the Christian nationalist rhetoric born out of the Religious Right finds its roots in the desire to create boundaries of group membership around race and the right of white Americans to segregate themselves from minorities ...Some of this may be due to explicit prejudice against black Americans. At the very least it clearly represents a preference that Ambassadors [advocates for Christian Nationalism] have for rigid racial boundaries and a society where racial group members socialize with members of their own race.<sup>xiv</sup>

The myth of America's foundation as a Christian nation both secularizes Christian identity as a matter of citizenship rather than of faith, and excludes from the fold of American Christianity those who are not sufficiently American. Whilst being Christian has become essential to being recognized as "American" in Christian Nationalism, it is no guarantee of acceptance. Perry and Whitehead again:

The trends are strikingly clear. As being a Christian becomes a more important marker of national belonging, the likelihood increases that adults feel that true Americans are those who were born here, lived here their whole lives, are able to speak English, and have American ancestry. Stated in reverse those who see being “Christian” as central to being “American” are highly resistant to the idea that immigrants – even Christians who have been here for years – those who cannot speak English, and those without an American ancestor can be “truly American.” They are indelibly “them,” not “us.”<sup>xv</sup>

The corruption of Christianity inherent in the transatlantic slave trade has been well-documented and it is no surprise that the false teachings that supported that corruption have continued to echo through the churches as well as in our society, which still struggles to reckon with racism. Stephanie Spellers writes:

T[he] siren song of empire is seductive, and oppressive powers can morph and slide just out of view so smoothly we don’t realize they’re still running the show. They’ve been especially adept at weaving the established order and White superiority into the core of dominant American Christianity, to the point where it’s tough to know where one ends and the other begins.<sup>xvi</sup>

This tendency to define both Americanism and Christianity in terms of White identity is undisguised in the legacy of Manifest Destiny and the Monroe Doctrine, which in turn draw from the Doctrine of Discovery. As described in the Bull Romanus Pontifex in 1455, the Doctrine of Discovery assumed that it was the right and duty of European, Christian powers to

invade, search out, capture, vanquish, and subdue all Saracens and pagans whatsoever, and all enemies of Christ wheresoever placed, and the kingdoms, dukedoms, principalities, dominions, possessions, and all movable and immovable goods whatsoever held and possessed by them and to reduce their persons to perpetual slavery, and to apply and appropriate to himself and his successors the kingdoms, dukedoms, counties, principalities, dominions, possessions, and goods, and to convert them to his and their use and profit.<sup>xvii</sup>

This allowed for the seizure of foreign lands, including in the Americas, under the guise of “discovery” by Christians, and the dispossession and subjugation of their indigenous peoples. We learn further from the Upstander Project that,

The Doctrine of Discovery was the inspiration in the 1800s for the **Monroe Doctrine**, which declared U.S. hegemony over the Western Hemisphere, and **Manifest Destiny**, which justified American expansion westward by propagating the belief that the U.S. was destined to control all land from the Atlantic to the Pacific and beyond. In an 1823 Supreme Court case, **Johnson v. M'Intosh**, the Doctrine of Discovery became part of U.S. federal law and was used to dispossess Native peoples of their land.<sup>xviii</sup>

The White supremacy inherent in these doctrines and their echoes today have resulted in the irony of Indigenous Americans being swept up in ICE raids, because they do not fit the image that has been created of what it is to be “American”, and instead are seen as other.

The idea of America’s “chosenness” is particularly galling for Indigenous people in the United States, said Rt Rev. Carol Gallagher, assistant bishop in the Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts

and an enrolled member of the Cherokee Nation. “[A]s an Indigenous person, I find it very hard to hear that phrase without understanding the price that was paid, not only in lives but land, people taken by disease, assumed to be ‘less than’.”<sup>xix</sup>

What other examples can you think of where you have heard, read, or seen Christian Nationalism adopting the values, ethos, or rhetoric of White supremacy?

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Optional activity

### BECOMING BELOVED COMMUNITY



(This is an extract from our Every One Beloved diocesan dismantling racism workshop):

#### **An exercise in truth-telling: The Diocese of Ohio and the Doctrines of Discovery and Manifest Destiny**

The celebration of the Diocese of Ohio as the first Episcopal Diocese beyond the thirteen colonies, while a source of pride, can tend to obscure some harder truths:

In 2015 General Convention ordered the examination of the devastating effects of the Doctrine of Discovery and its offspring, Manifest Destiny, on the beloved community. It directed “all dioceses to examine the impact, including acts of racial discrimination, racial profiling, and other race-based acts of oppression, that the repudiated Doctrine of Discovery, as well as ... Manifest Destiny, has had on all people, especially on people of color and indigenous peoples.”

In 2016, then-Presiding Bishop Katherine Jefferts Schori wrote:

I urge you to learn more about the Doctrine of Discovery and the search for healing in our native communities. But this is also a matter for healing in communities and persons of European immigrant descent. Colonists, settlers, and homesteaders benefited enormously from the availability of “free” land, and their descendants continue to benefit to this day. That land was taken by force or subterfuge from peoples who had dwelt on it from time immemorial – it was their “promised land.” The nations from which the settlers came, and the new nations which resulted in the Americas, sought to impose another culture and way of life on the peoples they encountered. Attempting to remake the land and peoples they found “in their own image” was a profound act of idolatry.

Repentance and amendment of life are the answer, and God asks us all – this Church, our partners and neighbors, and the nations which were founded under the Doctrine of Discovery – to the challenging work of reconciliation.

The abundant life we know in Jesus Christ is made possible through sacrifice – through repairing what is broken, and finding holiness and healing in the midst of that challenging work. That work is often costly, but it is the only road to abundant life.

<https://www.episcopalchurch.org/indigenousministries/repudiation-of-the-doctrine-of-discovery/>

Midstory, a 501(c)(3) “non-profit thinkhub that progresses the narrative of the Midwest”, published a story in 2020 on “the forgotten history of Ohio’s indigenous peoples.” It read, in part:

[A] series of treaties led to the Ohio Removal between ca. 1840-1845. But while most history books stop here, the true story is a bit more complicated.

A tremendous number of Indigenous people remained in Ohio after Removal. Another thing little known by the general public is that people flatly refused to go west,” Dr. [Barbara] Mann [author and professor at the University of Toledo] said.

“The government simply declared those people no longer Indian.”...

“Because the Ohio reservations were quickly taken away, and the government declared holdouts in Ohio no longer Indian, the official story is that ‘there are no Indians in Ohio’ but that is bunk.”

Currently, there are no federally recognized tribal communities or nations in Ohio.

<https://www.midstory.org/the-forgotten-history-of-ohios-indigenous-peoples/>

When Philander Chase first settled in Ohio in 1817, it had been a State for only 14 years, and had in its first decade already passed draconian laws designed to deter and restrict the freedoms of Black people within that “free state”, including the obligation of Black people to secure the sponsorship of two white citizens willing to pay a bond of \$500 on their behalf within 20 days of moving into the State, and disallowing any testimony from a Black person in a civil or criminal case involving a white person.

<https://calendar.eji.org/racial-injustice/apr/01>

Thinking of your own faith community and the communities that surround it, consider the questions:

- What racial/cultural/ethnic groups are in our church? (e.g. who is included? Who is missing? Who is in leadership?)
- Whose culture and story shapes our common life, leadership and worship? (e.g. Whose music do we sing? Whose art do we display? What expressions of prayer are encouraged/discouraged?)
- How has our church excluded or embraced the presence, story and power of different racial/cultural/ethnic groups over time? (e.g. Do we look like our neighbors? Why/why not?)<sup>xx</sup>

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In closing

Remember the two passages of scripture we read at the beginning of this session. Read them again, aloud if it is helpful. Then consider how the following reflections on the roots of Christian Nationalism relate to the Genesis and Revelation passages, respectively. Do they resonate for you, or not?

[The] European conquest of land and people throughout the Enlightenment period was actually a period of wrestling against God for control and dominion over the planet.<sup>xxi</sup>

and

[Stephen] Wolfe, for example, argues that our love for others is more intense the more similar they are to us, and that this is not a result of sin. It is a part of our human nature, as God intended it to be. ... This preference for being with people like oneself – members of one’s own culture, race, or ethnic group – is not how God intended it to be. We know this for many reasons, but one is that at the end of all things, when the new heavens and new earth are finally brought into being, we will serve and praise and enjoy God together, alongside people from every tribe, tongue, and nation (Rev. 7:9). This is where God is leading us; this is the next step in the story of humanity. We won’t oppose it then, and we should not oppose it now.<sup>xxii</sup>

During this conversation:

What, if anything, has changed about your understanding of Christian Nationalism?

Where have you heard the call of Jesus?

What/whom will you pray for?

## Session 4: The Episcopal Church and Christian Nationalism

[Jesus said] “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep. I am the good shepherd. I know my own, and my own know me, just as the Father knows me, and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father.”

*John 10:11-18 (New Revised Standard Version)*

- How does Jesus relate to the sheep of different folds?
- What does that tell us about our relationship as Christians across congregations, denominations, and demographics?
- What does it say about our relationship with other people made in God’s image, Christian or not?
- From what you have already learned, what might this passage and its meanings have to say about Christian Nationalism?

The Rt Rev. Gretchen Rehberg, Bishop of Spokane, wrote a pastoral letter in 2022 that became an op ed in her local paper, *The Spokesman*. It is also quoted in the House of Bishops report on the Crisis of Christian Nationalism that we referred to in Session 1. In it, she wrote,

As a follower of Jesus, I have a higher allegiance than any one country, and a citizenship that is beyond this country. I cannot sit by quietly when the faith is wrapped up in the flag. Christianity was here long before the U.S. came to be a country, and will be here long after we have colonized space.

<https://www.spokesman.com/stories/2022/sep/04/the-rt-rev-gretchen-m-rehberg-those-stirring-up-di/><sup>xxiii</sup>

- Does this inform, alter, or confirm your reading of the Good Shepherd passage above?

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Michael Austin writes,

In his famous sermon, “A Knock at Midnight,” Martin Luther King, Jr. offers vital wisdom when he says “The church must be reminded that it is not the master or the servant of the state, but rather the conscience of the state.” ... [Christian Nationalists] want the church to be the master of the state.<sup>xxiv</sup>

The Episcopal Church has tended, throughout its brief history, to have an uncomfortably close relationship with the state, part of its legacy as the scion of the established Church of England. We have heard the myth that our General Convention structure as a bicameral synod reflects the formation of our secular government, and that the same men who were drawing up the constitution of the one were simultaneously using the same principles to draw up the other. This myth, and the pride it provokes, may suggest that the Episcopal Church is particularly at risk of unconscious or unintentional Christian Nationalism.

The symptoms might show up, for example, as an inclination to think of “the national church”, instead of recognizing that the Episcopal Church encompasses dioceses from well beyond the United States, including in Haiti, Cuba, Venezuela, Honduras, France, Germany, Taiwan, and many more.

Like the nation’s founding fathers, the Episcopal Church, while proclaiming liberty and equality for all, was not in fact averse to exploiting other people through the institution of slavery. In *The Church Cracked Open*, Stephanie Spellers quotes historian Walter Posey,

Nearly all of the Southern bishops owned slaves, either by inheritance or purchase ... When his wife had the option of inheriting money or four hundred slaves, Bishop Polk of Louisiana encouraged her to take the slaves, as he thought thereby he could function better in his state as a man of influence.<sup>xxv</sup>

Unless we reckon with our church’s history and habit of accommodating the worst elements of exploitative and exclusionary nationalism, are we doomed to imitate and repeat them?

For some, this reckoning includes wrestling with the way in which we sometimes fuse and arguably confuse symbols of the nation with the symbols of our faith. For example, how many Episcopal churches that you know have United States flags adjacent to the holy table? What does that say about the God that we worship, and the people whom we welcome into our worship?

One suggestion, made by the Rt Rev. Deon Johnson, Bishop of Missouri, was to use the flag to direct attention appropriately to, for example, war memorials, books of remembrance, and other artefacts that lend themselves to national observance, and not at the altar, where it might unconsciously reinforce the association of Christ with the country, instead of with the Creator of all:

Christian nationalism, which aligns and often equates the cross with the flag, intentionally blurs the division between our faith in a loving, liberating, and life-giving God and national pride. ...It conflates the cross, a symbol of our hope in the resurrection of our Savior Jesus Christ as a means of salvation and grace, with the flag, a symbol of national unity which honors the hard-fought freedoms won by brave women and men who willingly sacrificed for its purpose and the cause of peace. As people of faith, we can take pride in the achievement and values of our nation while being true to the Gospel’s call to, “love our neighbors as ourselves.”<sup>xxvi</sup>

As Bishop Johnson notes, “we can take pride in the achievement and values of our nation,” but the call to resist Christian Nationalism is a call to resist turning that pride into idolatry. It is in God, not in the United States, that we trust.

### Optional activity 1

Read through the section of the Book of Common Prayer titled Prayers and Thanksgivings, beginning on p. 843.

- Do you see any signs or symptoms of unconscious or unintentional Christian Nationalism in the included texts?
- If so, how would you edit this/these prayer/s to reduce the risk of reinforcing Christian nationalism in our common life together?

### Optional activity 2

- If you have a flag in your main worship space, what kinds of conversation has your faith community had about that placement, its meaning, and resonances?
- What kind of conversation could you have?

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### In closing

At the beginning of this session, we read a brief quote from the Rev. Dr Martin Luther King, Jr's sermon, "A Knock at Midnight", based on the story from Luke 11:5-6 of the person who received an unexpected visitor knocking on his friend's door in search of bread. This is a longer extract from that sermon. Our brief quote from earlier in the session is in italics:

Men caught in the terrible midnight of war have often knocked on the door of the Church to find the bread of peace. In almost every instance the church has left them disappointed. Hardly anything has revealed the pathetic irrelevancy of the church in present-day world affairs as its stand on war. In the midst of a world gone mad with arms buildups, {chauvinistic} passions, and imperialistic exploitation, the church has stood by, either endorsing these activities or remaining appallingly silent. During the last two world wars the national churches often functioned as the ready lackeys of the state. They sprinkled holy water upon the battleships and joined the mighty armies in singing "praise the Lord and pass the ammunition." A weary world pleading desperately for peace has often found the church giving moral sanction to war.

Then there are those who have gone to the church for the bread of economic justice. How often has the church left men standing in the frustrating midnight of economic deprivation. In so many instances it has so aligned itself with the privileged classes and defended the status quo that it found it impossible to answer the knock at midnight. We must never forget the lesson of the Greek Church in Russia. This church allied itself with the status quo and became so inextricably bound with the despotic czarist regime, that it was impossible to get rid of the corrupt political and social system without getting rid of the church. This is the fate of every ecclesiastical organization that allies itself with the status-quo.

*The church must be reminded once again that {it} is not to be the master or the servant of the state, but the conscience of the state. It must be the guide and the critic of the state,—never its tool. **As long as the church is a tool of the state it will be unable to provide even a modicum of bread for men at midnight.** If the church does not recapture its prophetic zeal and cease to be an echo of the status-quo it will be relegated to an irrelevant social club with no moral or spiritual authority. If the church does not participate actively in the struggle for peace, economic and racial justice, it will forfeit the loyalty of millions and cause men everywhere to know that it is an institution whose will is atrophied. But if the church will free itself from the shackles of a deadening status-quo, and, recovering its great historic mission, will proceed to speak and act fearlessly and insistently on the questions of justice and peace, it will enkindle the imagination of mankind. It will fire the souls of men and imbue them with a glowing and ardent love for truth, justice and peace. Men far and near will then see the church as that great fellowship of love which provides light and bread for lonely travellers at midnight.<sup>xxvii</sup>*

During this conversation:

What, if anything, has changed about your understanding of Christian Nationalism?

Where have you heard the call of Jesus?

What/whom will you pray for?

## Session 5: Resisting Christian Nationalism as disciples of Christ

And Saul approved of their killing him.

That day a severe persecution began against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout the countryside of Judea and Samaria. Devout men buried Stephen and made loud lamentation over him. But Saul was ravaging the church by entering house after house; dragging off both men and women, he committed them to prison.

Meanwhile Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any who belonged to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. Now as he was going along and approaching Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" He asked, "Who are you, Lord?" The reply came, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But get up and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do." The men who were traveling with him stood speechless because they heard the voice but saw no one. Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing; so they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. For three days he was without sight and neither ate nor drank.

Now there was a disciple in Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias." He answered, "Here I am, Lord." The Lord said to him, "Get up and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul. At this moment he is praying, and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight." But Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints in Jerusalem, and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who invoke your name." But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is an instrument whom I have chosen to bring my name before gentiles and kings and before the people of Israel; I myself will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name." So Ananias went and entered the house. He laid his hands on Saul and said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on your way here, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and his sight was restored. Then he got up and was baptized, and after taking some food, he regained his strength.

*Acts 8:1-9, 9:1-19 (New Revised Standard Version)*

The conversion of Saul, later known as Paul, is one of the most dramatic in the Bible.

- Who converted Saul from murderous persecutor to committed apostle?
- What were the signs of his conversion?
- What do you think of Ananias' response to the call to nurture Saul in his nascent discipleship?
- What do you imagine you would have done in his place?

Amanda Tyler writes,

We will not end Christian nationalism if Christians do not actively work to dismantle it: to rid it from ourselves, our congregations, and our larger communities.<sup>xxviii</sup>

and

Though it can be tempting to focus on the movement aspect of Christian nationalism, I think our efforts are better directed at dismantling the ideology.<sup>xxix</sup>

- How do you read this advice in the light of Saul’s conversion story?

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Hanna Reichel has written “An Emergency Devotional” titled, *For Such a Time as This*.<sup>xxx</sup> In fact, it is more of a framework for thinking about how to remain grounded in faith during what the House of Bishops has called the *Crisis of Christian Nationalism* than a devotional.

Her advice includes,

- There is a lot of space for all kinds of emotions in the Bible, but time and again it insists, “Do not be afraid.” ... Feelings of anxiety and worry can easily be channeled into resentment and envy, scapegoating immigrants, political dissidents, or supposed “enemies of the state.” Fear narrows love and moral responsibility. (Reichel, 20-21)

*Remember the courage of Ananias. Resist making your world small; you may just miss a miracle.*

- “In the beginning was the Word...” The Bible tells of a word that is literally world-making (John 1:1). But even our small human words make and destroy worlds. ... Pay attention to language. This is where it starts. Pay attention when words get switched out or start to change their meaning. Pay attention when the same stories are told over and over again, and when everyone starts using the same words. (Reichel, 41)

*Praying shapes believing. Leonel L. Mitchell writes,*

Probably more than any other contemporary religious group, Episcopalians are people of a prayer book. Not only do we use the Book of Common Prayer for the conduct of our public services; it is the guide for our private prayer and the source of most of our theology. ... Traditionally this dependence of theology upon worship has been expressed in the Latin maxim *lex orandi lex credenda* ... which means that the way we pray determines the way we believe. Anthropologists say, “Creed follows cult.”<sup>xxxi</sup>

*Our language about God and one another influences and affects our beliefs about both.*

- Protect the weak. The good shepherd goes after the one sheep instead of the many. The lost sheep is not the person who hasn't had their come-to-Jesus moment. The lost sheep is the one who, unprotected by the group, will be torn up by the wolves. Don't abandon the few for the supposed good of the many.  
We all need God. And God is there for all of us. But those who recognize this are charged with a special responsibility.  
We call ourselves Christians not because God belongs to us but because we belong to God.  
(Reichel, 48-9)

*Remember that Jesus has sheep in other folds (John 10:16). Avoid either envying or disparaging them. Look forward to meeting them.*

- Obey God more than humans. (Reichel, 60)

Some boast of chariots, and some of horses; but we boast of the name of the Lord our God (Psalm 20:7; RSV). *Saul had orders and warrants for his intended persecution, but when he heard the command of Jesus, he found where his real allegiance and authority lay.*

- Hold onto unity, but mistrust uniformity. A living body will be composed of many different members and marvelously unruly functions. (Reichel, 97)

*The Vision Statement of the Diocese of Ohio reads,*

*Connected in Beloved Community, we seek to be faithful, healthy, effective, and sustainable sharers of the transformative love of Jesus.*

*This is based in our Grounding Scripture,*

*From Christ the WHOLE body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is EQUIPPED, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in LOVE. Ephesians 4:16(ish)*

*What does the Body of Christ look like to you?*

- Allow people to change. (Reichel, 123)

*Remember Saul.*

Which, if any, of these prompts resonates most with you?

Are you inspired by them to take any particular action, or begin any particular conversation or relationship?

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### Optional activity 1

Praying shapes believing. How we speak about God and one another shapes how we think about God and one another. How we worship not only reflects but influences how we live out our faith in the world.

*Sing: He's got the whole world in his hands*

Try adding verses that expand *your* vision of *God's* worldview. Take suggestions from the group. Include different pronouns for God as you alternate verses. How else might you open yourself to new visions of God?

### Optional activity 2

Write a prayer for the nation. Pay attention to the places where Christian Nationalism wants to seep into your language and your soul. Rewrite those phrases to reflect God's love for everyone, no exceptions.

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### In closing

Spend some extra time considering the questions we've used to reflect on each session:

During this conversation:

What, if anything, has changed about your understanding of Christian Nationalism?

Where have you heard the call of Jesus?

What/whom will you pray for?

*How will you pray?*

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## Notes

- <sup>i</sup> *The Crisis of Christian Nationalism: Report from the House of Bishops Theology Committee*, edited by Allen K. Shin and Larry R. Benfield, with a Foreword by Michael B. Curry (Church Publishing, 2024), 5-6
- <sup>ii</sup> *The Crisis of Christian Nationalism*, 9-12
- <sup>iii</sup> Amanda Tyler, *How to End Christian Nationalism* (Broadleaf Books, 2024), 138
- <sup>iv</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr, *Irony of American History* (Charles Scribner's Sons, 1952), 63, quoted by James H. Cone in *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* (Orbis Books, 2011), 34
- <sup>v</sup> *The Crisis of Christian Nationalism: Report from the House of Bishops Theology Committee*, edited by Allen K. Shin & Larry R. Benfield (Church Publishing, 2024), 15-17
- <sup>vi</sup> Michael W. Austin, *American Christian Nationalism: Neither American nor Christian* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2024), 52
- <sup>vii</sup> Andrew L. Whitehead & Samuel L. Perry, *Taking America back for God: Christian nationalism in the United States* (Oxford University Press, 2020), 17-18
- <sup>viii</sup> Austin, 28
- <sup>ix</sup> *The Crisis of Christian Nationalism*, 31-32
- <sup>x</sup> Brian Kaylor, *The Bible According to Christian Nationalists: Exploiting Scripture for Political Power* (Chalice Press, 2025)
- <sup>xi</sup> <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smithsonian-institution/why-thomas-jefferson-created-his-own-bible-180975716/>
- <sup>xii</sup> Austin, 66
- <sup>xiii</sup> Austin, 30
- <sup>xiv</sup> Whitehead & Perry, 100
- <sup>xv</sup> Whitehead & Perry, 99
- <sup>xvi</sup> Stephanie Spellers, *The Church Cracked Open: Disruption, Decline, and New Hope for Beloved Community* (Church Publishing Incorporated, 2021), 118
- <sup>xvii</sup> The Bull Romanus Pontifex (Pope Nicholas V), 1455. <https://doctrineofdiscovery.org/the-bull-romanus-pontifex-nicholas-v/>
- <sup>xviii</sup> <https://upstanderproject.org/learn/guides-and-resources/first-light/doctrine-of-discovery>
- <sup>xix</sup> Quoted in Amanda Tyler, *How to End Christian Nationalism* (Broadleaf Books, 2024), 43
- <sup>xx</sup> *Becoming Beloved Community Where You Are: A Resource for Individuals & Ministries Seeking Racial Justice, Healing, Reckoning & Reconciliation* from Episcopal Church Racial Justice and Reconciliation Team: Miguel Bustos, Manager for Racial Justice and Reconciliation, Isaiah Shanequa Brokenleg, Staff Officer for Racial Reconciliation, Andrea Lauerman, Coordinator for Sacred Ground, Melanie Mullen, Director of Reconciliation, Justice and Creation Care, Stephanie Spellers, Canon for Evangelism, Reconciliation and Creation Care, Katrina Browne, Nick Gordon and Valerie Mayo, Consultants, [www.episcopalchurch.org/ministries/racial-reconciliation](http://www.episcopalchurch.org/ministries/racial-reconciliation), UPDATED JUNE 2024
- <sup>xxi</sup> Lisa Sharon Harper, *Fortune: How Race Broke My Family and the World – and How to Repair It All* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2022), 90, quoted in Michael W. Austin, *American Christian Nationalism: Neither American nor Christian* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2024), 3.
- <sup>xxii</sup> Austin, 73
- <sup>xxiii</sup> <https://www.spokesman.com/stories/2022/sep/04/the-rt-rev-gretchen-m-rehberg-those-stirring-up-di/>
- <sup>xxiv</sup> Austin, 44
- <sup>xxv</sup> Spellers, 61
- <sup>xxvi</sup> [https://diocesemo.org/application/files/4317/4241/0482/Updated\\_2025\\_Christian\\_Nationalism\\_Pastoral\\_Letter\\_.pdf](https://diocesemo.org/application/files/4317/4241/0482/Updated_2025_Christian_Nationalism_Pastoral_Letter_.pdf)
- <sup>xxvii</sup> <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/draft-chapter-vi-knock-midnight>
- <sup>xxviii</sup> Tyler, 3
- <sup>xxix</sup> Tyler, 29
- <sup>xxx</sup> Hanna Reichel, *For Such a Time as This: An Emergency Devotional* (Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2025)
- <sup>xxxi</sup> Leonel L. Mitchell, *Praying Shapes Believing: A Theological Commentary on The Book of Common Prayer* (Morehouse Publishing, 1985), 1

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