

Statement Re White Christian Nationalism

A group of our alumni have become concerned about what is being called “white Christian nationalism” as a false religion and form of racism. Concerned that this phenomenon may seriously impact the upcoming 2024 election, and that the US Bishops have failed to speak out against this pseudo religion, they prepared the statement below and presented it to the readers of Semnet. So far, over 70 readers of Semnet have signed the statement. The signees feel that we need to educate ourselves on the subject and speak out against this dangerous distortion of religion. Now, the group asks you, the readers of the Newsletter, to study the matter and sign the statement. At the end of the statement will appear instructions on how to sign it. Be aware that this statement may be shared more widely and perhaps sent to the USCCB.

The Threat of White Christian Nationalism

American democracy will always be a work in progress. The struggles between individual and community, between competition and altruism will always need something like religion to assist our better angels in the ongoing effort to help our country live up to its ideals of equality and opportunity for all. Christianity has often provided the motivation for the work: Martin Luther King and John Lewis envisioned a Beloved Community of Christians who would work nonviolently for a more equitable society.

However, religion can also have a noxious side. In March of 2023, Pope Francis repudiated the papal pronouncements that centuries ago used religion to rationalize the enslavement of indigenous people and the appropriation of their lands. These decrees, commonly called the Doctrine of Discovery, were drafted in the 15th and 16th centuries to address problems associated with competing claims to “discovered” lands. Afterwards these papal edicts made their way into national and international law where they still are invoked in legal conflicts. In 2005, the US Supreme Court in an 8 to 1 decision quoted Discovery in deciding against the property claims of an indigenous people.

The reactionary imposition of order is understandable in a time of momentous change. While many changes are happening in today’s United States, one major contributing factor is the steady and inevitable disappearance of white hegemony. In about twenty years America will be a land of many cultures and ethnicities with no single majority. Some self-identified as white feel that they are being replaced and that their beloved country is being degraded by these newcomers, who are often people of color.

Many of us struggle with the racism and paternalism (and other isms) that we inherited from our culture, religion, or even our families. In contrast, sociologists identify a group of Americans as white Christian nationalists who to a greater or lesser degree endorse racist and anti-immigrant views and practices. Sociologist and evangelical Christian Andrew Whitehead argues from his research that white Christian nationalists are comfortable with the violence needed to impose their values upon our country’s institutions. They have legitimated the use of violence whether historically toward Native Americans and enslaved peoples from Africa, or more recently toward congressional representatives on January 6th, 2021, justifying such harm as part of God’s plan.

They are comfortable with imposing their beliefs on our citizens, justifying such anti-democratic beliefs with religious rhetoric.

White Christian nationalists believe that as one nation, we need one religion. They are trying to impose a supersessionist version of religion mixed with a reactionary legislative agenda and supported by one political party. The election of Republican Mike Johnson as Speaker of the House has brought to the fore the reactionary quality of this group's beliefs and the great harm that would be done to our nation should their policies be made into law.

Mary Jo McConahay (*Playing God: American Bishops and the Far Right*) has shown that US bishops have failed to speak out against this pseudo religion. As Catholics, a group of us have decided we need to do something. First of all, we need to educate ourselves on the subject, but then to speak out against this dangerous distortion of religion called white Christian nationalism.

You can join us by contacting Semnet, a curated e-mail newsletter with some 400 subscribers, alumni and others connected somehow with SJC/SPS. Along with other conversations and announcements from other semnet participants, Semnet will occasionally post examples of what we are doing. We welcome your suggestions for future work. You can contact Semnet here: semnetsjc@gmail.com and let semnet editor Dennis Lucey know if you wish to add your signature to this statement. You can also let him know if you wish to receive Semnet emails a few times a month, but you do not need to join Semnet in order to sign or comment on this statement.

Thank you for your consideration.

Michael Anderson
Brian and Donna Cahill
Don and Mary Jo Carroll
Salvador Chavez
Ed Chiosso
Robert J. Cleek
Kathleen Cox (for Jerry Cox)
Mike Curran
Peter Davey
Fr. Ray Decker
Thomas A. Dillon
Hugh Donahoe
Paul and Kathy Feyen
James A. Fitzgerald
Ed Gaffney
Juan Pedro Gaffney
Jim Ghilardi
Art Goodtimes (aka Bontempi)
Richard Gorringe
Randy Gorringe
Bud Grandsaert

Rich Guiliani
John Hunt
Timothy Johnson
Steve Kolda
Arnold Kunst
Richard Laveroni
Clarence Liu
Dennis J. Lucey
Fr. Jim MacDonald
Richard Madsen
Frank Maurovich
Greg and Marnie McAllister
Jim McFadden and JoAnn Consiglieri
Fr. Tony McGuire
Dennis McQuaid
Charles A. Meconis
Msgr. Michael J. Mitchell
Jim Monahan
Bob Murnane
Larry Murphy
Ed Nevin & Dale Ravazzini

Robert Nixon
Bob Norris
John and Marianne O'Brien
Daniel Onorato
John Owen
Fr. Larry Percell
Lou Persano
Dudley L. Poston, Jr.
Don Puppione
Lawrence Purcell
Jim and Bernie Purcell
Larry Ratto
Ivo Ravnik
Art Reardon
Jim Ringrose
Fr. Paul Rossi
Tom Sheehan
Jim and Cecelia Tonna
John and Phyllis Van Hagen
Fr. Paul R. Vassar
Mark Wandro
Jerry Winkenbach