

January 2026 Christian Nationalism Script

Welcome to our first Sunday Night Theology of the new year...

Before I begin, there are a couple of things which I thought I should say...

- The idea of these evenings is to stretch ourselves, to try to broaden our thinking and understanding about important issues... issues to do with our witness as Christians, our understanding of what it means to be a prophetic people. That means we need to have the courage to think about challenging and difficult subjects. Some of the ideas and concepts we're going to be talking about tonight are ones which I struggle with and find offensive... but we can't ignore this, we still have to be willing to face up to it.
- But we can help each other to do this by being thoughtful and respectful and measured in the things we say, and how we express them.
- A final qualifier... the focus of this evening is on right wing politics and ways in which some on the right are now using Christian ideas and symbols as part of their rhetoric, as part of the appeal they are making. There are some of us here who might be thinking that the far left are just as much of a problem in our contemporary politics. I don't deny that, but my focus tonight will be on the far right because I think it's fair to say that it's those groups who have a tendency to appropriate Christian theology and narratives.

In terms of preparation for this evening, I've read one recent book and done other reading online. I will also be drawing a lot on the work of Helen Paynter, a Baptist minister and lecturer at Bristol Baptist College, where she also heads up the Centre for the Study of the Bible and Violence.

So... where to begin... as this is an evening looking at the far right and Christian nationalism, a good place to start would be with some definitions of those terms.

For all of us here, most of our lives will have been lived in a context where the political spectrum was fairly fixed:

Socialism on the left and Conservatism on the right. And, of course, this would have been worked out in British politics through the two main parties: Labour on the left and the Tories on the right. At certain times, each of these parties would have moved further to an end of the spectrum on to the centre. For example, Thatcherism, in the 1980s, saw the Conservative Party move to the right in terms of economic policy and New Labour, from 1997 to 2010, saw Labour move towards the centre ground.

We will also have been aware that there were further extremes on this spectrum – **communism** on the left and **Fascism** on the right, but these politics were largely on the fringe in Britain. On the left, there would have been a Communist Party, the Socialist Workers Party, on the right there would have been the likes of the BNP.

In recent years, all of this has changed. I realise I covered some of this in the evening I did two years ago on Culture Wars, but I'll try to briefly cover this ground again. We have seen a number of major shocks in British society in recent years, each of which has disrupted the political consensus:

- **The banking crash of 2008.** I remember at the time of the crash, listening to a commentator say that when there is an economic shock it usually takes about ten years for the political shock to occur. In this case it was only eight years.
- **Brexit in 2016.** Brexit, as we all know, highlighted huge divisions within British society, which have never gone away. There seem to have been a number of factors that caused that vote:
 - A reaction to the status quo and certain elements of that status quo: globalisation and the loss of jobs, including manufacturing and heavy industry.
 - A reaction to austerity and its impact on many communities.
 - An anger about rising levels of immigration, especially from Eastern Europe.
- We should also note the **election of President Trump**, for the first time, in **2016**. That seemed to be an indication that what whatever change Brexit spoke of wasn't just limited to the UK. Trump spoke of making America great again, and there seemed to be a desire in Britain as well to return to a previous time that was perceived to be more prosperous, more ordered.
- **Covid in 2020.** Another major shock, socially and economically.

So... where has this left us?

In terms of our politics, a fracturing in terms of parties. **We now have Your Party and the Greens on the Left, we have Reform on the right.**

And there also seems to be a much greater emphasis on Identity within our politics, around a whole series of issues:

- **Sexuality and trans rights**
- On **gender roles** – if you look at younger people in particular, you can see a stark divide between the views of men and women on feminism, there seems to be a growing number of younger men who believe feminism has gone too far. See recent research by Kings: <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/news/gen-z-men-and-women-most-divided-on-gender-equality-global-study-shows>
- On **issues of ethnicity**, e.g. and theories to go with that, e.g. Critical Race Theory.

And then there are a few other issues which it's worth briefly highlighting:

- There is an ongoing debate about **multiculturalism and immigration**. It seems that in recent years the tone of the debate on multiculturalism has changed – it's gone from a debate about economics, housing, schools and infrastructure, to one that seems to focus more on culture and identity. To put it crudely, concerns on migration are expressed in terms of 'How many of these people do we want to let in?' or 'If we keep letting more people in, it won't be our country anymore.'
- **Free speech** is also an issue which comes up increasingly. It's now almost a year ago since JD Vance went to the security conference in Munich and spoke in terms of European civilisation being under threat. One of the things he cited was the allegation that people are no longer allowed to pray in public. He was referring to exclusion zones which are placed around abortion clinics. To be clear – there is no law in the UK which bans public prayer.
- **Who can be trusted?** Clearly, one of the biggest changes we've seen over the last 15 years or so has been the emergence of a post-truth or post-facts culture, where every news story is questioned or where some figures seem to lie or boast with a sort of shamelessness, and if they're called out on their lies they'll see it's just fake news.
- **Conspiracy theories etc...** the great replacement, Covid vaccines etc... QAnon
- **Lots of people are angry.** Look at the level of anger in our politics, e.g. consider anger towards Keir Starmer and Rachel Reeves... anger towards them or whoever is in power and failing to deliver? This is something I've heard a number of commentators remark on in recent months... Starmer is now less popular than Liz Truss.

And, of course, you put all of this together and you end up with an incredibly febrile atmosphere in which every issue is conflated... an issue like climate change becomes one which isn't just about the urgency with which we need to change our lifestyle in light of scientific evidence. People will now question whether the planet is really warming up and if they're asked to change their habits they will complain that their liberties are being taken away from them.

Before we get further into this topic, I think it might be helpful to explore a couple of definitions, to talk about what exactly we mean when we refer to the far right and to Christian nationalism.

In terms of the far right, a helpful explanation is provided by a Dutch political scientist called Cas Mudde.

He says that right wing movements can be divided into the **Mainstream Right** and the **Far Right**.

Those on the **mainstream** would be traditional parties such as the conservatives in Great Britain, who will hold views that are, say, pro-market, pro-small-state, more

traditional in terms of social attitudes, but which also seek to gain power through democratic means and who respect accepted norms with regard to the exercise of power.

Mudde then goes on to define the **far right** as **“those on the right who are “anti-system,” defined here as hostile to liberal democracy.’**

He then divides the far right into two further sub-groups:

- The **extreme right** ‘**rejects the essence of democracy, that is popular sovereignty and minority rule.**’ Examples of this include the likes of Hitler and Mussolini.
- In contrast, **the radical right** ‘**accepts the essence of democracy, but opposes fundamental elements of liberal democracy, most notably minority rights, rule of law and separation of powers.**’ It seems to me that we certainly see elements of that in the current Trump administration.

And then, what about Christian nationalism. How would we define that?

Let me begin with a definition which is offered by an advocate of this idea, **Stephen Wolfe**, an American academic, in a book called ***The Case for Christian Nationalism:***

“A totality of national action, consisting of civil laws and social customs, conducted by a Christian nation as a Christian nation, in order to procure for itself both earthly and heavenly good in Christ.”

I need to stress that I haven’t read the book, only online reviews of it – and it’s worth saying that it has been panned by other American writers, including some very conservative evangelicals. But my understanding is that Wolfe argues for a number of things which I guess we would recognise:

- A return to a more **‘muscular’ and self-confident Christianity**, which is not afraid to assert itself without apology in the face of social change that is characterised as wokeness.
- The suggestion that **nationalism necessarily involves “being for” one’s own “people group.”** This is a clear rejection of multi-culturalism. Wolfe argues that homogeneity is necessary for societies to be ordered, and suggests that even if the fall hadn’t occurred, humans would always have formed separate, culturally distinct communities.
- The need for what he calls **‘measured theocratic Caesarism,’** in other words, a form of government which will ensure Christian values are legislated for and required of people. There is a recognition that people cannot be made, in their hearts, to become Christians, but there is a belief that outwards displays of false religion should be clamped down. This is where we get into territory such as banning hijabs.

Now, we need to note that these are not new ideas. There are close parallels with this worldview and what is sometimes referred to as Civil Religion.

My definition of **Civil Religion** would be this: **To attribute a sacral or religious quality to secular power, such that the state and its rulers are seen as set apart by God and worthy of devotion and allegiance of heart, mind and body.**

Most of us will be aware that the United States of America has operated on many of these principles for much of its history. It speaks of itself and its founding principles with religious language, as ‘a city on a hill,’ its president traditionally ends addresses by saying ‘God bless America.’

Part of this mindset is the idea that American culture, or Western culture, has about it a form of exceptionalism that sets it apart and is rooted in Christian heritage, and which is now under threat. The government of Donald Trump has been very clear about this, some of us might recall the news in November of a new **National Security Strategy the United States**, which includes the following lines:

The larger issues facing Europe include activities of the European Union and other transnational bodies that undermine political liberty and sovereignty, migration policies that are transforming the continent and creating strife, censorship of free speech and suppression of political opposition, cratering birthrates, and loss of national identities and self-confidence.

It goes on to say:

We want Europe to remain European, to regain its civilizational self-confidence, and to abandon its failed focus on regulatory suffocation.

What is meant by ‘civilisational self-confidence’? It seems to me that that’s a clear reference to white, Christian culture.

And there was, of course, that famous line about one aspect of America’s policy going forward:

Cultivating resistance to Europe’s current trajectory within European nations;

I think it’s fair to say that there are definite elements of Christian nationalism within the MAGA movement in the United States. A couple of months ago I watched some highlights of a memorial service held for Charlie Kirk – it was a like a blend of a political rally and a megachurch worship event.

And this brings us to the emergence of Christian nationalism on the far right in the UK. There have been a couple of events over recent months in London which have brought this thinking to greater public awareness. These include the Unite the Kingdom rally which took place in September, and the ‘Put Christ Back Into Christmas’ Carol Service in December.

A key leader for both these events was **Tommy Robinson**, who many of us may have heard of. Since the mid-2000s Robinson has been a prominent figure on the far right, as a member of the British National Party and then a leader of the English Defence League. He also presents himself as a journalist. His X profile describes him as a journalist and points people to his website, which is called Urban Scoop, and which presents itself as telling the truth about what's really happening in the UK.

He's been imprisoned five times for a number of offences. He was released from prison in May 2025, after a sentence for contempt of court. **And when he was released, he said he'd been become a Christian.** A minister called Rikki Doolan, who leads Spirit Embassy Church in Tottenham, and who is also a former UKIP candidate, spoke of having led Robinson to Christ.

After his release from prison, he told the far right Visegrad 24 media platform that he had:

'... looked deeply over the past few years about what we are fighting for and what made Britain, and it is Christianity. We are a Christian culture.'

Since his release, he has positioned himself as an advocate for Christian revival, and there have been notable displays of Christian symbolism at his rallies. At the **Unite the Kingdom** rally in September, attended by 150,000 people, there were large crosses on display, there were placards proclaiming, "Christ is King."

To give us a flavour of Christian nationalism, I thought I would play a video and then we can take time to talk about our reaction to it. This is the opening prayer delivered at the Unite the Kingdom rally by a Welsh preacher, a bishop in the Confessing Anglican Church: Cei Dewar.

Play video: [Bishop Cei Opening Prayer At Unite The Kingdom](#)

How do we feel about this?

Trevor reflections:

- His charisma
- Use of religious language: awakening... consecration... clothing of power...
- The quote from Amos 5:24: 'But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!'
- Language of persecution...

So... how do we respond?

Let me offer a couple of thoughts...

Firstly, I think the church has to be clear and unequivocal in **naming Christian Nationalism as a distortion of truth and a heresy.**

I said we should be unequivocal, so there you have it...

I don't think we can confront the arguments of Christian nationalism with an approach of 'on the one hand this, on the other hand that,' there are some moments when the risk we're faced with is so grave that we have to be clear and unambiguous in our resistance, and when the church has to say: 'Not in our name,' that we, as God's church, will be the arbiters of what is or isn't Christian truth.

When we read the New Testament, starting with the gospels, we need to bear in mind that nationalism is not a new thing. There were many Jews within Israel who were committed to overthrowing Roman rule – as one friend recently put it, they wanted to 'Make Israel Great Again' or 'take back control.' But it seems clear that Jesus never aligned himself with these movements, in fact he seems to have spoken against them – his criticism of elements of the Jewish people who didn't choose the things that make for peace is regarded by many as a criticism of those groups.

There are certain gospel truths which I don't think we can negotiate on. And to me, these include the fact that Christ has died for all, that the church does not belong to one culture or ethnic group, that there is no nation which is more privileged than any other in God's eyes.

I find myself, once again, coming back to these key words from Galatians 3:

²⁶ So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, ²⁷ for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. ²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Galatians 3:26-28

For me, this is one of the most important statements Paul makes about the nature of the church, and I don't think it's a one-off. I think we see a similar argument in Ephesians 2, where he talks about the dividing wall of hostility having been brought down by Christ, and a new humanity created, which is composed of those who were once near and once far away.

Time and again, the vision of church that we find in Paul's letters is one where people of different backgrounds and experience have been brought together by Christ.

I think we see a similar vision of universal salvation in Revelation, and the picture it offers us of the destination to which God is calling us homeward:

⁹ After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. ¹⁰ And they cried out in a loud voice:

**“Salvation belongs to our God,
who sits on the throne,
and to the Lamb.”**

Revelation 7:9-10

I think that at this point it worth saying something about flags, and the proliferation of union flags and especially St George’s crosses we’ve seen on lampposts and in other public spaces. I hear some people complain that they shouldn’t have to apologise for flying their flags and celebrating their own culture. But my concern is about whether that’s really how these flags are being used, it seems to me that these flags are being used as boundary markers, as warning signs, as a way of telling people who does or doesn’t belong in certain spaces. I come from Northern Ireland, I have a lifetime’s experience on all of this.

I also think I need to make one other point here – which is that I’m not saying that patriotism is wrong, or that national cultures are wrong. I think it is good to celebrate certain things about Britishness – I love our sense of humour and irony, I love our culture and language and what we have given to the world, I’m a sucker for pomp and circumstance. And there are specific things I love about other countries I visit as well. But my concern is with a viewpoint that privileges one culture over another and especially that goes so far as claiming that particular cultures have some sign of God-given status.

Near the end of Revelation we read this statement about the new Jerusalem:

The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendour into it.

Revelation 21:24

I think that’s an important statement, it strikes me as an expression of God will bring into the new creation that which is to be celebrated in all national cultures and traditions.

As a Baptist, I think there are also convictions I would want to insist on about **the separation of church and state and religious freedom.**

An important part of our identity as Baptists is that we are people who have ourselves known persecution, with forebears who struggled for the freedom to worship God as we saw fit, to gather to worship on our own terms.

One of the founders of the British Baptist movement was **Thomas Helwys**, who famously wrote to King James 1a handwritten letter arguing for religious freedom. He said this:

"The King is a mortal man, and not God, therefore he hath no power over the mortal soul of his subjects to make laws and ordinances for them and to set spiritual Lords over them."

He paid a high price for this, he was thrown into Newgate Gaol where he died.

What is particularly striking about Helwys and the early Baptists is that they didn't just argue for freedom for themselves, but for other non-Anglican groups: for Catholics, also for Jews.

And I think they were onto something important: we can't impose our faith on others. We may long for the church to be renewed, we may long for many more people to come to know God – I do! But to know Jesus as Saviour is to be called to him by his love and to know his forgiveness... we're not going to achieve through legislation.

And, again, we have to be honest with ourselves... I fear that, often, the wishes we express to make Britain more Christian are really a desire to return to a time that was more ordered, more white...

That takes me on to my third point... **we need to reflect on what we're converting people from and what we're converting them to.**

This is something I've been reflecting on a lot recently, and which I'm still trying to make sense of: what is going on in our society at the moment?

One of the biggest talking points in the UK church last year was the talk of a quiet revival, and how lots of young people, particularly young men, are reading the Bible and going back to church.

But, of course, there is also data out there that tells us that young men are more likely to be right wing and to believe that feminism has gone too far. And I find myself wondering what overlap there might be, between these two groups, and what we do with that.

Before Christmas, I was talking to one of my best friends who is a Baptist minister, and who currently worships in a church in Birmingham. He told me about a young man who has been attending that church for a few months and who became a Christian through watching Charlie Kirk videos.

I find myself wondering what to do with that, I think back to what Paul says in Philippians 1:

¹⁵ It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. ¹⁶ The latter do so out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defence of the gospel. ¹⁷ The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains. ¹⁸ But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice.

Philippians 1:15-18

We may struggle with the motivations some people have when they claim to speak for Christ but link their message to one of Christian nationalism. But it may yet be that God will use the words of some of these messengers to draw people to Christ.

But if these people are coming to our churches, I think it's incumbent on us to be clear in our discipleship, to make sure we are conveying the fullness of what it is to be a follower of Jesus, that the gospel is one of reconciliation, that to follow Jesus is not something we can do on our own, but that we do it in churches and with people who are not like us.

And then there is one final response which I think we need to make:

Listening to those who are marginalised without looking down on them and without exploiting their fears.

This is one of the things that we do need to need to recognise. There are many people in our country who do feel left behind, who do feel that they have lost out as a consequence of globalisation. They certainly feel forgotten by politicians in London.

Before coming to Selsdon, I spent eight years in Birmingham, in a church that was located on what could best be described as an old white-working class estate. It had been impacted dreadfully by deindustrialisation... particularly the closure of MG Rover, which was previously British Leyland, but also other factories... nearly every funeral I did in those eight years, the deceased had a connection with either the car industry or Cadbury's. And now so much of that has gone...

Now, it's a very complex picture. There was a feeling among many people there that they had been forgotten, that other groups were getting preferential treatment. I felt there was a dependency culture on the part of some of those white families, that was very different to the work ethic of immigrant families, who were very aspirational. I think other communities were far better at organising – the black communities of Handsworth were miles ahead of places like Yardley Wood.

But that does not take away from their sense of loss for what they used to have – loss of jobs, loss of opportunity, loss of identity. I think they sometimes felt that everyone else's identity and culture was celebrated and not theirs.

We need to listen to those communities with respect, with empathy, and if we don't listen to them someone else will, someone else will articulate their grievances in unhelpful ways. There will always be people ready to exploit the sense of loss others feel. And we need to be honest about where the church fits into this: the church in the UK is, largely, a middle-class organisation, the church, if it is not careful, can come across as just one more set of people who are talking down to people and telling them to sort themselves out.

We need to have an answer to people which amounts more than just saying: ‘You shouldn’t fly these flags.’

When I was preparing for this evening, I came across some words which some of us might find controversial, but I think they’re worth putting on the table. They’re from an article last year in the Guardian, which looked at the backlash we’re now seeing against policies and attitudes which are often characterised by woke. As part of the article, the journalist Gaby Hinsliff interviews a guy called Luke Tryl, who worked for some years for Stonewall, but who has recently authored a report on Progressive Activists in the UK, and why they have sometimes failed to take people with them.

And I’ll quote just one paragraph from the article:

Core to woke philosophy is what is sometimes called “systemic thinking”, or the idea that society consists of overlapping systems of oppression, from capitalism to patriarchy, which we are socialised not to notice and to which we must be awoken by unpacking the power dynamics hidden in everyday interactions – between men and women, say, or people of different races. Pointing out undercurrents others have missed is therefore very important to progressives – they genuinely think it’s helpful, Tryl says – but not everyone shares their enthusiasm for what quickly descended, in the gladiatorial arena of late-2010s Twitter, into pile-ons and point-scoring: “There’s a group of people who come from a position of ‘I have some questions about this’, but everyone shouts at them, and they become radicalised the other way.”

Now, I don’t want to come across as being anti-progressive... but I do think something important is being named here... progressive people can be very patronising, they can sometimes sound as if they’re talking down to people, and they probably have driven some people in the opposite direction.

How do we make sure we don’t do that? Think again about Jesus... he called out injustice, he summoned people to change, he told them to repent because the kingdom of God was at hand... but he managed to do that in a very winsome and attractive way.

Questions

- Do we agree or disagree with the suggested responses to Christian nationalism?
- What we would add to this list or take away from it?