

A New Virus: Christian Nationalism

Ken Olson

“I’ve come to view Jesus the way I’ve come to view Elvis. I love the guy, but some of his fan clubs terrify me.” So writes John Fugelsang, a comedian; but, on this topic, he’s not out for laughs. His best-selling 2025 book is entitled *Separation of Church and Hate: A Sane Person’s Guide to Taking Back the Bible from Fundamentalists, Fascists, and Flock-Fleecing Frauds*.

“Christian” nationalism is neither Christian nor patriotic. It is an insidious betrayal of Jesus of Nazareth for secular power, having morphed from a fringe blasphemy into being on full display at the January 6 Capitol insurrection, where cross and flag were waved and woven together. Spreading like a virus, C/n has a presence now in nearly every community in the USA. Trump and his enablers have tapped into the netherworld of the national psyche with the idea that Christianity is “under siege” by hostile (even “demonic”) forces, so that he could paint himself as Defender of the Faith --Trump, of all people!

Fugelsang, who knows his Bible, puts it bluntly: “Christianity is under attack –but by divisive right-wing fundamentalists who publicly worship Jesus while fighting against, voting against, and legislating against His actual commandments.” These include helping the poor, caring for the sick, turning the other cheek, paying taxes, being kind to those in prison, and welcoming strangers. --Simply read the Gospels.

In Melville’s classic *Moby Dick*, the tyrannical Captain Ahab uttered one wise thing: “I will have no man in my boat who is not afraid of the whale.” There is a lot to fear in this movement, and wisdom knows when to be afraid. But for believers –including pastors—the next step is summoning one’s courage to denounce the fanaticism and hypocrisy of Christian-in-name-only nationalism. For, its ideology claims that only Christians have a God-given right to govern, making it an unconstitutional theocracy, a right-wing false religion deceitfully wrapped in the stars and stripes. It touts God-language, wears a cross, and builds churches but is all about control, patriarchal power, and a going back “again” to some illusory good old days when it was “great” that only white men ruled and women knew their place. Saint Paul’s Letter to the Galatians is all about the very opposite: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

In a former age, C/n would have been designated an outright heresy, because it is a hijacking or prostitution of the Faith. The leader of the movement is a pastor, Douglas Wilson, who heads an openly C/n sect in Idaho known as The Communion of Reformed Evangelical Churches. Its stated goal is to mold entire cities in the white male model by having people vote not as individuals but as families, the single vote cast --surprise, surprise-- by the man. Hegseth, our Secretary of Def... er, War, belongs to a satellite church in Tennessee, was on hand for the opening of a new one in Washington DC --and recently had Wilson lead prayer at the Pentagon. (!)

C/n rejects the separation of church and state, of God and Caesar, and wants to “have dominion” over what it calls the Seven Pillars or Seven Mountains of the nation, controlling

religion, government, business, education, media, entertainment, and the American family itself. It is thus a supremacist movement. (One thinks of another George Orwell's novels, *Animal Farm*, wherein "All the animals are equal, but some are more equal than others.")

Racism was openly promoted by those who marched with torches through Charlottesville while raging, "Jews will not replace us!" Jesus was a Semite, a brown-eyed, brown-skinned, dark-haired Jew who spoke Aramaic. Today, he would be on the receiving end of such vile threats and would not have been cast in any of the pale white movies about him.

But racism is also peddled in more subtle ways. Rogers and Hammerstein's 1949 Broadway musical *South Pacific* was a hit, playing 1,925 times, and one of its songs nails it: "You've got to be taught to hate and fear. You've got to be taught from year to year. It's got to be drummed in your dear little ear. / You've got to be taught to be afraid of people whose eyes are oddly made and people whose skin Is a different shade. / You've got to be taught before it's too late, before you are 6 or 7 or 8, to hate all the people your relatives hate. / You've got to be carefully taught." We are all teachers, but what kind?

One more Fugelsang quote: "if your church isn't telling you to love your enemies but keeps telling you who your enemies are, you're not really in a church."

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