

# [***Religion Is Being Misused To Divide America | Opinion***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6C0B-RB01-JBR6-9004-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Byline:** William J. Barber III

**Highlight:** Christian Nationalist influence on our ***politics*** is especially troubling to me because my own theological grounding directly contradicts the movement's aims.

**Body**

As the intensity of this year's election season continues to grow, so, too, has the focus[*in the news*](https://www.thenation.com/article/politics/trump-maga-white-evangelical-christians/) on a movement of Americans invoking the name of God to perpetuate division in our country. Some of these Americans go to church and read the Bible. Many of them don't. But all of them understand the unmistakable power of using faith as a cultural wedge to advance a political agenda that harms millions more Americans than it helps.

Followers of this political movement that misuses religion have become known as[*Christian Nationalists*](https://www.npr.org/2023/02/14/1156642544/more-than-half-of-republicans-support-christian-nationalism-according-to-a-new-s)for their association with an ideology that vehemently rejects the pluralistic democracy our country aspires to be. The movement's origins are bound up with white supremacist oppression going back hundreds of years to when slavery was the norm and the Indigenous were systematically persecuted. I hesitate to even call them "Christian," because their actions do not reflect the teachings of Jesus.

Today, they talk incessantly about abortion and gay people while supporting policies that harm the people Jesus calls us to care about—the poor, the sick, immigrants, and the incarcerated. A [*survey found*](https://www.npr.org/2023/02/14/1156642544/more-than-half-of-republicans-support-christian-nationalism-according-to-a-new-s) that people who embrace Christian Nationalism are more likely to be anti-immigrant, anti-Black, antisemitic, and anti-Muslim. They are extremists within a much broader conservative tent with varying degrees of support for their priorities—not all conservatives are Christian Nationalists.

As a pastor who has dedicated my life to the pursuit of social justice, I'm deeply concerned about the increasing influence Christian Nationalists are having on American ***politics*** today. The divisive rhetoric and policy proposals coming out of the Trump campaign, for example, has been directly linked to [*self-identified*](https://www.politico.com/news/2024/02/20/donald-trump-allies-christian-nationalism-00142086) Christian Nationalist proponents who served in his first administration, and who want to expand the anti-LGBTQ, anti-immigrant, and other regressive policies Trump championed when he was president.

In fact, one of those officials advised on the creation of a comprehensive policy plan for a would-be Trump second term—Project 2025—which, among many alarming priorities, [*"says policies that support LGBTQ+ rights, subsidize 'single-motherhood' and penalize marriage should be repealed because subjective notions of 'gender identity' threaten 'Americans' fundamental liberties.'"*](https://www.politico.com/news/2024/02/20/donald-trump-allies-christian-nationalism-00142086)

Christian Nationalist influence on our ***politics*** is especially troubling to me because my own theological grounding directly contradicts the movement's aims. My faith guides me to protect the interests of the most vulnerable among us. To that end, I am morally committed to fostering a policymaking ecosystem that seeks to heal all who are sick, feed all who are hungry, house all who need shelter, and unite us all in our common humanity. This is not "liberal" Christianity or "progressive" theology; it is the fundamental message of the Bible.

In this election year, I'm looking for candidates who want to expand living wages and union rights, health care, and ecological justice, compel an end to the spilling of innocent blood, re-imagine criminal justice, and establish the protection and expansion of voting rights and equal protection guarantees. Currently, 700 people across all races, ethnicities, and genders [*die each day*](https://www.cambridgeday.com/2024/02/21/poverty-is-a-leading-cause-of-death-in-the-u-s-poor-peoples-campaign-seeks-to-heal-that/) in this country because they are poor and unable to access the resources they need to thrive. The status quo is unconscionable.

These are neither left nor right issues, progressive nor conservative. These are moral issues our country must address if we take seriously what the Bible calls the "weightier matters of the law"—love, justice, and mercy. These are moral issues we cannot ignore if we accept the Constitution's call to form a more perfect union.

Innumerable faith leaders and pastors across the country share my faith perspective and concern about Christian Nationalism's impact on our ***politics***. We are taking collective action to redefine the terms of our nation's policy debates. A growing cadre of us are signatories of the newly created [*New Haven Declaration of Moral and Spiritual Issues in the 2024 Presidential Election*](https://secure.everyaction.com/Ljc9DnD7_U6qiQvt0ywCkw2). The document codifies our collective pledge to launch a season of preaching the moral issues at the heart of our scriptures and tradition, and to which Americans should hold candidates for elected office accountable this year and every year.

We stand in the moral tradition of social justice heroes who came before us—Frederick Douglass, Sojourner Truth, William Lloyd Garrison, Ida B. Wells, Pauli Murray, and Martin Luther King, Jr.—to name a few. Our highest hope is that the politicians Americans elect understand the transcendence of justice over partisanship, legislation, and the law in the same way President John F. Kennedy expressed it only 60 years ago. In his famous 1963 Report to the American People on Civil Rights, Kennedy recognized the need for a momentous policy and cultural shift to cure the ills of segregation and discrimination. [*He told the country*](https://www.jfklibrary.org/archives/other-resources/john-f-kennedy-speeches/civil-rights-radio-and-television-report-19630611), "We are confronted primarily with a moral issue. It is as old as the scriptures and is as clear as the American Constitution."

That is the kind of political leadership we need today.

*Bishop William J. Barber II is founding director of the Center for Public Theology & Public Policy at Yale Divinity School and author of the forthcoming,* White Poverty: How Exposing Myths About Race and Class Can Reconstruct American Democracy**.**

*The views expressed in this article are the writer's own.*

[*Link to Image*](https://d.newsweek.com/en/full/2389994/flower-arrangements-cross-are-displayed.jpg)

**Graphic**

Flower arrangements and a cross are displayed

Jon Cherry/Getty Images

Flower arrangements and a cross are displayed around a sign directing voters to the polling place during the Kentucky Primary Elections at Deer Park Baptist Church on May 16, 2023, in Louisville, Ky.

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