

DEMONIZING WHITE CHRISTIANS

Much to the chagrin of the Christian left, they have never been able to gain traction. This accounts, at least in part, for their animus against conservative Christians, who, unlike those on the left, carry significant political and cultural weight. The most recent manifestation of the Christian left's hostility to conservative Christians is their invention of Christian nationalism.

It always helps to have a bogeyman. Christian nationalism was not discovered—it was created out of used cloth. Formerly known as the “Religious Right” or “Christocrats,” today's bad guys are different in that they evince a strong racist edge. White people are the problem. To be more specific, it is white conservative Christians, many of whom are Trump supporters, who are an existential threat to our democracy.

Who believes this nonsense? Americans United for Separation of Church and State believes it. It blamed Christian nationalists for the Capitol riot of January 6. So did several True Believers in Christian nationalism, including professor Andrew Whitehead, one of the more prominent exponents of this fiction.

Christianity Today columnist Tish Harrison Warren is also on board. The violence, she said, can be “laid at the feet of the white American church.” The “white American church?” Who speaks this way? Is there an “Asian American church?” Or a “people of color American church?”

David French is a white evangelical critic of Christian nationalism, but unlike most of these partisans, he hasn't gone off the deep end. For example, he doesn't seem to know what the “white American church” is anymore than the rest of us. “It is rare to find an outright Christian nationalist church. There's not a huge wave of Christian nationalist

churches.”

This seems odd. If we can't locate where the bogeyman hangs out, isn't it possible he doesn't exist? After all, communists were reliably found hanging out at the offices of the Communist Party. Why can't anyone locate the address of Christian nationalists? Whitehead suggests that's because they're everywhere. “Christian nationalism is pervasive across all segments of U.S. society,” he says. Still, it doesn't make sense that no one can find their headquarters.

Paul D. Miller was featured last month in an interview he gave to Christianity Today on this subject. He is a professor at Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service; he is also finishing a book on Christian nationalism. Those are impressive credentials. Too bad he can't get his facts straight.

Miller cites a book by Whitehead and Samuel Perry on Christian nationalism, “Taking America Back for God.” They contend the country is split between advocates and detractors of Christian nationalism. They call the most rabid advocates of Christian nationalism “ambassadors,” saying they make up 19.8% of the population. In his interview, Miller said the authors contend that “52% of all Americans are what they call ambassador.”

How could Miller screw this up? It's not hard to figure out. In his enthusiasm to show how omnipresent the bogeymen are, he conflated the ambassadors with the “accommodators,” the less rabid supporters of Christian nationalism; they constitute 32.1% of the public. That's how Miller concluded that the majority of Americans are radical Christian nationalists.

If someone believes that the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution are divinely inspired, does that make him a Christian nationalist? Whitehead and Perry say it does. Miller goes so far as to say “that put[s] you high up on the scale of Christian nationalism.”

That would seem to make Thomas Jefferson, not exactly a practicing Christian, a Christian nationalist. The author of the Declaration made four references to God in our founding document. He spoke of “the laws of nature and nature’s God”; “the Creator”; “the supreme judge of the world”; and “the protection of Divine Providence.” And, of course, he said our inalienable rights come from our “Creator,” not government.

Was the U.S. Supreme Court giving voice to Christian nationalism in 1892 when it declared, “This is a Christian nation”? Or was it simply making an historical observation? No matter, to advocates of the cancel culture, such a remark needs to be excised.

Are those who sing patriotic songs Christian nationalists? What about those who display the American flag? Or how about those who say the Pledge of Allegiance? Miller says all three are examples of Christian nationalism. He just indicted most Americans.

What about left-wing Christians who pledge their allegiance to the poor? Are they Christian nationalists? No, insists Miller. What about Christians who are pro-life or who defend religious liberty? According to Miller, they are true Christian nationalists.

Looks like David French is a Christian nationalist after all. The mild-mannered critic of Christian nationalism maintains, “I haven’t changed my perspective on things like being pro-life or believing in strong religious freedom protections.”

Miller was asked what pastors can do to help stop Christian nationalism. His answer was precious. They can ask the faithful, “How much time are you spending a day listening to Fox News and talk radio?”

Who knew that Rush was the real bogeyman all along?