# LYING ABOUT CHRISTIAN NATIONALISTS

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on what is being said about so-called Christian nationalists:

Hardly a week goes by without some pundit claiming that the United States is being taken over by Christian nationalists. Accusations are being made that are completely without foundation, and few in the media are taking them to task.

Proponents of this view like to point to the presence of a few Christian signs that were evident in the Jan. 6 Capitol riot. This has had almost no effect on most Americans, and with good reason: those who stormed the Capitol were men and women who came to express their anger at the American ruling class. It was not an exercise in Christian nationalism. But to those who distrust white Christian patriotic Americans, the signs were proof that Christian nationalists are on the march.

No one beats Samuel L. Perry, a sociologist at the University of Oklahoma. "The Capitol Insurrection was as Christian nationalist as it gets." His baseless charge was endorsed by the likes of Thomas B. Edsall of the New York Times and Americans United for Separation of Church and State. Merely asserting that culpability belongs to Christian nationalists is all that matters these days. No proof is required.

Robert P. Jones is another author who is sold on the threat of Christian nationalists. Looking at the Capitol riot, he is convinced that "a significant number of the attackers on Jan. 6 were Christian nationalists and white supremacists." He said he spotted a Christian flag at the event, adding that "Many people may not be familiar with it." Good point: We took a poll of our Catholic League staff and no one had ever heard of it.

If the presence of a little-known Christian flag is enough to convince some activists and pundits that Jan. 6 was a Christian nationalist uprising, then it should follow that the burning of the American flag at Black Lives Matter and Antifa rallies—it happened regularly—is overwhelming proof of their anti-American agenda. They are the real threat to peace and safety, not Christian nationalists, whoever they are.

Author Katherine Stewart also maintains that Christian nationalists are a menace to society. In March last year, she cited evidence that Christian nationalists are "running the country." Her proof? A remark made by President Trump that "by Easter" the Covid crisis would ease. That was all the evidence she needed—his dropping of the "E-word."

Andrew Whitehead is a sociologist at Indiana University-Perdue University Indianapolis who wrote a book on Christian nationalists with Samuel Perry. Two years ago he said that Christian nationalists "think you have to be Christian to be truly American." He did not quote anyone to that effect. Quite frankly, as one who runs in Christian circles, I never heard anyone make such a stupid comment.

Perry and Whitehead are quite the dynamic duo. They argue that if someone believes the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution are divinely inspired documents, that proves they are Christian nationalists. The bar is obviously not set very high.

According to Perry, no one epitomizes the mind-set of Christian nationalism better than evangelical pastor Greg Locke. Edsall was so impressed by Perry's observation that he cited Locke's book, *This Means War*, as the definitive source of this dreaded movement.

Having never heard of Locke, I bought the book, which was published last year before the election, and searched in vain for anything Locke said about Christian nationalism. He never

mentions the term. The best I could find was one throw-away sentence near the end of the book where he says, "When it comes to an election, you'd better be a Christian first and a Christian last."

That was it. Most of the book is comprised of Protestant musings on the need for Christians to stand fast against challenges to our Judeo-Christian heritage. If this is supposed to be Exhibit A in the arsenal of those convinced that Christian nationalists are about to take over the nation, they had better retire before more people find out about their fairy tales.

The lies about Christian nationalism have real-life consequences. Three months ago, Anthea Butler, who teaches religious and African studies at the University of Pennsylvania, accused white evangelicals of posing "an existential crisis to us all." She said their ideas "may end up killing us all." It is this kind of incendiary comment that should be challenged with regularity, but never is. That's because Butler is black and white liberals don't have the guts to confront her.

Just as unnerving is the spectacle of states bent on adopting a new curriculum wherein teaching the truth about our Judeo-Christian heritage is considered taboo.

In Florida, one of the items deemed problematic for 7th graders holds that students should "Recognize how Judeo-Christian values influenced America's founding ideals and documents." Also found objectionable is the requirement that "Students will recognize the influence of the Protestant work ethic on economic freedom and personal responsibility."

Both of these declarations are indisputably true. The problem is with those who object to them, not those who applaud them.

Christian nationalism is not only a myth, it is a pernicious lie. We should be celebrating patriotic Americans who are

Christian, not castigating them.