MAKING BOGEYMEN OF CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM

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The Left is very good at making up bogeymen, and one of their favorites is Christian nationalism. The latest iteration of this madness is an article in the *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*; a subsequent analysis of it was recently published in psypost.org. As a sociologist, I am particularly interested in this issue: sociologists are the ones most responsible for promoting the fiction that America is threatened by Christian nationalists.

The journal article, written by sociologist Fanhao Nie of the University of Massachusetts Lowell, claims that Christian nationalists are likely to have negative views of atheists. Had he inquired if atheists have negative views of Christians, in general, he would have found they do—the evidence is overwhelming. But that was not what he set out to do.

What exactly is Christian nationalism? Nie says it is "broadly defined as an ideology that calls for the integration of Christianity and American civic life." We get the gist of it, but this is so elastic a definition that it might mean something as innocent as noting that our rights come from God. In fact, one of the sociologists cited by the author, Andrew Whitehead, has said exactly that.

When Wayne LaPierre, the head of the National Rifle Association (NRA), gave a speech on the Founding documents, Whitehead, in a piece he co-authored, saw Christian nationalism written all over it. The NRA chief said our freedoms were "granted by God to all Americans as our American birthright."

This is not the voice of a Christian nationalist—it is the

voice of Thomas Jefferson, author of the Declaration of Independence. Our unalienable rights, he said, come not from government but from our "Creator." Whitehead may not like this, but what LaPierre said is historically accurate.

"The genius of those documents, the brilliance of America, of our country itself," LaPierre also said, "is that all of our freedoms in this country are for every single citizen."

Most Americans would see this for what it is: an accurate and sober account. Some might even say it is pedestrian. But to those whose job it is to find—or invent—instances of Christian nationalism, this was like hitting the jackpot. The fact that LaPierre did not say that our freedoms are for Christians—he said they were "for every single citizen"—should have given Whitehead pause. After all, it seriously undercuts his position.

If Christian nationalism were the threat that those who promote this nonsense say it is, most Americans would oppose it. In fact, most never heard of it. In a survey released last year, Pew Research found that 54 percent never heard or read anything about it, and an additional 16 percent said they heard of it "a little." Of the few who had heard of it, more held an unfavorable view (24 percent) than a favorable one (5 percent).

There is a reason for this. Christian nationalism doesn't exist, save for faculty lounges, sociological circles and left-wing activist organizations. And it is they who have influenced those who hold a negative view.

The Pew story on this survey printed some of the comments made by those who had a favorable and unfavorable view of Christian nationalism.

Here's a sample of those who hold a favorable view:

- "People who love God and USA."

- "A society in which patriotism and religion are inseparably entwined doing the will of God in and for America and believing God is on America's side."
- "Values of society based on Judaic-Christian values and priorities."
- "Religious people who love their country."
- "A nation that espouses Christian principles and prioritizes the faith above secular humanistic principle that are more prevalent in the secular society of the U.S. today."

Here's a sample of those who hold an unfavorable view:

- "Attempting to use the government to impose an extreme, fringe version of Christianity on everyone in the nation, regardless of others' religious views. They are no different than al-Qaida or the Taliban."
- "Racist, misogynistic, White, older, retro group of people wanting to return the U.S. to a time when everyone 'knew their place.' Narrow-minded view that the Bible is key to life for everyone."
- "Militant Christians openly attempting to install a right-wing Christian theocracy leading to a Christian ethno-state."
- "It's code used by extremists to indicate government for White Christians by White Christians."
- "White supremacists and male superiority."

All of those who offered a favorable view were Catholic or Protestant. All of those who offered an unfavorable view said they ascribed to no religion.

Regarding the latter, notice the hysteria. And the hate.

It is not those who are proud to live in a country founded on our religious heritage who are a threat—it is those who portray them as a threat. They are the real menace. Inventing bogeymen so as to trash patriotism and Christianity is a sick

preoccupation of those on the Left. It's time our side ripped the mask off these demagogues.