

Column – Christ and Nationalism

Has anyone ever met a “Christian nationalist”? I had not heard this term until several years ago and am still trying to figure out what it means.

I am not alone. People I have spoken with are either unfamiliar with the term all together or have only the foggiest notion of what constitutes one. More than that, to a man, I have not found a single person who identifies as one.

After doing a little research, I discovered that there is no common definition of a Christian nationalist. Rather, it seems to be pejorative in nature, one of those labels people use to discredit those with whom they disagree. If you don't like what someone is saying, instead of engaging in a civil and reasoned exchange in the quest of finding common ground, you hurl at your opponent such words as Nazi, racist or homophobe.

A Latin term for such arguments is *ad hominem*. It means “to the person” and is used to describe a technique in debate when a person's character,

motive or background is targeted rather than tackling the contested issue. It might be described as a “blow below the belt” attack . . . something on the order: “And by the way, yo mamma is ugly and wears army boots.” Needless to say, people of goodwill need to be on the lookout for *ad hominem* arguments and pay no attention to those who use them.

But back to “Christian nationalism”. Let’s take this term apart and see what we might do with it. Christian, of course, refers to a follower of Jesus Christ. According to Acts 11:26, the term was first used of those who received the Gospel in Antioch.

“Nationalist,” meanwhile, refers to someone who is fiercely loyal to his country and who is proud of its background, traditions and culture. From a Christian standpoint, such loyalty becomes problematic only when other countries and peoples are disparaged and are seen as being outside of the realm of God’s care and concern.

What about Christians in America? Is it wrong for them to be proud of their country’s heritage of faith and freedom? To acknowledge God’s hand of

providence in the nation's founding, maintenance and preservation? To see it, in spite of its many failures, as a city set on a hill? To actively seek to guard its Christian heritage, traditions and morals?

No, I don't think so. Seigfried A Mahlmann's 1815 hymn rightly teaches us to sing: "God bless our native land; / Firm may she ever stand / Thro' storm and night . . ."

A third stanza often appendaged to Mahlmann's hymn adds a note of correction to unholy exclusivism, nationalism taken to excess: "And not to us alone, But be thy mercies known / From shore to shore. / Lord make the nations see / That men should brothers be / And form one family / The wide world o'er."

This last stanza is significant inasmuch as it reminds us that the Kingdom of God is greater than any one country, even our own. Christ's reign embraces people of every nation, race and language. To this Kingdom we must give our highest allegiance. "Christ for the WORLD we sing. The

WORLD to Christ we bring” is the unending song of Jesus’ people.

So long as the universal nature of Christ’s kingdom is not forgotten, room is left for tempered, Christian patriotism. So, fly your flag, sing national hymns and be a proud and grateful American without apology.

Beyond that, the distractors of Christian faith, including those who resort to *ad hominem* attacks, must not be allowed to drive people of faith from the public square and cause them to retreat into some private ghetto. Personal evangelism – saving souls – is of vital importance, but it does not preclude working to bring the values of Christ’s eternal kingdom – love, justice, truth, honesty, humility, tolerance, fair play and industriousness – into the public sphere in the present.

If the values I have just mentioned constitute a “Christian nationalist”, then count me in!

ALMIGHTY God, who hast given us this good land for our heritage; We humbly beseech thee that

we may always prove ourselves a people mindful of thy favour and glad to do thy will. Bless our land with honourable industry, sound learning, and pure manners. Save us from violence, discord, and confusion; from pride and arrogancy, and from every evil way. Defend our liberties, and fashion into one united people the multitudes brought hither out of many kindreds and tongues. Endue with the spirit of wisdom those to whom in thy Name we entrust the authority of government, that there may be justice and peace at home, and that, through obedience to thy law, we may show forth thy praise among the nations of the earth. In the time of prosperity, fill our hearts with thankfulness, and in the day of trouble, suffer not our trust in thee to fail; all which we ask through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The Rev. Victor H. Morgan is rector of St. Luke's Church, Blue Ridge.