

Christian Nationalism and Liberal Democracy in Europe and USA

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**‘Religious Change at a Time of Recompositions in Europe: Actors,
Norms, Values – New Challenges’**

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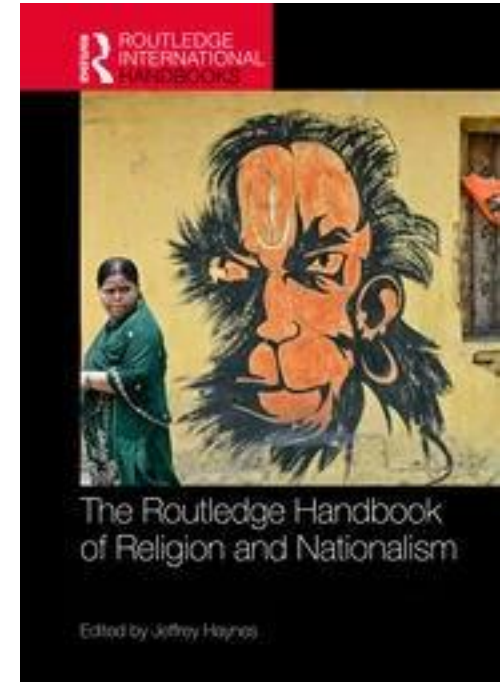
ROUTLEDGE HANDBOOK OF RELIGION AND NATIONALISM

Global focus: sections on how, why and with what effects religion and nationalism impact politically domestically and internationally, discussing the future of the field; religious nationalism 'on the ground'.

Religions: Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, Judaism, Buddhism.

Coverage: Africa, Americas, Asia, Europe, Middle East/North Africa

Core issues: nationhood as a concept; historical perspectives on nationalism; theoretical approaches to nationalism; the state; populism; violence and conflict; immigration; terrorism; globalisation; the post-secular world; and foreign policy.



OBJECTIVE OF LECTURE

- The lecture seeks to examine and assess comparative influence of Christian nationalism in Europe and USA, in relation to liberal democracy.
- For Christian nationalists, to uphold, protect or expand what they regard as 'Christian values' may be more important than consistently observing democratic norms.

CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM ON LIBERAL DEMOCRACY IN EUROPE AND USA

- Christian nationalism, both political ideology and cultural framework, advocates fusion of a particular form of Christianity in a country's civic life & political institutions and privileges Christianity in the public realm.
- Comparative impact of Christian nationalism on liberal democracy in Europe and the USA?

CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM: DANGER TO LIBERAL DEMOCRACY?

- **Hypothesis**: Christian nationalism endangers liberal democracy when it becomes politically influential .
- Christian nationalists prioritise **power** and **control**, supporting politicians promising to **protect** or **restore** Christianity's cultural hegemony.
- Democratic quality is undermined in relation to human rights & inter-ethnic/religious relations.

CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM, LIBERAL DEMOCRACY:, AND THE 'THIRD WAVE'

- Political impact of Christian nationalism is recent phenomenon in both Europe and USA.
- Christian nationalism threatens some groups' democratic rights in both Europe and USA.
- Contrasts with Christianity's pro-democracy stance during third wave of democracy (mid-1970s-c.2000), notably in **Central & Eastern Europe**.

CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM

- For some, Christian nationalism is politically benign: ‘healthy form of Christian patriotism, of loving God and loving one’s country’.
- For others, Christian nationalism politically malign, anti-democracy: ‘political movement to shape [a country] according to a certain interpretation of evangelical Christianity, by vote or ... by coercion’ (Horton 2024).
- Whitehead and Perry (2020: 10) define Christian nationalism as ‘collection of myths, traditions, symbols, narratives, and value systems – that idealizes and advocates a fusion of Christianity with ... civic life’.
- Swanson (2022): ‘Undergirded by identification with a conservative political orientation (though not necessarily a political party), Bible belief, premillennial visions of moral decay, and divine sanction for conquest’.

RELIGION AND THE THIRD WAVE OF DEMOCRACY

- Christian leaders/institutions generally strong supporters of democratisation during third wave, including in CEE.
- Linked to religious freedom issues, problematic during non-democratic rule.
- Senior religious figures joined with secular civil society to encourage democratisation.
- Part of process of religious de-privatisation in 1980s and 1990s.
- Following democratisation, religious actors' political role declined, with political parties taking over.

RELIGION, NATIONALISM AND DEMOCRACY

- Today in CEE and USA, Christianity may be associated with nationalism, presenting a specific form of 'religious nationalism':
Christian nationalism
- **Religious nationalism** emphasises alignment between two distinct phenomena: religion and (secular) nationalism.
- **'Secular' nationalism** demands exclusive loyalty, devotion, or allegiance to nation or nation-state.
- Widely regarded as most important organising principle in concept of 'national interest'.

CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM AND POPULISM

- Christian nationalists typically combine culturally-and religiously-influenced chauvinism with populist rhetoric and themes.
- Rhetorically, Christian nationalism is often 'anti-elite', claiming to speak to and for the Christian 'common people', expressing pronounced dislike/distrust of culturally different 'foreigners', especially ethnic/religious minorities.

EUROPE

- Christian nationalists typically identify the ‘enemy’ as Muslims and the Islamic faith, pointing to dangers of Islamist extremism, radicalism, and terrorism in attacking Europe’s traditional ‘Christian’ cultures (Haynes 2019).
- Concern with perceived intercivilisational conflict between the ‘West’ and the ‘Muslim world’, key reason for significant electoral support for Christian nationalists in, e.g., Hungary and Poland.

USA

- ‘Little would you know that when they talk about recreating the kingdom of God on earth, they weren’t talking about something spiritual. **They were talking about demolishing democracy so that God, i.e. themselves, could rule.** And for that reason, I call it a conspiracy carried out in broad daylight.
- ‘They’re incredibly strategic. They’re extremely good at organization, and they have a very, very long attention span. **If they set out an objective, they will give it 40 years to play out, they will build organizations, they will go into electoral districts not a month before the election, but two years before the election, organizing voters’** (Horton 2024).

CONCLUSIONS (1)

- What if any are commonalities between Europe and the USA, regarding impact on liberal democracy of Christian nationalism?
- Christian nationalism in Europe, USA: 'framework' whereby Christian organisations, as public religions, rally around nationalism, heterosexuality and Christianity in their world-view.
- In both Europe and the USA, Christian nationalism operates in both private and public spheres, with public role in relation to politics, society and nation building.
- Christian organisations and influential Christians speak publicly on national issues, especially at election times.

CONCLUSIONS (2)

- Christian nationalism in both Europe and USA involves confluence of far-right politics with religious identity, promoting narratives of a threatened 'Christian civilisation', and advocating highly restricted immigration and anti-LGBTQ+ measures.
- Fuelled by fear and perceived attack on cultural heritage.
- Historical roots: close ties between 'founding myth' (USA) and established churches and nation-states (Europe).
- Current manifestations characterised by transnational networks, anti-immigrant sentiments, critique of liberal democracy.