Respectful Communication Guidelines from The Kaleidoscope Institute

R = take RESPONSIBILITY for what you say and feel without blaming others.

E = use EMPATHETIC listening.

S = be SENSITIVE to differences in communication styles.

P = PONDER what you hear and feel before you speak.

E = EXAMINE your own assumptions and perceptions.

C = keep CONFIDENTIALITY.

T = TRUST ambiguity because we are not here to debate who is right or wrong.

ELCA Social Statements

[Untitled-8 (elca.org)](#) The Church in Society, an intro and brief summary are also available

[Untitled-16 (elca.org)](#) Freed in Christ: Race, Ethnicity, And Culture, a study guide, intro and brief summary are also available

Enter the Bible, Luther Seminary

[Does God Bless America (Only)? - Enter the Bible](#)   blog post

[3.9: Can you help biblically explain why nationalism is not a Christian narrative? - Enter the Bible](#)   podcast

Respecting Religion and BJC (Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty)

[Fighting the idolatry of Christian nationalism - BJC (bjconline.org)](#)   reflection

[https://bjconline.org/RespectingReligion](#)   many, many podcasts

Books with formats other than print

Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America (National Book Award Winner) by Ibram X. Kendi   NLS   Audiobook   Kindle

Jesus and John Wayne: How White Evangelicals Corrupted a Faith and Fractured a Nation by Kristin Kobes Du Mez   NLS   Audiobook   Kindle

The Psychology of Christian Nationalism: Why People Are Drawn in and How to Talk Across the Divide by Pamela Cooper-White   Audiobook   Kindle

The Flag and the Cross: White Christian Nationalism and the Threat to American Democracy by Philip Gorski   Kindle

The Family: The Secret Fundamentalism at the Heart of American Power by Jeff Sharlet   NLS   Kindle

Confederates in the Attic: The Secret Fundamentalism at the Heart of American Power by Tony Horwitz   NLS   Audiobook   Kindle

On Tyranny: Twenty Lessons from the Twentieth Century by Timothy Snyder   NLS   Audiobook   Kindle

Stony the Road: Reconstruction, White Supremacy, and the Rise of Jim Crow by Henry Louis Gates, Jr.   NLS   Audiobook   Kindle

The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America by Richard Rothstein   NLS   Audiobook   Kindle

The Seven Deadly Sins of White Christian Nationalism: A Call to Action by Carter Heyward   Audiobook   Kindle

Unsettling Truths by Mark Charles and Soong-Chan Rah   NLS   Audible   Kindle

Definitions

patriotism or nationalism

Both patriotism and nationalism involve love of, identification with, and special concern for a certain entity. In the case of patriotism, that entity is one's *patria*, one's country; in the case of nationalism, that entity is one's *natio*, one's nation (in the ethnic/cultural sense of the term). Thus, patriotism and nationalism are understood as the same type of set of beliefs and attitudes, and distinguished in terms of their objects, rather than the strength of those beliefs and attitudes, or as sentiment vs. theory.

To be sure, there is much overlap between country and nation, and therefore between patriotism and nationalism; thus, much that applies to one will also apply to the other. But when a country is not ethnically homogeneous, or when a nation lacks a country of its own, the two may part ways.

nativism

the policy of protecting the interests of native-born or established inhabitants against those of immigrants

xenophobia

dislike of or prejudice against people from other countries

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Christian Nationalism Scale

1. The Federal Government should declare the United States a Christian Nation.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
0	1	2	3	4

2. The Federal Government should advocate Christian values.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
0	1	2	3	4

3. The Federal Government should enforce strict separation of church and state.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
0	1	2	3	4

4. The Federal Government should allow the display of religious symbols in public spaces.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
0	1	2	3	4

5. The success of the United States is part of God's plan.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
0	1	2	3	4

6. The Federal Government should allow prayer in public schools.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
0	1	2	3	4

Review: Taking America Back for God: Christian Nationalism in the United States by Andrew L. Whitehead and Samuel L. Perry

[1] Sociologists Andrew L. Whitehead (Clemson University) and Samuel L. Perry (University of Oklahoma) compel us to reflect on the twin questions that motivate *Taking American Back for God*: "What *is* Christianity's relation to American identity and civic life? What *should* it be?" (3). Although they clearly state that social science cannot answer these questions, they are convinced that empirical analysis can establish the importance of the questions, reveal the range of attitudes Americans adopt, and assist readers in defining our own answers.

[2] Whitehead and Perry use survey responses to the following six statements to cluster respondents into four "orientations" concerning "the interweaving of Christianity and American civil society" (24). To identify your own orientation, respond to the six statements below by indicating whether you strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree. On how many do you find yourself undecided?

1. The federal government should declare the United States a Christian Nation.
2. The federal government should advocate Christian values.
3. The federal government should enforce strict separation of church and state. (The responses to #3 are "reverse coded" by the authors so that strong agreement with this proposition is recorded in the same way that strong disagreement is recorded for the other five.)
4. The federal government should allow the display of religious symbols in public spaces.
5. The success of the United States is part of God's plan.
6. The federal government should allow prayer in public schools.

[3] The questions were included in the Baylor Religion Survey (BRS; formally known as the Values and Beliefs of the American Public Survey) in both 2007 and 2017; the BRS was administered by Gallup to a randomly selected national sample. This quantitative information has been supplemented by qualitative data, correlated with other value questions included in the BRS, and enriched by the authors' previous work on Christian nationalism.[1]

[4] When the attitudinal clusters are framed as contrasting orientations toward "Christianity's relation to American identity," the authors' intention would seem to be the creation of a neutral, descriptive typology. This book, however, has a strong and purposeful edge. As the subtitle makes clear, this study is not so much about a range of diverse options as it is about one option—Christian nationalism—that both has the support of many Americans and is opposed by many Americans. The six propositions are specifically designed to determine attitudes toward Christian nationalism. The four orientations identify ranges on a 24-point "Christian nationalism scale." [2]

[5] By the author's calculations, 51.9 percent of Americans are Ambassadors or Accommodators, that is, they are to some degree supportive of Christian nationalism. Those who Resist and Reject Christian nationalism make up 48.1 percent. Chapter 1, "Four Americans," describes the orientations in some depth:

- *Ambassadors* (19.8 percent of the population; 55 percent of this group are affiliated with Evangelical churches): Ambassadors strongly agree with most or all of the six propositions. They believe that the "American government should unapologetically privilege Christianity" (4). They believe that the founding fathers declined to make any particular Christian denomination the state church, but that they are convinced that the country was founded as and should remain an explicitly Christian nation. They consider secular and liberal Americans to be "blinded to the truth and out to suppress religious freedom" (24).
- *Accommodators* (32.1 percent of the population; one third of this group affiliate with Evangelicals and one third affiliate with Catholicism): Accommodators are comfortable with the claim that the United States was founded on Christianity; they see "much to admire about Christianity" (33); they are "amenable to the idea of a society where Christianity is conspicuous" (34). Their "support [for Christianity in the public sphere] is undeniable but it is not unequivocal" (34).
- *Resisters* (26.6 percent of the population; two thirds of this group identify with the Christian tradition): Resisters may be quite religious and often give religious reasons for supporting the separation of church and state. In response to the six propositions, they frequently disagree, though they seldom register strong disagreement.
- *Rejectors* (21.5 percent of the population; 7 percent of this group had a score of 0, meaning that they strongly disagreed with all six propositions; one third of this group self-identifies as Christian): These respondents reject privileging the country's "Christian heritage and population while other non-Christian groups are merely tolerated" (24). The wall between church and state should be "high and impenetrable," and "Christianity should not shape social policies at all" (27).

[6] In chapters 2, 3, and 4 ("Power," "Boundaries," and "Order"), the authors supplement their quantitative analysis with data from their individual interviews and participant observation, exploring, often through analysis of "Trumpolitics," how Christian nationalism operates in our national public square. Reactionary,

xenophobic, ethnocultural, and authoritarian, Christian nationalism provides a national narrative that "mobilizes Americans to take positions on issues and rally behind candidates that will defend their cultural preferences, preserve their political influence, and maintain the 'proper' social order" (87). While Whitehead and Perry might have contented themselves with saying "the explicit ideological content of Christian nationalism comprises beliefs about historical identity, cultural preeminence, and political influence" (x), they go much further. "At least since the early 1800s, Christian nationalism has provided the unifying myths, traditions, narratives, and value systems that have historically been deployed to preserve the interests of those who wish to halt or turn back changes occurring within American society" [151]. Emphasizing the importance of civic narratives to national identity, they characterize Christian nationalism as a cultural framework rather than a set of private attitudes that are subject to change. It is the framework that undergirds our political polarization, and by trying to freeze social evolution it makes practical solutions to actual social challenges difficult to impossible. Worst of all, in its strongest forms, it is morally malignant—an incubator of bigotry and "a threat to pluralistic democratic society" (161).

[7] But is it actually Christian? They think not: "Christian nationalism is not 'Christianity' or even 'religion' properly speaking" (20). The best that can be said is that the version of "Christianity" that Christian nationalists effectively "marry" to the identity of the United States as a nation is only one "particular ethnocultural strain" (156) in the complex weave of American Christianity. More importantly, in the authors' view, it "represents more than religion" because "it includes assumptions of nativism, white supremacy, patriarchy, and heteronormativity, along with divine sanction for authoritarian control and militarism. It is as ethnic and political as it is religious" (10).

[8] The authors go to considerable lengths to correct two prominent mistakes. First, their analysis makes it clear that Christian nationalism should not be identified with white Evangelicalism.[3] "Christian nationalism is not bound to any particular religious group" (153); rather, ambassadors and accommodators are liberally seeded through all Christian denominations. There is no reason for Lutherans to think that Christian nationalism is somebody else's problem. The authors make the point that Ambassadors in Evangelical churches and mainline churches "vote and act in very similar ways" (153). Thus, a Lutheran who fits the profile of an ambassador (and almost 20 percent of mainline Protestants do) can be expected to have more in common with a Catholic or Evangelical ambassador than with a Lutheran who fits the profile of a resister. Aligning themselves with Robert Wuthnow's theory that American religion is in the midst of a "restructuring," the authors suggest that the phenomenon they are investigating is "at least one axis" upon which that realignment is taking place (153).[4]

[9] The second mistake that the authors seek to correct is the assumption that Christian nationalism is closely correlated with religious devotion. The authors found that correlations with religious piety and/or doctrinal orthodoxy are relatively weak. Indeed, a surprising proportion of Christian nationalists are quite secular (x)—an apparent paradox that disappears if the authors are correct that "taking America back for God" is actually, for many of its adherents, about "seeking to retain and gain power in the public sphere" (153). Reclaiming America "for God" is "not primarily about mobilizing the faithful toward *religious* ends" (153, authors' italics). On the contrary, "Christian nationalism is . . . ultimately about privilege. It co-opts Christian language and iconography in order to cloak particular political or social ends in moral and religious symbolism. This serves to legitimate the demands, wants, and desires of those embracing Christian nationalism [by grounding their political program] in the transcendent" (153). The authors uncover empirical evidence that the more devout Christians are, the less inclined they are to embrace Christian nationalism. Indeed, the authors note that a firm commitment to Christian discipleship seems implicated in resistance and rejection.[5]

[10] Despite Christian nationalism's complicated relationship with churches and with personal faith, Whitehead and Perry insist that it has become the "distorting lens" through which almost everyone considers religion in relation to public life and through which many Americans perceive Christianity itself. It provides the dominant interpretive framework, not just for its ambassadors, but for those who reject it, those who resist it, and those who stretch themselves in various ways to accommodate it. Rather than constituting one voice among many in the marketplace of religious pluralism, Christian nationalism has become the lingua franca of public discourse about religion.

[11] The logic of their argument, grounded in their conviction that Christian nationalism has to be understood as a cultural framework, runs along these lines: Social changes generate perplexities, challenges, and cultural conflicts (gun violence, immigration, gender roles and gender identity, minority rights and status, secularization, diverse religions—to name a few). These social and political issues are persistently publicly defined by high profile religious leaders (but also by political figures, celebrities, journalists, and public intellectuals) through the lens or frame of Christian nationalism's faulty suppositions about Christian heritage, unwarranted claims concerning Christian moral superiority, and enflamed anxiety about the threat constituted by "secularism." The broader range of participants in the conversation may share the aspirations of these religious figures or they may be anywhere along the continuum of opposition to these aspirations—but the authors' point is that they all accept rather than question the framework of the discussion. The playing field is being defined by the aspirations of figures who "wish to institutionalize conservative 'Christian' cultural preferences in America's policies and self-identity" (153). The conversation is not about what might best serve the

common good in this moment of changing social arrangements and massive challenges like climate change—rather the conversation is about what the government should do about the particular value set of no more than, at best, half the citizens. This undermines the nation's ability to arrive at practical and prudent judgments about managing social evolution and addressing disruptive change.

[12] Moreover, Whitehead and Perry believe that Christian nationalism is a significant factor in the disaffection and indifference Americans, especially young adults, increasingly display toward Christianity, particularly toward the churches and denominations that are the organized, public face of Christian faith. Results of a Gallup poll released March 29, 2021, show that for the first time fewer than 50 percent of Americans report belonging to a church, synagogue, or mosque, with the precipitous decline of 17 percentage points between about 2005 and 2020.[6] Whitehead and Perry, commenting on "the great abdicating" (the inverse of the great revivals),[7] suggest that the rise of religious "nones" from 8 percent of Americans in 1976 to nearly 20 percent in 2012 and 23.3 percent in 2018 reflects the degree to which "Christian nationalism is turning people away from Christianity" (163). In other words, Christian nationalists have increasingly succeeded in defining what Christianity means to large numbers of Americans, and many are repelled by what they see.[8]

[13] The most valuable critical perspective on *Taking America Back for God* would be that of a sociologist who could assess the data that provide the book's foundation and its warrant. I have no such expertise and will content myself with raising two questions in closing. (1) Can the six statements at the core of their analysis be relied upon to disclose what Americans take "Christianity's relation to American identity" to be? I confess that I find four of the six to be quite ambiguous.[9] (2) The authors submerge the relatively neutral project of describing different visions of Christianity in civic life under the project of describing attitudes toward Christian nationalism. They do this precisely because they believe that Christian nationalism, as a cultural framework, has become the filter through which all questions of Christianity in America are viewed. For the authors, it does indeed function as just such a lens. But does their argument then manifest precisely the kind of distortion that they warn against?

[1] Extensive appendices provide a detailed account of the authors' methodology. Qualitative data includes (a) in-depth interviews with "50 American men and women across the Christian nationalism spectrum and from different regions of the country" (173) and (b) corroboration of the accounts of those interviewed by the authors' own participant observation—that is, the authors themselves attended "events where Christian nationalist ideology would be preached, discussed, or

otherwise generally assumed by all in attendance" (173; for the list of events observed, see 176). Correlations of the responses to the six statements with responses to other questions on the 2007 BRS allow the authors to identify the ten "top predictors of stronger adherence to Christian Nationalism" (12, table I.1). The authors also draw upon data from recent waves of the "gold standard" General Social Survey (GSS)—both to validate the reliability of the BRS and for longitudinal statistical information about, for example, "how important Americans believe being a Christian is for being 'truly American'" (51). For the authors' earlier work on particular issues, see Andrew L. Whitehead and Samuel L. Perry, "A More Perfect Union? Christian Nationalism and Support for Same-Sex Unions," *Sociological Perspectives* 58(3): 422-40, and Andrew L. Whitehead and Samuel L. Perry, "Is a 'Christian America' a More Patriarchal America? Religion, Politics, and Traditionalist Gender Ideology," *The Canadian Review of Sociology* 56(2): 151-77.

[2] Answers are coded as 4 points for each "strongly agree," 3 points for each "agree," 1 point for each "disagree," and 0 points for each "strongly disagree." An answer of undecided earns 2 points. *Note that the answer to #3 is reverse coded* to give 0 points for "strongly agree," 1 point for "agree," 3 points for "disagree," and 4 points for "strongly disagree." The sum of the respondents' points determines their position on the authors' Christian nationalism scale:

18-24 points: Ambassador

12-17 points: Accommodator

6-11 points: Resister

0-5 points: Rejector

[3] While it is true that 54.9 percent of Evangelical Protestants (this category does not include Black Protestants) are ambassadors whereas the second highest proportion of ambassadors is 18.6 percent among Catholics, 25 percent of Evangelicals score as Resisters or Rejectors.

[4] Robert Wuthnow, *The Restructuring of American Religion* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988).

[5] See pages 155-56. Elsewhere the authors note that "Christian nationalism does not encourage high moral standards or value self-sacrifice, peace, mercy, love, justice, and so on" (86) and that "Christian nationalism often influences Americans' opinions and behaviors in the *exact opposite direction* than traditional religious commitment does" (20). However, see chapter 4, 142-48, for their discussion of (and explanation for) the convergence of Christian nationalism and religious commitment on matters of gender, sexuality, and family.

[6] Jeffrey M. Jones, "U.S. Church Membership Falls below Majority for First Time," release date March 28, 2021, https://news.gallup.com/poll/341963/church-membership-falls-below-majority-first-time.aspx (accessed March 29, 2021). Note that *affiliation* and *membership* are not the same; the Gallup report notes that "The U.S. remains a religious nation, with more than seven in 10 affiliating with some type of organized religion" (9), For an article that explores the causes of the decline but does not mention Christian nationalism among them, see Sarah Pulliam Bailey, "Religious membership in U.S. falls below 50%, poll finds," *Washington Post,* March 30, 2021, A3. Bailey relies on Ryan Burge, *The Nones: Where They Came From, Who They Are, and Where They Are Going* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2021).

[7] For the use of the phrase "the great abdicating" in this religious context, see also Joseph O. Baker and Buster Smith, *American Secularism: Cultural Contours of Nonreligious Belief Systems* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2015), 61-88.

[8] An effort has been initiated by Christian organizations to disrupt this representation of Christianity. This campaign has been endorsed by ELCA Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton among many other prominent U.S. religious leaders. The initiative, "Christians against Christian Nationalism," offers a one-page statement that (1) identifies Christian nationalism as a threat and a "distortion" of "both the Christian faith and America's constitutional democracy" and (2) lays out in eight simple affirmations an alternative Christian view of civic life in a pluralistic society that flourishes under Constitutional protections. The statement is available at: https://www.christiansagainstchristiannationalism.org/statement. This website and associated campaign are managed by BJC (https://bjconline.org/), a national faith-based group whose mission is to "protect religious freedom for all," including those who reject faith traditions.

[9] For example, how should one read #2? Many will understand the question to mean "The federal government should outlaw abortion, invalidate the laws recognizing same-sex marriage, uphold capital punishment, and reinstate prayers by Christian leaders in the schools"—and they would strongly agree or strongly disagree in light of their own convictions on those and similar issues. Members of my own home congregation would very likely understand the question to mean "The federal government should uphold justice; should develop policies to protect the stranger, the widow, and the orphan; should redistribute wealth to decrease poverty; and should provide universal healthcare—thus they might very well strongly agree with #2 even though they share next to nothing with what Whitehead and Perry describe as Christian nationalism.

Diane (D.M.) Yeager

Diane Yeager has been a self-described pointy-headed intellectual who is gratefully leaving that life behind for an uncertain future.

Author

- Diane (D.M.) Yeager

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Articles published in the journal reflect the perspectives and thoughts of their authors and not necessarily the theological, ethical, or social stances of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

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Jeremiah 7 NRSVue

7 The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD: **2** Stand in the gate of the LORD's house, and proclaim there this word, and say, Hear the word of the LORD, all you people of Judah, you who enter these gates to worship the LORD. **3** Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Amend your ways and your doings, and let me dwell with you[a] in this place. **4** Do not trust in these deceptive words: "This is the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD."

5 For if you truly amend your ways and your doings, if you truly act justly one with another, **6** if you do not oppress the alien, the orphan, and the widow or shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not go after other gods to your own hurt, **7** then I will dwell with you in this place, in the land that I gave to your ancestors forever and ever.

CHICAGO — The Rev. Elizabeth A. Eaton, presiding bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), has joined Christian leaders in a statement against Christian nationalism.

Christians Against Christian Nationalism

As Christians, our faith teaches us everyone is created in God's image and commands us to love one another. As Americans, we value our system of government and the good that can be accomplished in our constitutional democracy. Today, we are concerned about a persistent threat to both our religious communities and our democracy — Christian nationalism.

Christian nationalism seeks to merge Christian and American identities, distorting both the Christian faith and America's constitutional democracy. Christian nationalism demands Christianity be privileged by the State and implies that to be a good American, one must be Christian. It often overlaps with and provides cover for white supremacy and racial subjugation. We reject this damaging political ideology and invite our Christian brothers and sisters to join us in opposing this threat to our faith and to our nation.

As Christians, we are bound to Christ, not by citizenship, but by faith. We believe that:

- People of all faiths and none have the right and responsibility to engage constructively in the public square.

- Patriotism does not require us to minimize our religious convictions.

- One's religious affiliation, or lack thereof, should be irrelevant to one's standing in the civic community.

- Government should not prefer one religion over another or religion over nonreligion.

- Religious instruction is best left to our houses of worship, other religious institutions and families.

- America's historic commitment to religious pluralism enables faith communities to live in civic harmony with one another without sacrificing our theological convictions.

- Conflating religious authority with political authority is idolatrous and often leads to oppression of minority and other marginalized groups as well as the spiritual impoverishment of religion.

- We must stand up to and speak out against Christian nationalism, especially when it inspires acts of violence and intimidation—including vandalism, bomb threats, arson, hate crimes, and attacks on houses of worship—against religious communities at home and abroad.

Whether we worship at a church, mosque, synagogue, or temple, America has no second-class faiths. All are equal under the U.S. Constitution. As Christians, we must speak in one voice condemning Christian nationalism as a distortion of the gospel of Jesus and a threat to American democracy.

Resolution on the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to Condemn White Supremacy
Submitted by: Kerry Nelson

WHEREAS, we are members of the Body of Christ called to love and serve a hurting world; and

WHEREAS, each of us is called through our Baptisms to proclaim that God's love is for all people, not just for people who are white; and

WHEREAS, we have observed with alarm a rising tide of racist rhetoric, hate crimes, and domestic terrorism in the name of white supremacy in our nation; and

WHEREAS, we have now seen again the terrible consequences of violence visited on immigrants and people of color in the name of so-called "Christian Nationalism" or "white supremacy"; and

WHEREAS, we now grieve with the communities of El Paso, Texas and Dayton, Ohio, who have experienced terrible losses as a result of mass shootings or racist violence directed against their neighbors, friends, and loved ones; and

WHEREAS, we continue to grieve with and remember the communities of Charleston, South Carolina and Charlottesville, Virginia, who have also been victims of hate crimes in the name of white supremacy; and

WHEREAS, as Lutherans, we have a unique historical calling to recognize, name, and condemn racist acts, imagery, and violence that seeks to injure, demean, or marginalize persons who are not white or Christian; and

WHEREAS, we acknowledge with horror that Christians, including persons raised in congregations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, have committed mass shootings in our nation; and

WHEREAS, we understand that interpretations of Scripture that seek to legitimize racism or white supremacy are false teachings that must be named and condemned as such by this Church with one, powerful voice; therefore, be it