

Are You a Christian Nationalist?

Charisma News reported on a letter, signed by 500 evangelical leaders, that condemned “Christian nationalism” and tied it to the Capitol riots of Jan. 6. I agree with the authors of the letter that all Christians need to speak out against all violence and hate and the detestable acts that took place in Washington, D.C., on Jan. 6.

However, while every evangelical I know condemns the acts of Jan. 6, the authors of the letter seem to be using Jan. 6 as a broad brush to paint every supporter of Donald Trump as an insurrectionist and supporter of white supremacy.

This, perhaps, should not be surprising since the authors of the letter actively campaigned against Trump and sought to turn evangelicals from him to Joe Biden in the 2020 presidential election. So, whatever their moral and theological concerns may be, they obviously have a political agenda as well.

The term “Christian nationalism” is relatively new and is generally defined as “the attempt to merge Christian and American identities and thereby distorting both the Christian faith and America’s constitutional democracy.” I have been accused of being a “Christian nationalist” because of my book, *1726*, that documents the profound Christian influence on America’s founding.

A Christian Republic Is Not a Theocracy

Most Americans do not know the difference between a theocracy and a constitutional republic founded on Christian principles. America’s founders had a clear understanding of the difference, and they rejected the former and created the latter.

Theocratic rulers claim a divine right to rule over their subjects. Iran's ayatollahs claim a divine right from God to rule the citizens of that land. The "Divine Right of Kings" and the "Divine Right of the Episcopacy" were widely held beliefs in medieval Europe where monarchs and popes claimed to rule their subjects with God's blessing and favor.

America's founders held no such grandiose view of themselves or any human being. Influenced by the "dissenting Protestants," they rejected the claims of popes and monarchs and created a society that is free and open, but requiring a moral vision and expectation because of the flawed condition of human nature.

The Founders Believed in Original Sin

America's founders held the traditional Christian view that the human condition is flawed by sin and cannot be trusted with power. They would agree with Sir John Acton who wrote, "Power corrupts; absolute power corrupts absolutely."

This belief is clearly borne out in both their writings and their actions. "Take mankind in general," said Alexander Hamilton, "they are vicious." James Madison added, "If men were angels no government would be necessary."

This same mindset is why George Washington prayed for forgiveness. In a prayer journal he kept in his twenties, Washington wrote, "Wash away my sins in the immaculate blood of the Lamb and purge my heart by Thy Holy Spirit ... daily frame me more and more in the likeness of Thy Son Jesus Christ" (Hyatt, *1726: The Year that Defined America*, 132).

Historian Benjamin Hart is correct in saying, "A central assumption of America's founders was original sin, meaning the corruption of man's character." That is why they divided the powers of government and instituted checks and balances to keep any one person or group from obtaining absolute power.

A National Morality

Freedom from theocratic rulers and government tyranny was an ideal that pervaded the thinking of America's founders. However, because they held to the traditional Christian view of original sin, they knew that the populace, if not ruled from without, must be governed from within by moral and virtuous values.

William Penn, the founder of Pennsylvania, had said, "Those who will not be governed by God, must be ruled by tyrants." The founders unanimously believed that only Christianity provided the moral values that would guard liberty and keep it from becoming a license for anarchy and sin.

That is why Christian chaplains were instituted in all the armed forces. It is why a chaplain was appointed to Congress and each session opened with prayer. It is why George Washington insisted on taking the oath of office with his hand on a Bible.

It is why John Dickinson, founding father and chairman of the committee that produced the Articles of Confederation, warned that "when states lose their liberty, this calamity is generally owing to a decay of virtue." And commenting on this fact, the Catholic scholar, William Novak, has said, "Far from having a hostility toward religion, the Founders counted on religion [Christianity] for the underlying philosophy of the republic, its supporting ethic, and its reliable source of rejuvenation" (Hyatt, 1726: *The Year that Defined America*, 171). {eoa}

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This article is derived from Dr. Eddie Hyatt's book, 1726: The Year that Defined America, which documents how a great, spiritual awakening unleashed the moral and spiritual forces that brought about the end of slavery on this continent and defined America as a land of faith and freedom. This book, and

many others, are available from Amazon and his website at .

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