

LifeLong Learners Class in Political Ideologies—Handout # 4

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Conservatism

State is founded on tradition and custom—not social contract and consent. People are born into an existing society that they did not make. Conservatives approach to government emphasizes order and authority as a check on the passions of ordinary people. Chaos is the greatest evil that can befall a society. An adherence to custom and tradition is the surest way to avoid society disorder. Conservatives advocate a unity of authority, lifestyle and religion.

- A. Human nature is flawed. Need long standing institutions to control the excesses of human nature. Without strong institutions chaos reigns. Human nature does not change and it is more productive to work with human nature as it is and not as we would like it to be.
- B. Reason has its limits to fix problems. Using reason to tell us how to organize the just society will end up in chaos. Society is too complex for reason to figure it all out. The interaction of state, family religion, language, race, class and cultural norms over time is different for each society. There is no universally good approach to politics and government. Conservatives don't argue there are not problems but denies that reason can fix them.
- C. Change—Little if any and should only be undertaken with extreme circumspection. Slow if at all. No change in the fundamental institutions of society. Individuals need stability, predictability, order over all. Change produces disorder. Change weakens the power of existing institutions to control the excesses of human nature.
- D. Tradition-Survival over time carries with it the justification for the future. The basis of the political community is not consent but survival over time. Tradition is the source of legitimate authority. There are no universal natural rights—any concept of rights depends on the traditions and customs of the society. Only those rights that survive over time are considered as legitimate. There are no self-evident natural rights.
- E. Freedom must be well regulated or it will end in disorder.
- F. What is called the Natural Aristocracy should rule. Merit not election should determine who rules. The “better part” of the community should make decisions. Idea of virtual representation—make decisions by virtue of personal qualities not election. Such good judgment does not exist in the average citizen.
- G. Rule by the few does not imply despotism. The Natural Aristocracy must rule for the good of the whole community and not just for themselves.

H. Inequality is naturally occurring and is to be accepted. All societies have inequality. If reward is to be based on merit, there will be inequality in society. To impose equality will stifle creativity.

For Further Reading

Conservatism

1. Edmund Burke—*Reflections on the Revolution in France*.
2. Russell Kirk—*The Conservative Mind: From Burke to Eliot*
3. Michael Osakeschott-- "On Being Conservative" (1956), which is famously in his book *Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays*
4. *Conservatism: An Invitation to the Great Tradition* by Roger Scruton.

These are four of the classical works on conservatism as an ideology written by conservatives.

CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM

MAJOR TENETS OF CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM

To understand Christian Nationalism, it is helpful to distinguish it from "Christianity" as a religion. While Christianity is a system of faith and practice centered on the life and teachings of Jesus, **Christian Nationalism** is a political ideology that seeks to merge American identity with a specific, often conservative, version of Christian identity. Here are the major principles and core tenets that define the Christian Nationalist movement.

1. Divine Foundation and Exceptionalism

The foundational belief of Christian Nationalism is that the United States was **providentially founded** as a Christian nation.

- **Covenantal Logic:** Proponents often argue that the U.S. has a special relationship with God, similar to biblical Israel.
- **Exceptionalism:** They believe America has a unique role in God's plan for humanity and that the nation's success is directly tied to its faithfulness to Christian principles. Deviating from Christian principles leads to harm.

2. Legal and Cultural Integration

This ideology rejects the "wall of separation" between church and state, arguing instead that the government should actively promote Christian values. Christian dogma should be the basis of law.

- **Theocratic Influence:** While not always calling for a total theocracy, the goal is to ensure that the country's laws, holidays, and public symbols reflect Christian heritage.
- **Religious Privilege:** The movement often seeks to maintain or restore the cultural dominance of Christianity in the public square, rather than viewing it as one religion among many in a pluralistic society.

3. Traditional Moral Order

Christian Nationalism places a heavy emphasis on a specific social and moral hierarchy based on traditional interpretations of the Bible.

- **Family Structure:** It strongly advocates for the traditional nuclear family and often opposes LGBTQ+ rights and abortion.
- **Gender Roles:** Many versions of the ideology emphasize patriarchal leadership within the home and the church.

4. Cultural Purity and Identity

A major theme is the preservation of a perceived "original" American culture, which is often viewed as white, English-speaking, and Christian.

- **In-group vs. Out-group:** It creates a sharp distinction between "true Americans" (those who fit the Christian profile) and those who are seen as threats to that identity (secularists, immigrants of other faiths, or progressives).
- **Nostalgia:** The movement is often fueled by a "Return to Glory" narrative—the idea that America has strayed from its roots and must be "reclaimed" or "restored."

5. Dominionism and "Seven Mountains"

In more radical circles (such as the New Apostolic Reformation), a principle known as **Dominionism** is central.

- **The Seven Mountains Mandate:** This is the belief that Christians are called to "occupy" or take control of the seven influential spheres of society: government, family, religion, education, media, arts/entertainment, and business.

HOW DOES CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM FUNCTION AS A POLITICAL IDEOLOGY

Christian nationalism functions as a political ideology by fusing a specific, often fundamentalist, interpretation of Christianity with national identity, arguing that the nation (specifically the U.S.) was founded as Christian and must be governed by Christian, patriarchal, and conservative values. It seeks to privilege Christians in public life, restricting LGBTQ+ rights,

promoting biblical education, and, in some cases, restricting non-Christian freedoms to restore a perceived lost, religiously homogenous, or "authentic" national character.

Key Aspects of How It Functions

- **Fusion of Identity:** It merges religious faith with national patriotism, equating being a "true American" with being a conservative Christian, which often leads to the belief that the nation has a special, covenantal relationship with God.
- **Political Action and Policies:** It pushes for legislation aligned with its doctrine, such as promoting prayer in public schools, restricting or banning abortion, reducing protections for LGBTQ+ people, and banning books.
- **Historical Revisionism:** Adherents often promote the narrative that the U.S. Constitution and founding were exclusively Christian, despite historical evidence of a secular, pluralistic framing.
- **Exclusionary Citizenship:** It often defines the ideal citizen as White, heterosexual, and Christian, treating those outside this group as "lesser" or harmful to the nation's health.
- **Cultural Dominance:** It operates by asserting that Christian morality should take precedence in social and public life, attempting to create a "Christian nation" through both political power and cultural influence.

Impact on Democracy

- **Undermining Religious Freedom:** By favoring a specific religious expression, it threatens the secular, pluralistic, and democratic principles of, for instance, the U.S. Constitution's First Amendment.
- **Justifying Authoritarianism:** It can promote authoritarian tendencies, where political opponents are viewed as enemies of God, sometimes justifying violence to achieve its goals.
- **Marginalization:** It often leads to the marginalization of minorities, including non-Christians, LGBTQ+ individuals, and sometimes Christians who do not share the movement's political views.

As a political ideology, Christian nationalism seeks to merge Christian identity with national identity, demanding that the government actively promote a specific, conservative interpretation of Christianity in public life, law, and policy. It asserts that the U.S. is a "Christian nation" that should be governed by Christian, specifically Protestant, values. It acts as a political force by:

- **Promoting Christian Supremacy:** It advocates for policies that give preferential treatment to Christians in the social and political spheres, often positioning them as superior to non-Christians.

- **Influencing Policy:** It seeks to pass laws based on, or enforcing, their interpretation of the Bible, including restricting reproductive rights, LGBTQ+ rights, and enforcing religious, rather than secular, norms in public education.
- **Weakening Church-State Separation:** It actively aims to dismantle the separation of church and state, arguing that the government should explicitly recognize and support the Christian religion.
- **Advancing a Specific National Mythos:** It promotes the view that America was founded as a Christian nation and must return to that state to regain divine favor, treating this as a, if not the, primary, national identity.
- **Operating as a Cultural Identity:** It acts as a political marker for a, often, white, conservative, and nativist, political movement that uses the language of Christianity to unite supporters and define political, rather than religious, opponents.

For further reading: (These sources listed below are written by supporters of Christian Nationalism.)

Christian Nationalism

Two primary formal documents that outline these principles are "**The Statement on Christian Nationalism & the Gospel**" and the "**National Conservatism: A Statement of Principles**."

Formal Documents and Principles

The Statement on Christian Nationalism & the Gospel (2023)

This document outlines a theological and political framework, asserting the lordship of Christ over government and arguing that nations should officially affirm orthodox Christian faith. It identifies the Bible as the ultimate authority for faith, obedience, and civil governance, and the Ten Commandments as the objective standard of justice. Policy priorities include formally acknowledging Christ's lordship, abolishing abortion and pornography, defining marriage as between one man and one woman, securing borders, and reclaiming national sovereignty from global entities

National Conservatism: A Statement of Principles (2022)

Cited by some Christian nationalists, this document emphasizes that nations need "humility and gratitude before God," and in countries with a Christian majority, public life should be rooted in Christianity. It advocates for independent nation-states and rejects globalism, stating that the Bible should be a primary source taught in education about Western civilization.

The Case for Christian Nationalism—Stephen Wolfe—2022

This is considered the most definitive modern justification for Christian Nationalism. According to Wolfe the purpose of the state is to direct people to God and heaven.

Christian Nationalism: A Biblical Guide for Taking Dominion and Discipling Nations—Andrew Torba and Andrew Isker.

Argues for Christians taking over all societal institutions

Project 2025—Heritage Foundation

Argues for infusing biblical/Christian principles into federal government policy