

# DOING GOD'S STORY IN WORSHIP: ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM ON THE CHURCH'S SANCTUARY



Session 3b: Using the Touchstones:  
Assessing the Worship of “Covenant Nation” XtnNat

## A BIT OF BACKGROUND ON XTN NAT: WHAT IS IT?

*\*  
A tight fusion of national identity and allegiance to  
Christian religiosity so as to lead adherents to use  
political and cultural means\* to achieve compliance with\*  
and implementation of Christian practices and ethics (as  
perceived and defined by those adherents) in and by  
society as a whole.*

Lester's definition

## A BIT OF BACKGROUND ON XTN NAT: WHAT TRIGGERS IT?

*“Politicized religious movements are the responses of those who feel desperate and desolate in the current geo-political crisis. The problem that they experience is not with God, but with politics, and with their profound perceptions that the moral and ideological pillars of social order have collapsed. Until there is a surer sense of the moral legitimacy of secular nationalism, religious visions of moral order will continue to appear as attractive solutions, and religious activists will continue to attempt to impose these solutions in violent ways, seeing themselves as soldiers in a cosmic drama of political redemption.”*

Mark Juergensmeyer, “The Worldwide Rise of Religious Nationalism,” *Journal of International Affairs* 50, 1 (Summer, 1996).

## A BIT OF BACKGROUND ON XTN NAT: SOME IMPORTANT “NOT JUSTS...”

- Not just *now*
- Not just *here*
- Not just *Christian*
- Not just *one kind of people*
- Not just *one kind of motivation and rationalization*

- A national Christian magazine, in the midst of a tumultuous political situation, encouraging its readers to consider which side of the political fight was “God’s side” (the question was intended to be rhetorical) and to recognize that the interests of Christ’s kingdom and the progress depended upon full-throated allegiance to one political party’s leader and to that party itself. Behind this convergence of religion and patriotism was a reading of the Bible in which the United States was seen as a new Canaan that God favored above other countries.

The time? The middle of the Civil War in the early 1860s

The magazine? The widely distributed denominational magazine of the Methodist Episcopal Church

The political part and its leader? The Republican party and Abraham Lincoln who, when calling for a national day of prayer and humiliation in March 1863, asked Americans to “recognize the sublime truth, announced in the Holy Scriptures and proven by all history, that those nations only are blessed whose God is the Lord.”

Source: Joshua Zeitz, *Lincoln’s God* (2023)

# Important Distinctions



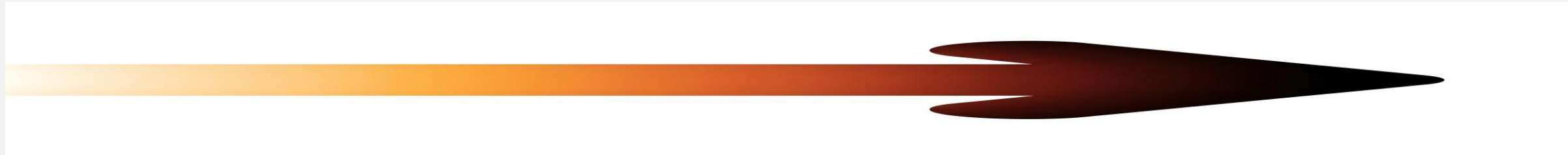
Patriotism

Civil Religion

Christian Nationalism

*Bellah, 1967: “Common elements of religion orientation that the great majority of Americans share...this public religious dimension is expressed in a set of beliefs, symbols, and rituals that I am calling the ‘American civil religion’.”*

# Important Distinctions



Patriotism

Civil Religion

Christian Nationalism

## A BIT OF BACKGROUND ON XTN NAT: TYPES

- Covenant Nation
- Dominionist
- Misogynist

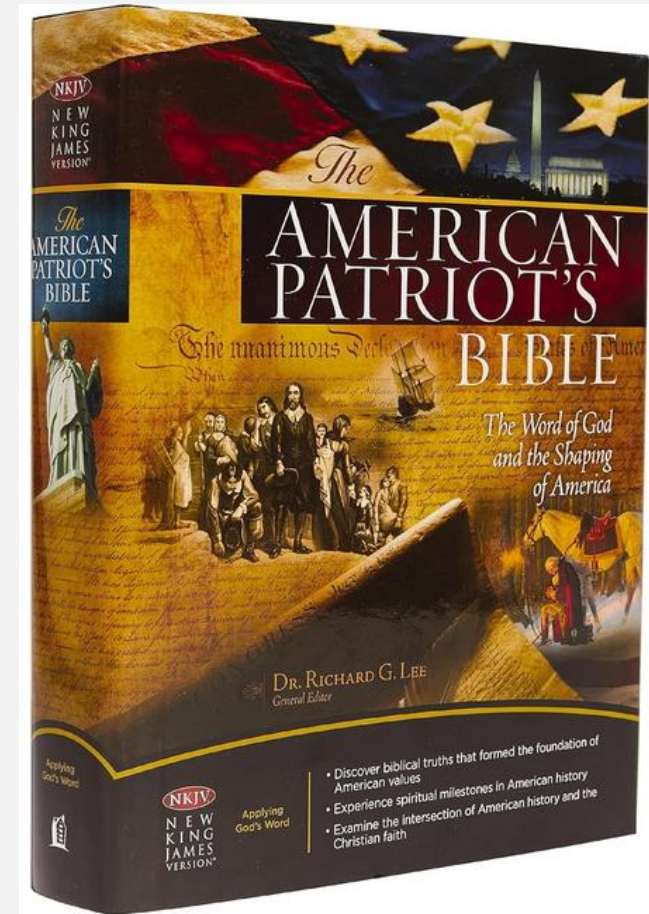


### Core ideas:

- God elects and makes covenant with specific nations (ancient Israel, the United States) who have a special relationship with him.
- Blessing and prosperity as a nation are based upon obedience to God's moral code as found in the Bible (especially as found in the Old Testament and especially as found in the Pentateuch).
- The covenantal relationship with God makes a nation exceptional in the world. And so, it is incumbent for the nation to remain faithful in order to be a distinctive witness for the sake of the whole world.

### Tendencies:

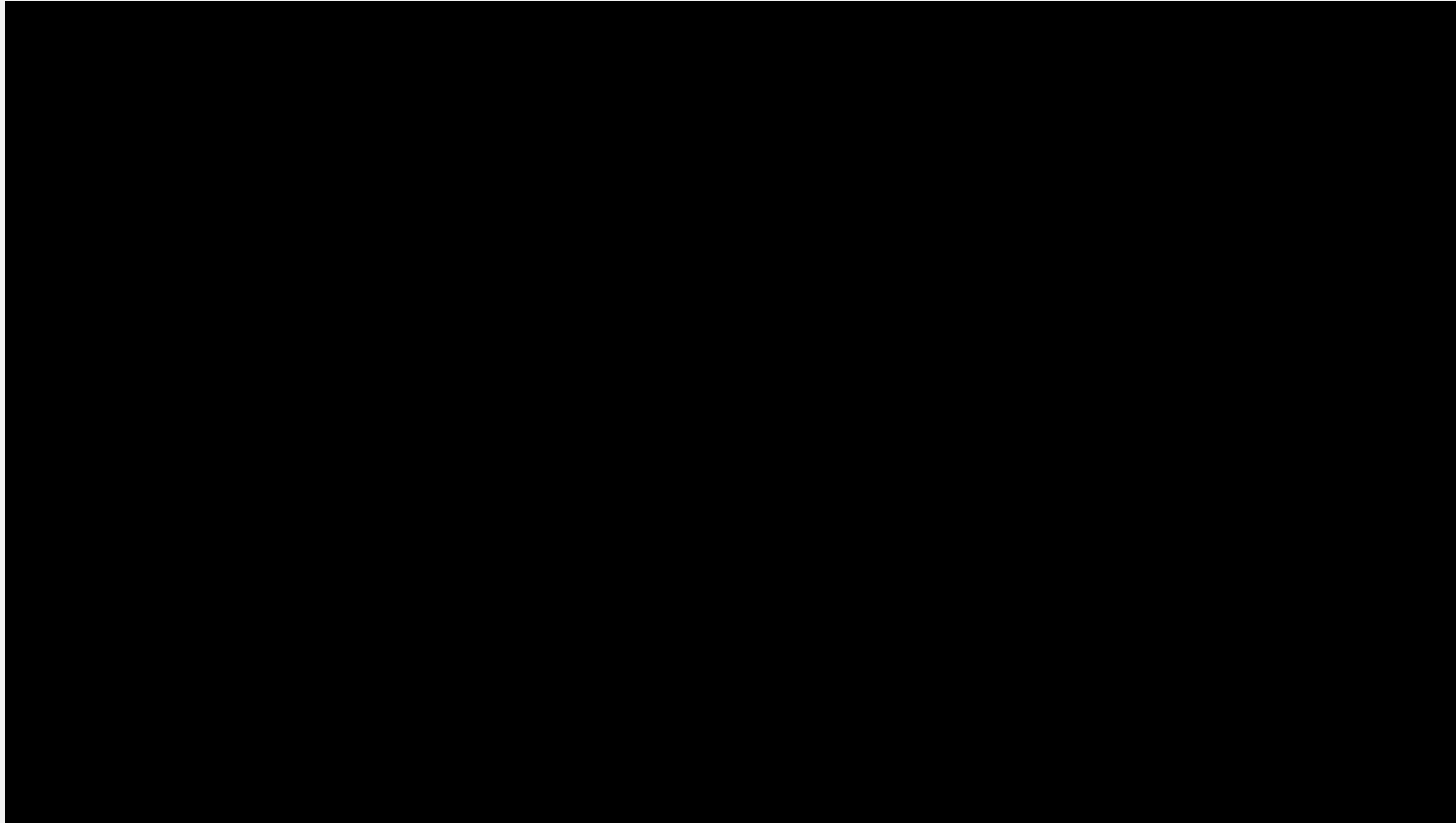
- Giving an idealized version of history: "In the colonial and early republic periods the Founding Fathers intentionally and explicitly founded this nation to be a Christian nation emphasizing the keeping of biblical morality as the key to its prosperity."
- Reliance upon 2 Chronicles 7:14 et al. as "go-to" groundings
- Glorification of the U.S. military specifically and of military-type force generally



TYPE I: COVENANT NATION

WORSHIP EXAMPLES  
OF COVENANT NATION XTN NAT

WITHIN A MAINLINE SERVICE,  
WHOLLY DEDICATED



A METHODIST CHURCH IN SOUTH CAROLINA  
JULY 7, 2024

AS A SEPARATE, SPECIAL SERVICE



A NONDENOMINATIONAL CHURCH IN CALIFORNIA  
JULY 2, 2022

WITHIN A WHOLLY DEDICATED SERVICE

AN EVANGELICAL CHURCH IN THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC  
FEBRUARY, 2022

# THEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT

1. Dynamic worship narrative: Worship is the *doing* of God's story. *of relationship to one's nation/state [or race].*
2. Eschatological: Worship is the ~~preliminary~~ in-breaking of the future. *as the Kingdom, nation-state, and church are conflated.\**

3. Trinitarian: Worship is getting caught up in the dynamics between the three Persons of the Trinity.



*Trinity irrelevant: Torrance's category of "functionally Unitarian" applies*

4. Christological/Incarnational: Worship is the continuation of Christ's ministry on earth.



*Distanced from Christ: activity directed to Christ (perhaps) but not from Christ; identity of the Church to be found in the nation-state; Worship is thus non-catholic in a core sense.*

*\*and the future is restricted to individual and family, i.e., non-cosmic, destinies.*