Not Church and State, But Christianity and Culture
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There never has been a single, visible church in the United States, even when certain states in the early republic maintained establishment churches. American Protestants have used the term *church* to describe a spiritual web of Christians united by the Holy Spirit through the new birth. The focus on the invisible church resulted from the fusion of free-church polity, revivalism, and the politics of non-conformity. On the American view, this invisible company of believers leaps across institutional boundaries to form a single movement. While believers may be segregated into denominational institutions, the church transcends such institutional boundaries. As H. Richard Niebuhr stated, "The true church is not an organization but the organic movement of those who have been 'called out' and 'sent.'"[1] If the church is a movement, Niebuhr argued, then the enduring problem is not the relation of church and state (as though there was a single institution the state could endorse) or even the church and society, but the relationship between Christ and culture.[2]

The description of the church as an organic movement fit the role of the people in democratic systems. For democracy to succeed, it required a moral people. John Adams' words to the Massachusetts Militia echoed the sentiments of many: "We have no government armed with power capable of contending with human passions unbridled by morality and religion."[3]

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[1]H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Kingdom of God in America* (New York: Harper and Row, 1937), xiv.

[2]H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper and Row, 1951).

[3]Charles Francis Adams, *The Works of John Adams*, vol. 9 (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1854), 229.

Several decades later, Alexis de Tocqueville argued that the voluntary, the religious, and the moral were all necessary to a flourishing democracy.[4] If preserving democratic structures requires a moral people, it raises the issue of how people should be morally formed. This issue has been at the core of a debate on preserving democracy since the founding. No single church could perform this task. Instead, it was religion as a whole. The primary religion at the founding was Christianity, or the organic movement of Christians who together helped to shape a nation. In the early nineteenth century, it was the revivalism of the Second Great Awakening that connected voluntary religion, democracy, and a commitment to moral formation in holiness. This movement among the churches partly inspired Niebuhr's depiction of the church.

Niebuhr was not alone in describing the church this way. American Pentecostalism understood itself as a movement of renewal in the church and society. Pentecostals inherited this self-understanding from the nineteenth-century Wesleyan-Holiness movement, which originated in John Wesley's efforts to renew England and reform the Church of England by spreading scriptural holiness throughout the land. Central to the Wesleyan-Holiness movement was maximizing lay participation to transform the culture. It did this by focusing on the distribution of gifts at Pentecost that empowered the people of God with charisms to move into every area of society.

Pentecost meant democratization. It unleashed the potential of every believer. After embracing the Wesleyan view of Pentecost as a deeper infilling of the Spirit subsequent to the new birth, the Presbyterian William Boardman claimed that God is not raising up another

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[4]See Raymond Hain, "Tocqueville on Religion," in Daniel Gordon, ed., *The Anthem Companion to Alexis de Tocqueville* (New York: Anthem Press, 2019), 3-20.

Whitefield but a multitude of Whitefields. Like the industrial revolution expanded wealth and prosperity to the *hoi polloi*, Boardman concluded that Pentecost meant an abundance of divine love and power flowing into all believers.[5] Pentecost made people moral while also generating an explosion of Holiness lay evangelists who remade the American landscape.

The theological rationale of Pentecost harnessed the American entrpreneurial drive, reinforcing the voluntary nature of American religiosity through a populism that created a host of mediating institutions. To transform the culture required that one begin with the religious and moral condition of the people rather than the legal and political structures and institutions of the nation. This starting point among the people was the rationale behind prioritizing mission as evangelization and discipleship. Social and political action were an extension of this mission, not its heart. The mistake of theological liberalism within the mainline is to place social and political action in the center of mission rather than at its edges. It is also a mistake that strong forms of Christian nationalism make.

My broad claim in this paper is that the relationship between the Bible and politics in the American context is about the relationship between Christianity and culture. How do Christians transform the culture? Is this transformation a bottom-up enterprise or a top-down enterprise? Should Christians start with the people or the institutions that shape the people? Or, both? By the end of the paper, I will argue that the transformation of culture and the making of a moral electorate moves from the people to institutions and then to society as a whole. This position invariably means public-private partnerships but it resists the desire to build a new version of Christendom present in all forms of Christian nationalism.

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[5]William Boardman, *The Higher Christian Life* (Boston: Henry Hoyt, 1858), 307-318.

Since the debate about how to transform the culture in evangelicalism has been largely driven by Neo-Calvinism, I will begin with a historical narrative that traces these developments and the three views of government that dominated evangelicalism by the end of the twentieth century. Unpacking this history is necessary to understand the landscape of modern evangelicalism at the beginning of the twenty-first century. The first section tells this story.

The confusion among evangelicals over Christianity and culture in the Trump era has been fueled by the rise of Christian nationalism. The language of Christian nationalism entered the public consciousness during the George W. Bush administration. It was first utilized by journalists on the secular left to critique the Bush administration's policies of compassionate conservatism. After the election of Donald Trump in 2016, the language returned under the influence of sociological analyses of evangelicalism. It became a way to explain why white evangelicals supported Trump overwhelmingly. The use of this language caused some evangelicals to appropriate the name and embrace Christian nationalism while others repudiated it. Some strong forms of Christian nationalism even argued for a confessional state whereas most evangelicals maintain a clear separation between church and state. Outlining this history will illuminate some of the issues clouding the relationship between the Bible and politics. This will be my second section.

Finally, I will offer some thoughts from a Wesleyan-Pentecostal perspective approach to the Bible and politics. Central to these thoughts will be my view that Pentecost is about democratization. The transformation of culture begins among the people who then generate movements that create mediating institutions. It is from evangelization and discipleship of the people to the creation of a movement that is then sustained and advanced by mediating

institutions. In other words, it is always a bottom-up movement from the people to institutions and never a top-down movement. This will be my final section.

Neo-Calvinism and Evangelicals on Government

From its inception in the 1940s and 50s, modern evangelicalism was largely driven by the Neo-Calvinism coming out of the Netherlands. Its primary architects were Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck although it was Americanized by Reformed thinkers like Cornelius Van Til, Gordon Clark, and Louis Berkhof. When Carl F. H. Henry dedicated *Remaking the Modern Mind* (1948) to Van Til, Clark, and William Harry Jellema, he was channeling this Neo-Calvinism.[6] The Americanization of Neo-Calvinism combined Kuyper's approach to government through sphere sovereignty, world-view analysis, and presuppositional apologetics with the doctrine of inerrancy. This formed the heart of what Ron Nash called the new evangelicalism in the 1960s.[7] In doing so, Nash was echoing the label that Harold Ockenga had given to separate a more intellectually robust form of conservative Protestantism from its fundamentalist cousins, who were primarily Baptists and dispensationalists like John R. Rice, Bob Jones, or those associated with Dallas Theological Seminary.[8]

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[6]Carl F. H. Henry, *Remaking the Modern Mind* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1946), 5-8.

[7]Ronald H. Nash, *The New Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1963). See also the fundamentalist take on the new evangelicalism: Robert P. Lightner, *Neo-Evangelicalism* (Des Plaines: Regular Baptist Press, 1965).

[8]Garth M. Rosell, *The Surprising Work of God: Harold John Ockenga, Billy Graham, and the Rebirth of Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 13fn10.

Over the three decades from 1960 to 1990, Neo-Calvinism contributed to the development of three broad approaches to the relation of Christianity and politics: Christian reconstructionism, Christian America, and principled pluralism. Grounded in Rousas Rushdoony's interpretation of Van Til, theonomy or Christian reconstructionism sought to reform society on the basis of God's revealed law in scripture.[9] For Rushdoony, the problem was not the institutional separation of church and state but the removal of Christianity from the foundation of the state's law.[10] Following Kuyper, he thought that the church and the state had their own distinctive spheres.

Rushdoony also followed Kuyper in declaring that Jesus must be lord over all of life. There could be no dichotomy between sacred and secular. All nation-states govern through laws, and all law has a religious basis insofar as it stems from a moral framework. The primary question was what moral framework should ground civil law. Should civil law be grounded upon some version of autonomy from secular humanism or theonomy from Christianity? Rushdoony thought that the early American republic was a civil and social order grounded in Protestantism.[11] The aim in the late twentieth century should be to restore this order. The government should come under Christ's lordship, which means that Christians should seek to reconstruct every area of society according to God's civil and moral law in scripture.

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[9]For a succinct statement of Christian reconstructionism, see Greg L. Bahnsen, "The Theonomic Position," in Gary Scott Smith, ed., *God and Politics: Four Views on the Reformation of Civil Government* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1989), 21-53.

[10]Rousas J. Rushdoony, *Christianity and the State* (Vallecito: Ross House Books, 1986), 7.

[11]Rousas J. Rushdoony, *The Nature of the American System* (Fairfax: Thoburn Press, 1965), 1-23.

The second position broadly goes under the description of Christian America. What came to be called Christian America developed in the 1970s as fundamentalist and evangelical writers contrasted Christianity with humanism. Representing the mainstream of evangelicalism, this position claims that the United States has a Christian heritage, Christians must recover this heritage, and secularism has sought to destroy or deny this heritage.[12] While this position became broad enough to undergird the coalition of the Religious Right, it was driven in the 1970s by a smaller group of Reformed thinkers such as Francis Schaeffer and Harold O. J. Brown. Brown and Schaeffer had collaborated since 1961 with Brown facilitating Schaeffer's return to the United States when he was student minister at Harold Ockenga's Park Street Church in Boston.[13] Brown also become the initial chairman of the Christian Action Council he helped to form in July 1975. With Ruth Graham Bell and C. Everett Koop, Brown helped to form the new pro-life organization to remind American's that Protestants had long been against elective abortion.[14] Brown and Schaeffer were at the forefront of organizing evangelicals into political action under the call to reinstate the "Judeo-Christian ethical tradition" that was being marginalized in the face

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[12]On this point, see the following: Mark A. Noll, Nathan O. Hatch, and George M. Marsden, *The Search for Christian America*, expanded edition (Colorado Springs: Helmers & Howard, 1989); Gary Scott Smith, ed., *God and Politics: Four Views on the Reformation of Civil Government* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1989); Christian Smith, *Christian America? What Evangelicals Really Want* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); Daryl C. Cornett, *Christian America? Perspectives on Our Religious Heritage* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2011).

[13]Barry Hankins, *Francis Schaeffer and the Shaping of Evangelical America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 64-75.

[14]See "How Much Censorship is Too Much?" *Christianity Today* (August 8, 1975), https://www.christianitytoday.com/1975/08/editorials-how-much-censorship-is-too-much/. "Newly Formed Protestant Unit Will Be Pro-Life," *Lake Shore Visitor*, July 18, 1975, 13; "Pro-Lifers Aren't All Catholics," *Lake Shore Visitor*, August 15, 1975, 24.

of secularization and humanism.[15]

Both Brown and Schaeffer argued that American society needed to recover its biblical (or Judeo-Christian) basis.[16] Schaeffer, in particular, combined worldview apologetics with Kuyperian sphere sovereignty to argue for how evangelicals should transform the culture. Schaeffer borrowed Kuyper's use of sphere as an area of influence. Sphere sovereignty meant that Christians should bring the lordship of Christ to bear on business, education, the family, government, and other areas.[17] In *A Christian Manifesto*, Schaeffer called Christians to oppose the total worldview of humanism by recovering the Christian consensus of the early republic and bringing Judeo-Christian values to bear on law and government. Neither Schaeffer nor Brown went as far as Christian reconstructionists in demanding that the civil and moral law in scripture should be the ground for all civil law in America. Instead, they wanted an institutional separation of church and state with a government that grounded its morality and law in the Judeo-Christian tradition. Brown argued for collaboration between church and state as long as church means an

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[15]Harold O. J. Brown, "The Passivity of American Christians," *Christianity Today* (January 16, 1976), https://www.christianitytoday.com/2007/07/passivity-of-american-christians-2/.

[16]Harold O. J. Brown, *The Reconstruction of the Republic* (New Rochelle: Arlington House, 1977); updated edition (Milford: Mott Media, 1981); Francis A. Schaeffer, *A Christian Manifesto* in *The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer*, vol. 5: A Christian View of the West (Wheaton: Crossway, 1982), 413-500. See also C. Gregg Singer, *A Theological Interpretation of American History*, third edition (Greenville: A Press, 1994). Singer's first edition was printed in 1964.

[17]Francis Schaeffer, *Pollution and the Death of Man* in *The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer*, vol. 5: A Christian View of the West (Wheaton: Crossway, 1982), 35. Schaeffer published *Pollution and the Death of Man* in 1970.

"invisible but real body of believers."[18] The Judeo-Christian position should ground the moral life of American society as a whole and therefore inform what laws government enacted.

Schaeffer's and Brown's articulation view of Christian America helped unite the Religious Right. Jerry Falwell explicitly cited Brown when describing his agenda to appeal to a moral majority in America who wanted a separation of church and state but believed "this nation was founded upon the Judeo-Christian ethic by men and women who were strongly influenced by biblical moral principles."[19] Bill Bright of Campus Crusade (now Cru) and Loren Cunningham of Youth With a Mission both adapted Schaeffer's use of Kuyperian sphere sovereignty, turning it into the seven spheres of influence. Their goal was to train young Christians to engage the culture in family, religion/church, education, government, media, arts and entertainment, and economics. Bright and Cunningham were joined by Tim LaHaye, Jerry Falwell, and John Whitehead.[20] They all saw America as a Christian or religious nation that had been secularized in the post-World War II context and must now be reclaimed.

During the 1980s a debate raged between Christian reconstructionists, advocates of Christian America, and a third interpretation of Kuyper described as principled pluralism. Principled pluralism begins with Kuyper's claims that government, family, the church, schools

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[18]Harold O. J. Brown, "The Christian America Position," in Smith, *God and Politics*, 145.

[19]Jerry Falwell, "Future-Word: An Agenda for the Eighties," in Jerry Falwell, Ed Dobson, and Ed Hindson, eds., *The Fundamentalist Phenomenon: The Resurgence of Conservative Christianity* (New York: Doubleday, 1981), 188-189.

[20]Tim LaHaye, *Faith of Our Founding Fathers* (Brentwood: Wolgemuth & Hyatt, 1987); Jerry Falwell, *Listen, America!* (New York: Doubleday, 1980); John W. Whitehead, *The Second America Revolution* (Elgin: Cook, 1982). See also D. James Kennedy with Jerry Newcombe, *What If America Were a Christian Nation Again?* (Nashville: Nelson, 2003).

and other structures are God-ordained structures that exist in their own spheres.[21] Known as structural pluralism, these distinct areas have their own integrity within the order of creation. Christians should respect other perspectives (confessional pluralism) even as they seek to advance Christianity within each sphere. The major spokespersons of principled pluralism were Mark Noll, George Marsden, Richard Mouw, and Charles Colson.[22]

Noll, Marsden, and Nathan Hatch argued that while America had been influenced by Christian traditions, it was a mixture of diverse influences from Puritanism to Hellenism to Enlightenment rationality.[23] Because the American system was designed to bring compromise through checks and balances, it could never be Christian in the sense of reflecting the ideals of scripture. This history means that any appeal to a "Christian" America would end up compromising the church or baptizing the past in a way that was detrimental to the purity of the faith. Instead of calling for a Christian America, Christians should take a more defensive posture of upholding the necessity of pluralistic structures and protecting those structures. The government must be a referee among different religious perspectives allowing all to have a say.

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[21]See Gordon J. Spykman, "The Principled Pluralist Position," in Smith, *God and Politics*, 78-99.

[22]On principled pluralism, see James W. Skillen, *Recharging the American Experiment: Principled Pluralism for Genuine Civic Community* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994); George Marsden, *The Twilight of the American Enlightenment: The 1950s and the Crisis of Liberal Belief* (New York: Basic Books, 2014), 151-187; Richard Mouw, *Abraham Kuyper: A Short and Personal Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 40-44. The Center for Public Justice is patterned on principled pluralism (https://cpjustice.org/).

[23]Noll, Hatch, and Marsden, *Search for Christian America*, 13-27.

More than any other, Charles Colson has advocated for principled pluralism.[24] For Colson, the state should not give any special privilege to the Christian. A corollary is that Christian politicians should not use their office to evangelize the culture.[25] This does not mean that Christians should not advance their views, but when a Christian enters public office, the duty is justice and freedom for all citizens in the context of the many compromises politics requires. Colson, along with other principled pluralists, remains concerned that the church simply becomes another interest group rather than the body of Christ.

This brief overview of the influence of Neo-Calvinism on evangelical views of politics helps us identify three important points. The first is that evangelicals remained committed to the institutional separation of church and state. This followed Kuyper's distinction of church and state as spheres ordained by God to maintain the social order. Second, to speak of Christianity as a whole was to consider the church as an invisible and organic movement rather than an institution. While church and state remain institutionally separated, Christians can and should seek to transform the life of the nation, which includes engaging in its political life. Finally, Christianity has had a large and important influence on American life and culture. Since this influence is predominantly in the moral life, one could talk about a Judeo-Christian view rooted in the God of the Bible, which Protestant, Jews, and Catholics share. This Judeo-Christian vision has been under attack as secularists have attempted to remove religion from the public square.

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[24]David Koyzis makes this point. See David T. Koyzis, "What Would Kuyper Do?" *First Things*, January 23, 2015, https://firstthings.com/principled-pluralism-and-idolatry/.

[25]Charles Colson with Ellen Santilli Vaughn, *Kingdoms in Conflict: An Insider's Challenging View of Politics, Power, and the Pulpit* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), 305; Charles Colson, *God & Government: An Insiders View on the Boundaries Between Faith & Politics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 345.

The evangelical political emergence in the 1970s and 80s resulted from a desire to combat the rise of secularism and return to a Judeo-Christian vision of reality. The distinction between the principled pluralist position and the other two positions is that the former remains committed to a bottom-up transformation of culture that utilizes mediating institutions to protect the structures of society.

Christian Nationalism, Neo-Charismatics, and the Secular Left

Even though evangelicals had debated these three views for several decades, two developments since the turn of the twenty-first century have contributed to our current challenges. First, a group of journalists associated with left-wing magazines like *Salon* and *The Nation* began accusing the George W. Bush administration of being in bed with Christian reconstructionists. Their criticisms centered on the role that Marvin Olasky played in Bush's program of compassionate conservatism, but broadened out to encompass the application of Christian ideas to public policy.

Over a series of books, Olasky argued that the fight against poverty had failed because it was insufficiently holistic. Poverty was not simply an economic problem, but also a personal and spiritual problem. He called for a more decentralized approach to poverty that took into consideration public-private partnerships, especially among Christian charities who addressed the issue holistically.[26] Olasky also argued for local solutions in which experiments with helping the

[26]Marvin Olasky, *The Tragedy of American Compassion* (Washington D.C.: Regnery, 1992); Marvin Olasky, *Renewing American Compassion: How Compassion for the Needy Can Turn Ordinary Citizens into Heroes* (Washington D.C.: Regnery, 1997); Marvin Olasky,

poor address local problems. Both Newt Gingrich and George W. Bush endorsed Olasky's basic approach, which impacted Bush's campaign for president. After assuming the presidency, Bush established the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Partnerships with Don Willett initially at the helm. A conservative Christian, Willette was appointed to the Texas Supreme Court before Trump appointed him to the Fifth Circuit of Appeals.[27] The purpose of the new office was to direct Federal dollars to private charities and 501C-3 organizations, many of which were Christian. These efforts created alarm among secular journalists.

Max Blumenthal and Joe Conanson both went after Olasky, connecting his thought to the Christian philanthropist Howard Ahmanson, Jr.[28] Ahmanson had supported Rushdoony while also giving money to Olasky. While Olasky argued against being influenced by Christian reconstructionism, Blumenthal and Conanson had successfully drawn attention to the connection.

A flurry of volumes hit the shelves in 2006. From Kevin Phillips' *American Theocracy* to Chris Hedges' *American Fascists*, writers took their turn accusing the Bush administration of seeking to impose Christianity upon America.[29] Phillips called Bush's approach to government a

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Compassionate Conservatism: What It Is, What It Does, and How It Can Transform America (New York: The Free Press, 2000).

[27]On Willett, see Eric Benson, "Don Willett's Quiet Revolution," *Texas Observer*, November 17, 2016, https://www.texasobserver.org/don-willett-trump-supreme-court/.

[28]Joe Conason, "Where's the Compassion? Bush's 'Compassionate Conservatism" is a Deft–and–Dishonest–Strategy," *The Nation*, August 28, 2003; Joe Conason, *Big Lies: The Right-Wing Propaganda Machine and How It Distorts the Truth*, revised and updated (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2004); Max Blumenthal, "Avenging Angel of the Religious Right," *Salon*, January 6, 2004.

[29]Chris Hedges, *American Fascists: The Christian Right and the War On America* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2006); James Rudin, *The Baptizing of America: The Religious Right's Plans for the Rest of Us* (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 2006).

theocracy by which he meant the application of religious motives and biblical worldviews to domestic and international political agendas.[30] The connection between worldview analysis and public policy became the fundamental basis for the charges being leveled. Secularists were deeply concerned about a conservative Christian takeover by the Bush administration and subsequent Tea Party movement.

Among these writers was Michelle Goldberg. A secular feminist who had been part of the circles at *Salon*, Goldberg recalled interviewing the Iranian graphic novelist Marjane Satrapi and coming to the conclusion that Iran's mullah's and America's evangelicals were both the same. This led her to the label Christian nationalism. She subtitled her book *The Rise of Christian Nationalism*, marking the first time this phrase entered the national vocabulary.[31] Goldberg repackaged the language of Christian worldview as a "total ideology," which she then labeled Christian nationalism.[32] Fusing worldview with Christian reconstructionist ideas, she claimed that the evangelicals behind the Bush administration dreamed of restoring a Christian nation by taking dominion. Christian nationalism was an ideology that sought to apply the Christian worldview to every aspect of life and restore America to a Christian nation by taking dominion over political structures and appointing Christians to powerful positions. No wonder Ross Douthat labeled 2006 a "paranoid moment in American politics."[33] Even though Goldberg

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[30]Phillips, *America Theocracy*, viii-ix.

[31]Michelle Goldberg, *Kingdom Coming: The Rise of Christian Nationalism* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2006).

[32]Goldberg, *Kingdom Coming*, 4-10.

[33]Ross Douthat, "Theocracy, Theocracy, Theocracy," *First Things*, August 1, 2006, https://firstthings.com/theocracy-theocracy-theocracy/.

admitted that the description did not fit most evangelicals, she argued that a highly mobilized minority were pushing it and getting other evangelicals to join.

When Donald Trump won the presidency in 2016, the language of Christian nationalism resurfaced through the writings of sociologists Andrew Whitehead, Samuel Perry, and Philip Gorski.[34] As Perry and Whitehead wrote in a 2015 article, "Following the election of George W. Bush in 2000 and culminating in the Tea Party movement since 2009, scholars have called attention to what they consider to be a resurgence of a conservative strain of national-religious identity or 'Christian nationalism.'"[35] When you trace out their references to "scholars" all roads lead back to Michelle Goldberg. Following Goldberg, they define Christian nationalism as holding that America is and should be a Christian nation, advocating for a fusion between the religious and political spheres, and combining ethno-nationalism of ancient Israel as a chosen nation with modern America, which reinforces white identity.

These sociologists successfully repackaged Goldberg's claims into a broad definition of Christian nationalism as a cultural framework that blurs Christian identity and American identity. In the wake of Trump's election, it became the primary method to understand why so many

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[34]Samuel L. Perry and Andrew L. Whitehead, "Christian Nationalism and White Racial Boundaries: Examining Whites' Opposition to Interracial Marriage," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 38 (2015): 1671–1689; Samuel L. Perry and Andrew L. Whitehead, "Christian Nationalism, Racial Separatism, and Family Formation: Attitudes toward Transracial Adoption as a Test Case," *Race and Social Problems* 7 (2015): 123–34.

[35]Samuel L. Perry and Andrew L. Whitehead, "Christian Nationalism and White Racial Boundaries: Examining Whites' Opposition to Interracial Marriage," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 38 (2015): 1671–1672.

evangelicals had voted for Trump.[36] The first way to detect this framework was to ask whether an evangelical thought that America was a Christian nation in any sense. A second way was whether the person viewed Christian mission through an apocalyptic lens.[37] The result of their analysis was to take the older view of Christian America that evangelicals had debated for several decades and turn it into Christian nationalism. An avalanche of books flowed from 2020 to the present all of which centered on the rhetorical use of Christian nationalism to describe conservative Christians who supported Trump.

Before 2016 evangelicals did not use the language of Christian nationalism to describe any position in the movement. Instead, as Christian Smith observed in his survey of evangelicals at the beginning of Bush's presidency, the most common evangelical view was Christian America.[38] Smith also observed that evangelicals did not agree on what that phrase meant with at least ten percent claiming America was never a Christian nation and another thirty percent being agnostic about the claim. Moreover, Smith catalogued six meanings among those who talked about America being Christian. Most evangelicals held that it meant support for religious freedom among the founders while others that a majority of Americans had been Christians. The four remaining views were that the founding document reflected Christian principles, that the Founding Fathers were theistic, that Christian principles influenced the founding, and that public

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[36]Samuel L. Perry and Andrew L. Whitehead, *Taking America Back For God: Christian Nationalism in the United States* (New York: Oxford, 2020); Philip S. Gorski and Samuel L. Perry, *The Flag + The Cross: White Christian Nationalism and the Threat to Democracy* (New York: Oxford, 2022).

[37]Perry and Whitehead, *Taking America Back For God*, 10-15.

[38]Christian Smith, *Christian America? What Evangelicals Really Want* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 21-60.

expression of religious symbols and customs were part of the fabric of the nation.[39] What Smith discovered was an ongoing an lively debate about the role of Christianity in American history with a desire that Christianity be acknowledged in public discourse. With their newly-worked out definition of Christian nationalism, Whitehead and Perry took those same views and transformed them into a vast political movement among white evangelicals.

One of the most significant failures of the sociological analysis of Christian nationalism was its lack of engagement with evangelical texts or sociological literature on evangelicals and Christian America. Even Southern Baptists were still debating whether and in what sense America could be described as a Christian nation. In 2011, the Southern Baptist pastor Daryl Cornett assembled a group of scholars to debate the question.[40] The views ranged from David Barton's claim that America was distinctively Christian to Jonathan Sassi's assertion that America was religiously eclectic and secular. The question of how to define Christian America remained disputed with some claiming it meant a nation founded on biblical and Christian principles while others simply claimed it referred to the influence of Christianity upon the nation.

The rhetoric of Christian nationalism reframed the debate about Christianity, America, and politics. After 2020, not only did evangelicals like Rob Schenck write their confessions about being a Christian nationalist, others like Paul Miller called it "identity politics for tribal evangelicals."[41] Miller defined Christian nationalism as holding that America is a Christian

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[39]Smith, *Christian America?*, 26-37.

[40]Daryl C. Cornett, ed., *Christian America? Perspectives On Our Religious Heritage* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Academic, 2011).

[41]Rob Schenck, "Confessions of a (Former) Christian Nationalist: When Religion is Placed At the Service of a Political Party, It Corrupts Both," *Mother Jones* (Nov.-Dec. 2024),

nation and desiring that the government promote Anglo-Protestantism.[42] By the time Miller offered his analysis, the broad outlines of who counted as a Christian nationalist had become clear. It always reduced to three components: 1) America was Christian in some sense; 2) Christians should enact a Christian worldview or Christian morality in government; 3) the attempt to recover a Christian past is an appeal to white Protestantism, which is a privileging of white racial identity. Michelle Goldberg's invention of Christian nationalism had proven to be a powerful rhetorical strategy.

To make matters worse, some evangelicals, predominantly Christian reconstructionists, starting appropriating the moniker, which ultimately created a debate within Reformed circles on the role of government.[43] This strong form of Christian nationalism argued that government should exist under the lordship of Christ and therefore should support Christian confessions and morality. It was an argument for a new version of Christendom in which church and state remain distinct institutions but both advance a Christian view of life in their respective spheres. Given that this strong view was being advanced by Christian reconstructionists, it included a replacement ecclesiology that saw the church as the new Israel and invalided the older appeal to the pluralism of Protestant, Catholic, and Jew under the framework of Judeo-Christian

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https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2024/09/rob-schenck-confessions-of-a-former-christian-nationalist/; Paul D. Miller, *The Religion of American Greatness: What's Wrong With Christian Nationalism* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2022), 6.

[42]Miller, *Religion of American Greatness*, 59.

[43]Andrew Isker and Andrew Torba, *Christian Nationalism: A Biblical Guide to Taking Dominion and Discipling Nations* (Gab AI Inc., 2022); Stephen Wolfe, *The Case for Christian Nationalism* (Moscow: Canon Press, 2022); Douglas Wilson, *Mere Christendom: The Case for Bringing Christianity Back into Modern Culture* (Moscow: Canon Press, 2023).

civilization. As such, it opened the door to the antisemitism currently espoused by some on the political right.

During the same period that left-wing journalists accused the Bush administration of being in bed with Christian reconstructionists, a Neo-Charismatic theology emerged that proved to be a potent political force.[44] While many writers have connected this Neo-Charismatic theology to a series of independent networks labeled the New Apostolic Reformation, it may be better just to use the label Neo-Charismatic. Under the influence of postmillennial eschatology, ministers in these networks shifted away from evangelism of people toward the evangelism of nations. Postmillennial Christian reconstructionists had been attacking premillennial dispensationalism over the final two decades of the twentieth century. In its place, they proposed a model of top-down transformation centered on the interpretation of the Great Commission as calling for the nations to be discipled over against individuals. Gary North, Ray Sutton, and other Christian reconstructionists interpreted Matthew's Gospel as applying the covenant to take dominion through the slow and steady transformation of nations by taking over the structures of society.[45] The Great Commission was as much about political structures as about baptizing

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[44]See Dale M. Coulter, "Neocharismatic Christianity and the Rise of the New Apostolic Reformation," Firebrand, January 18, 2021, https://firebrandmag.com/articles/neocharismatic-christianity-and-the-rise-of-the-new-apostolic-reformation; Matthew D. Taylor, *The Violent Take It By Force: The Christian Movement That Is Threatening Our Democracy* (Minneapolis: Broadleaf, 2024); Matthew Boedy, *The Seven Mountains Mandate: Exposing the Dangerous Plan to Christianize America and Destroy Democracy* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2025).

[45]Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, fifth edition (Dallas: Point Five Press, 1988), 83-84, 277-29. See also Ray Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, second edition (Tyler: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987), 124-136; Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, second edition (Dallas: Point Five Press, 2012), 5-6, 413-424.

individuals.

Within the Reformed world, the divisions over political engagement had led to distinct interpretations of the Great Commission. One view took that biblical notion of nations as people groups, which led to a use of worldview analysis as part of evangelism in order to change the culture from the ground up. Darrow Miller articulated this view in his *Discipling Nations* (1998). Following Kuyper, Miller argued that poverty and economic development worked best when the personal, familial, and local communities worked together. Mediating institutions allowed for a communitarian approach by organizing at the local level to facilitate cultural change. This approach diverged from Christian reconstructionism that interpreted nations more in terms of geo-political entities that must be changed through taking over structures and institutions.

Neo-Charismatic ministers adopted the approach to nations articulated by Christian reconstructionists. In books released in 2008, Cindy Jacobs and Peter Wagner argued that the Great Commission meant not the conversion of individuals but the discipleship of nations by seizing institutions and becoming leaders over significant areas of culture.[46] The dominion mandate of Genesis 1 was the kingdom mandate insofar as it was establishing God's government over society. Wagner suggested that Christians must get elected to political positions and then use those positions to facilitate change. Closer to Christian reconstructionism, Jacobs argued that society should be grounded on the civil and moral law of scripture. They both concluded that this

[46]C. Peter Wagner, *Dominion: How Kingdom Action Can Change the World* (Grand Rapids: Chosen Books, 2008); republished as C. Peter Wagner, *On Earth As It Is in Heaven: Answer God's Call To Transform the World* (Grand Rapids: Chosen Books, 2012). See also Cindy Jacobs, *The Reformation Manifesto: Your Part in God's Plan to Change Nations Today* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2008). The book was slightly revised and republished as *Reformers Arise: Your Prophetic Strategy for Bringing Heaven to Earth* (Shippensberg: Destiny Image, 2021).

should occur through the "seven molders of culture" or the "seven gates of culture." Neither used "seven mountains" in 2008, but Wagner acknowledge that Lance Wallnau had used that phrase.[47] The only person who had explicitly adopted Wallnau's language was Johnny Enlow.[48] Enlow agreed with Wagner's and Jacobs' position but placed it within a symbolic interpretation of the story of Joseph.

These writers make it clear that the Seven Mountain Mandate was the contribution of Lance Wallnau.[49] Wallnau had altered Loren Cunningham's seven spheres of influence to seven mountains after he heard the near-death testimony of the Georgia State Senator Michael Crotts. While flat-lining for 34 minutes, Crotts claimed to have had a vision of seven mountains with one mountain standing behind them.[50] The seven mountains symbolized world kingdoms and the one mountain behind them symbolized the kingdom of God. Wallnau interpreted the seven spheres as mountains of influence that the church must conquer to transform the nation. The Seven Mountain Mandate is Kuyperian sphere sovereignty in Neo-Charismatic dress. Between 2008 and 2013, six books had been published advancing some form of dominionism under the Seven Mountain Mandate.

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[47]Wagner, *Dominion*, 143-144; Jacobs, *Reformation Manifesto*, 18-20.

[48]Johnny Enloy, *The Seven Mountain Prophecy: Unveiling the Coming Elijah Revolution* (Lake Mary: Creation House, 2008), 35-46; Johnny Enlow, *The Seven Mountain Mantle: Receiving the Joseph Anointing to Reform Nations* (Lake Mary: Creation House, 2009).

[49]Coulter, "Neocharismatic Christianity," Firebrand; Taylor, *The Violent Take It By Force*, 141-172; Boedy, *The Seven Mountains Mandate*, Introduction. Kindle.

[50]On Crotts' heart attack and testimony, see Mike D. Crotts, *Dead for 34 Minutes: A True Story of Life After Death* (McDonough: Rising Starr Publications, 2018). Mike and Phyllis Crotts also tell the story in this video: "Miracle Night w/Senator Mike Crotts (The Life Center 6/25/22)," https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Md7_i_26W0g.

The Seven Mountain Mandate is about the church conquering the culture by using leaders in each area to advance the cause of Christ. Wallnau learned the strategy of focusing on leaders from Doug Coe of The Fellowship Foundation. Known as the "stealth Billy Graham," before his death in 2017, Coe had worked in Washington D.C. since the late1950s with the goal of building a network of global leaders who advanced Christian principles in government.[51] Coe interpreted Jesus's statement about Christians as sheep among wolves to mean that Christians were to go to leaders (the wolves) in their communities and work to convince them about Christ; or, at least, to advance the cause of Christ. These "wolf-kings" were leaders in every sphere. They need not even be moral. Coe worked dictators in many countries if they agreed to advance Christian causes. When Wallnau declared that Trump was a Cyrus figure, he was simply applying Coe's strategy of identifying a "wolf-king" who could advance the cause of Christ. The church takes a nation through the leadership of these spheres driving out forces of wickedness. It was a soft form of Christian nationalism Wallnau was advancing with a focus on top-down transformation.

The profile of the New Apostolic Reformation and the Seven Mountain Mandate has risen over the past five years. This was partly due to the high profile role that many Neo-Charismatics like Paula White have played in both Trump administrations. It was also due to the role of Neo-Charismatics in the events surrounding January 6. More than either of these, however, this movement has had an increasing role in politics, especially in California, which is

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[51]Jeff Sharlet, *The Family: The Secret Fundamentalism at the Heart of American Power* (New York: HarperCollins, 2008), 31, 220-237. In a chapter on the seven mountains, Wallnau describes an interview with "a key Washington leader who is often referred to as the 'stealth Billy Graham.'" It's a clear reference to Doug Coe. See Lance Wallnau, "The Seven Mountain Mandate," in Ché Ahn, *The Reformers Pledge* (Shippensburg: Destiny Image, 2010), Pledge 8. Kindle.

the epicenter of this movement. For example, Ché Ahn who pastors Harvest Rock Church is a key NAR player. Recently, he launched his campaign for governor of California and is speaking at the Conservative Political Action Committee's International Faith Conference on March 25.[52]

Another example is Roy McCoy who influenced Charlie Kirk. Although he overstates his case, Boedy reveals the connection between Rob McCoy, Lance Wallnau, and Charlie Kirk. Rob McCoy operates out of the framework one finds in the Seven Mountain Mandate with its emphasis on transforming nations. McCoy is the pastor emeritus of Godspeak Calvary Chapel. He also entered political office, serving as mayor of Thousand Oaks, California. McCoy holds that the church should be involved in the state. He has claimed to be a Christian nationalist in the sense that he loves Christ and he loves America. Behind McCoy's statements is his view that Christians should become political by forming political action groups, mobilizing voting for particular candidates, and entering political office.

Under the influence of Neo-Calvinism, these Neo-Charismatic ministers have developed forms of Christian nationalism. For Cindy Jacobs, it's a hard form of Christian nationalism, rooted in the Christian reconstructionist goal of bringing the civil and moral law of Torah into the modern American context. For Wallnau and Wagner, it's a soft form of Christian nationalism that wants the government to endorse Christianity.

While there are other historical developments I should mention, these two help us discern some of the issues before us. The rhetorical deployment of Christian nationalism has created confusion among evangelicals. The center of evangelicalism remains the Christian America

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[52]See "Ché Ahn for Governor," (che4ca.com); "Ché Ahn to Join CPAC International Faith Summit," CPAC USA 2026 (cpac.org).

view, but its redescription as Christian nationalism has led some evangelicals to embrace the tag while others have eschewed it. The result is more salt than light. Some evangelicals have interpreted involvement in the political process or any form of political advocacy as Christian nationalism. Moreover, among those who embraced the tag, there are soft Christian nationalists and hard Christian nationalists. The hard Christian nationalists want some version of a confessional state in which Christian doctrine and morality are upheld. They want to resurrect Christendom. Soft Christian nationalists tend to be those who want Christians to take control of the reigns of government and use their positions to facilitate change. They want to disciple believers to take the nation. This view was accelerated when certain states did not allow churches to meet during Covid.

Pentecost, the People of God, and Politics

The confusion among evangelicals regarding the relationship between Bible and politics stems from the past decade. The task of morally forming the American people remains. It has led to heated debates over the teaching of human sexuality and marriage, human dignity with respect to life, biological sex in relation to gender, and wealth and poverty. The culture wars concern the use of education, media, and government to form and shape citizens. From their entrance into the public square, evangelicals have argued consistently that secularism and humanism represent alternative moral systems. It was not simply Rushdoony who claimed that civil and criminal laws embody morality. In the words of Alasdair MacIntyre, the questions become “Whose justice?

Which rationality?"[53] The public square is never neutral, even if secularists effectively used the courts to attempt to evacuate religion from it. Since the 1980s, however, evangelicals have joined with Catholics to use the courts to mount a defense of religion with a particular focus on religious freedom. The proliferation of evangelical legal organizations from The Rutherford Institute (1982) to the Becket Fund and Alliance Defense Fund (1994) have enabled evangelicals to coordinate their efforts at securing religious freedom and religious rights.[54] Under George W. Bush, evangelicals and Catholics also tried to implement some of their ideas on addressing poverty through public-private partnerships.

A key question in these debates has been whether transforming the culture requires a top-down strategy or a bottom-up strategy. Should Christians seek to gain control of institutions and advocate from a Judeo-Christian perspective? Should Christians seek the conversion of individuals and then build institutions who mediate Christian moral convictions? What does scripture say about these two approaches? Does the language of *ethnos* entail people groups organized into political arrangements such as the modern nation-state or peoples united around a common cultural, ethnic, or religious identity? While I cannot offer complete answers to these questions, I want to tease out some answers in conversation with the previous sections. I will begin with some broad principles that ground a Pentecost approach to politics.

The first and most obvious point is that the institutions of the church and the state must remain separate. This means that denominations should remain focused on the mission of the

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[53]Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988).

[54]Stephen P. Brown, *Trumping Religion: The New Christian Right, The Free Speech Clause, and the Courts* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2002).

church, which includes reminding the state that its power is not divine. As Reinhold Niebuhr argued, the biblical witness holds two views in tension. On the one hand, God has ordained the structures of government to establish justice and maintain social order. On the other hand, no ruler is exempt from divine judgment over the performance of those tasks.[55] One rationale for the American revolution was the judgment of God against British tyranny. This view need not be grounded in a larger narrative of America as a new Israel such as some have done. A full picture of government from Romans and Revelation is that the task of government is to uphold the social order, but it officers can fail in that task and become a demonic agents. There remains a tension between government's duty to resist anarchy with justice and the temptation of government to totalitarianism. Without remaining institutionally separate, the church cannot hold government accountable to its duty or pull it back from the temptation to deify itself.

Second, Christianity is a movement largely consisting of lay people empowered by the Spirit to bring the kingdom to all of life. It is not reducible to a single form of the institutional and visible church. The task of the visible church is to disciple the people of God to function in their gifts and callings. It does so by embodying and transmitting the story of the Triune God's plan to create life, enter into relationship with his creation, and save it from the self-destruction of sin. Scripture rehearses this story in its five acts of creation, Israel, Christ, the Holy Spirit, and the consummation. Proclaimed in the good news and enacted in sacraments and worship, this story forms the people of God, shaping their identity over against all principalities and powers. This comports with the vision of the church in the first several centuries. The mission of the

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[55]Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, vol. 2: Human Destiny (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1964), 269.

church among early Christians was first to proclaim the gospel to people who were brought into a new nation that challenged the social and cultural structures by virtue of their beliefs and practices. One may disagree with the Anabaptist narrative of a Constantinian fall or shift and still affirm this historical point.

As Oliver O'Donovan has noted, the first frontier of Christian mission was society and the second was the rulers.[56] The biblical and political question is how to coordinate these two frontiers. O'Donovan states, "the best order might, perhaps, be the missionary order: society first, government after. The truth in that order is that Christ has conquered the rulers from below, by drawing their subjects out from under their authority."[57] The church's project remains its mission to bring as many into the kingdom as possible. Christendom stems from God's blessing that mission.[58] It is the result of the church's quantitative and qualitative success, the former by numerical growth and the latter by growth among all classes, including the top two percent from which senators and rulers came.

Christendom became a structural arrangement in which church and state were distinct institutions within a single Christian society. Regardless of the government within which this arrangement occurred (monarchy, commonwealth, etc.), it was the structural arrangement that constituted Christendom. This structural arrangement was rejected from the beginning of the American experiment precisely because, more times than not, it marshaled the resources of the

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[56]Oliver O'Donovan, *The Desire of the Nations: Rediscovering the Roots of Political Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 193-197.

[57]O'Donovan, *The Desire of the Nations*, 193.

[58]O'Donovan, *The Desire of the Nations*, 195.

state to privilege one form of Christianity against another. In this sense, America has never been nor can it ever be a "Christian" nation. Hard Christian nationalism seeks to reconstitute some form of Christendom, which is why so few evangelicals support it.

The democratic experiment of America opens up the possibility of a reaffirmation of the missionary order. That order begins in Pentecost as Christ's outpouring of gifts upon his people to equip and build his new society on earth. Pentecost is about democratization through the bestowal of gifts and unity through holiness of life. It facilitates the creativity and diversity of believers so that the laity transform the landscape of the nation by following their gifts and calling into all areas of society, including politics. While the church remains institutionally separate, the people of God engage in the political life of the nation. In the nineteenth century, this approach fueled the rise of voluntary associations, which became the primary vehicles for moral formation of society as a whole. Political and social activism occurred through voluntary associations rather than denominations, establishing what R. Jonathan Moore called a "Benevolent Empire."[59]

The formation of voluntary associations highlights my third point. The democratization of Pentecost reinforces voluntary religion and entrepreneurial drive, resulting in the proliferation of institutions who advanced the mission of renewal. In the Holiness movement, educational institutions, such as Bible schools and colleges, partnered with holiness associations, parachurch organizations, and denominations to disciple and advance the mission of Christ. These mediating institutions stand between the individual and the state. In light of Pentecost, they partner with the

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[59]R. Jonathan Moore, *Suing for America's Soul: John Whitehead, The Rutherford Institute, and Conservative Christians in the Courts* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 7.

institutional church to disciple the individual and refine his or her calling. The spiritual gifts of individual persons come together through mediating institutions that encourage a communitarian approach to resolving the social and political problems of the nation.

Pentecost also advances a communitarian approach. The immediate impact of Pentecost upon the people of God was the voluntary sharing of resources and the engagement in social services. The church was to participate in Israel's call to be a holy nation through cultivating a holy community in which each person became a gift to others through the sharing of time and resources. Ultimately, this new "way" within Judaism expressed the reciprocity system behind the New Testament concept of grace. Grace pointed to the lavish bestowal of gifts by a benefactor upon others.[60] With its outpouring of spiritual gifts, Pentecost symbolized God's free and lavish grace that created a community grounded in benefaction through the giving of gifts. Ignoring existing social distinctions, this new communitarianism attracted many into its networks and slowly transformed Roman society and Western culture.

The use of voluntary associations to promote communitarianism and cultural transformation aligns with some of the core ideas within principled pluralism. Given the system of checks and balances at the local, state, and national levels, American democracy will always involve compromises. The church cannot baptize political compromise with the designation of Christian, but she can and does baptize individuals, some of whom receive gifts that compel them to enter professions of law and government. If vocation stems from gifting, then the church can facilitate the creation of mediating institutions as individuals take up their calling to pursue

[60]James R. Harrison, *Paul's Language of Grace in its Graeco-Roman Context*, reprint (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2017); John M. G. Barclay, *Paul and the Gift* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015).

the law, education, politics, or some other sphere of life. The purpose of government in this context is to allow all groups, including Christians, the religious freedom to occupy.

Finally, Pentecost actualizes the cultural mandate in Genesis 1, which drives mission. Through Pentecost, the cultural mandate has become the kingdom mandate, or the reshaping of human existence through the reign of God. Pentecost points back to the Jewish and Christian vision of human being. Grounded in the image of God, humanity is called to become cultivators of life through the creation of culture. The gifts of God are the vehicle by which this new creation occurs. This task is not about dominion over life but the creation of new life through the construction of businesses, educational institutions, media, and other mediating institutions who embody the Christian story.

Such an approach assumes the relational and vocational dimensions of the image of God as the ground of social and political existence. Pentecost's communitarian and vocational dimensions are merely the outworking of these fundamental aspects of the human person. The relational dimension of the image points toward humanity's connection to God, one another, and the land. Paul alludes to the connection to God when he describes believers as God's "handiwork" (Eph. 2:10). The image gestures toward God as the potter stooping over creation and forming humanity out of the earth. The Father shapes human existence by the Word and Spirit and then calls humanity to shape others. Pentecost underscores the continuous flow of gifts from the Father of lights to the people of God so that they may continue to shape the world. The political and the social flow from relationship to God.

The relational and vocational dimensions also relate to the connection to the land in Genesis. God forms humans from the earth and then calls them to cultivate the earth. Culture

emerges from the connection of a people to the land they inhabit. They are shaped by the land even as they shape the land. Private property matters because of the role of the land in the development of the human person. It not only gives individuals a stake in any nation, it also slowly etches the contours of the nation upon them. Renters burn it all down but owners become caretakers of creation as they cultivate and shape the land.

Conclusion

The relationship between the Bible and politics must be construed in terms of Christianity and culture rather than church and state. This requires an approach to politics that begins at Pentecost and the democratization of the people of God. When people can exercise their gifts, they enter into all areas of society, creating mediating institutions that advance Christian mission in the nation. This allows the church to remain distinct as an institution while simultaneously encourage Christians to exercise their rights as citizens.

Even though the spectre of Christian nationalism hovers over Christians, its origins were in an effort to keep Christians from entering the public square as though they could not offer their own Judeo-Christian perspective on the moral life of the nature. This perspective not only denies the important role of Christianity in the life of the nation, it seeks to push Christians back into a privatized view of religion that reinforces a naked public square. At the same time, Christians should not engage in the top-down approach of Christian nationalists. Such an approach has only led the church into compromise on its mission.