Christian nationalism a threat to Christianity, BJC chief asserts

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Christians should confront Christian nationalism not only because it harms civil society, but also because it dilutes their faith and damages the church, an expert in church-state relations told a [webinar](#) audience.

Amanda Tyler

"Christian nationalism is a threat to Christianity," Amanda Tyler, executive director of the [Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty](#), told participants in a teleconference sponsored by the BJC, Fellowship Southwest, Faith Commons, Faith Forward Dallas and CBF Texas.

Christian nationalism appropriates some of the language and symbols of genuine Christian faith but strips them of their rich meaning, she asserted.

"Christian nationalism waters down Christianity and perverts it in many ways," Tyler said.

Rather than trying to confront Christian nationalism by applying the name

to individuals who may not accept that label, Tyler suggested helping people understand what Christian nationalism means and why it is dangerous.

Churches should offer the proper forum for promoting that kind of understanding because of their commitment to discipleship and growth; their emphasis on community, relationship and accountability; and their dedication to truth-telling, she said.

'More about identity than religion'

Tyler defined Christian nationalism as "a political ideology that seeks to merge Christian and American identities, distorting both the Christian faith and America's constitutional democracy."

"The 'Christian' in Christian nationalism really is more about identity than religion," she said.

Tyler drew a distinction between patriotism—healthy love for one's country—and a brand of nationalism "that demands supremacy over all other allegiances, including to Jesus."

"Patriotism does not require us to minimize our religious convictions," she said.

Key markers of Christian nationalism include a "mythological history" that identifies the United States as a "Christian nation," an exaggerated form of American exceptionalism and an emphasis on God's providential hand in American history and politics, she said.

Sociologists who have researched Christian nationalism identify Americans who embrace the ideology as those who strongly agree with statements such as: "The federal government should declare the United States a Christian nation;" "The success of the United States is part of God's plan;"

and "The federal government should advocate Christian values."

"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," Tyler said.

'Provides cover for white supremacy'

Individuals and groups that oppose Christian nationalism are not part of a secular leftist plot "to strip God, Jesus and religion out of the public square," she insisted.

"People of all faiths and none have the right and responsibility to engage constructively in the public square," she said, quoting from the [Christians Against Christian Nationalism statement](#) that has been signed by more than 21,000 individuals

Christian nationalism and white supremacy are not synonymous, but the two ideologies do intersect, Tyler asserted.

"Christian nationalism often overlaps with and provides cover for white supremacy and racial subjugation," she said.

To those who assert government should promote and protect the majority religion in the United States and that it is imperative for political leaders to reflect Christian values, Tyler pointed to the U.S. Constitution.

The First Amendment includes the guarantee that government not prefer one religion over another, and Article VI says "no religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust."

The more extreme forms of Christian nationalism not only were evident during the [Jan. 6 insurrection](#) at the U.S. Capitol, but also the 2018 shooting at the [Tree of Life Synagogue](#) in Pittsburgh and the 2015 shooting

at the [Mother Emanuel AME Church](#) in Charleston, S.C., she said.

However, Christian nationalism represents a "broad spectrum," Tyler noted. Aspects of the ideology also are woven into more "mundane" aspects of American life, she observed, such as efforts to require that "In God We Trust" be posted in public schools—and displaying American and Christian flags year-around in church sanctuaries.