

# Christian nationalism clearly evident in Capitol riot

January 7, 2021

Signs of Christian nationalism—not to be confused with honest-to-God biblical faith—were hard to miss when a violent mob stormed the U.S. Capitol, some advocates for separation of church and state observed.

One of the first rioters to enter the Senate Chamber carried a Christian flag. Some in the crowd that seized the Capitol waved “Jesus Saves” banners. Others displayed a banner that said: “Jesus is my Savior/Trump is my president.” A flag reading “Proud American Christian” with an American flag inside an ichthus—an ancient Christian symbol—also was seen.



Amanda Tyler

Amanda Tyler, executive director of the [Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty](#), noted the misappropriation of Christian imagery and called on fellow Christian Americans to “dismantle Christian nationalism.”

“Like nearly all Americans, I watched in horror yesterday as a violent, unlawful and delusional mob attacked the seat of America’s representative democracy. My outrage increased when I saw photos of the rioters, cloaking their destructive acts in Jesus’ name and Christian imagery,” Tyler

said.

“What we all witnessed yesterday was un-American and un-Christian. Those of us who claim both identities have a special responsibility to repudiate these actions to continue the work to dismantle Christian nationalism, a dangerous ideology that permeates our society and demands a privileged place for Christianity and its adherents.”

The Baptist Joint Committee launched a [Christians Against Christian Nationalism](#) initiative last summer, condemning it as “a distortion of the gospel of Jesus Christ and a threat to American democracy.”

“This egregious display [at the U.S. Capitol] can serve as a wake-up call, but we shouldn’t be complacent about the less obvious but still insidious displays of Christian nationalism in our communities,” Tyler said.

## ‘Unholy alliance’

Americans United for Separation of Church and State issued a [statement](#) linking the mob that seized the Capitol to Christian nationalism and white supremacy.

“Make no mistake: These rioters threaten every freedom we claim, including religious freedom. The noose hung on the West Lawn of our Capitol and the signs calling on Jesus only re-emphasize the unholy alliance of this president with White Christian nationalists,” Americans United stated.

“The same people who profaned Black churches in Washington, D.C., three weeks ago are responsible for today’s abhorrent actions with the blatant backing of the president they support.”

On Twitter, Americans United Executive Director Rachel Laser was equally direct.

“What went on is not just an attempted coup but also the product of White Christian nationalism that knows no limits in pursuing its power,” [Laser tweeted](#).

## ‘Conflating of religion and politics’

In an [opinion article](#) in the *Baptist Standard*, Jack Goodyear, dean of the Gary Cook School of Leadership at Dallas Baptist University, condemned the “acts of domestic terror” at the Capitol by a mob “primed by the sitting president” who created a false narrative about a stolen election.



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the Capitol

“But for those who believed the falsehoods, the narrative became set in stone,” Goodyear wrote in the *Standard* “Voices” column.

“On Jan. 6, these beliefs spilled over into chaotic madness as a mob descended upon the Capitol, smashing windows, tearing through offices, disrupting sessions of Congress and leading to four reported deaths. Numerous flags were paraded through the Capitol, including the Confederate flag, Trump flags of various sorts and even a flag declaring, ‘Jesus Saves,’ which indicates the close intertwining of politics and faith,” he continued.

Christian nationalism has led directly to increased political instability,

Goodyear wrote.

“Politics and religion have increasingly aligned for Christians in America, leading to the belief that to be a good Christian one must vote for a certain party. Or that certain politicians are God’s chosen instruments. However, this conflating of religion and politics comes with a heavy price,” he wrote.

“One of the dangers of a society determining a leader is divinely chosen—whether viewed as King David or King Cyrus—is that the standard of righteousness morphs to become whatever that ‘chosen’ leader determines it to be.”

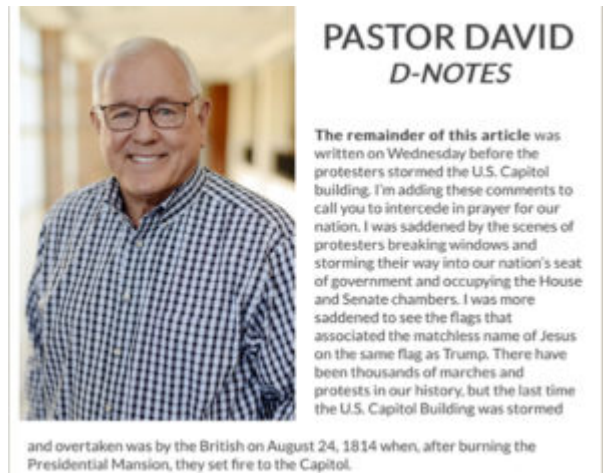
Goodyear urged Christians—particularly Baptists, who historically have been committed to separation of church and state—to resist the blending of religious and political identity.

“We as Christians must reflect, repent and lead in a new direction away from Christian nationalism, which leads to further injustice and instability,” he wrote. “We can and must remain involved in politics as salt and light, but we must not find our identities in a political tribe. We must not swear allegiance to a politician.”

## **‘Christian Nationalism on display’**

Some Baptist pastors likewise noted the Christian symbols displayed by rioters.

In his weekly email newsletter to members of Green Acres Baptist Church in Tyler, Pastor David Dykes wrote: “I was saddened by the scenes of protesters breaking windows and storming their way into our nation’s seat of government and occupying the House and Senate chambers. I was more saddened to see the flags that associated the matchless name of Jesus on the same flag as Trump.”



Dwight McKissic, pastor of Cornerstone Baptist Church in Arlington, pointed to the irony that Southern Baptist Convention leaders focus on attacking critical race theory while Christian nationalism is demonstrated at the U.S. Capitol.

“Christian Nationalism on display, while the SBC debates CRT,” McKissic [tweeted](#).

Anthony B. Bradley, professor of religion at King’s College in New York, offered a similar perspective.

Bradley [tweeted](#): “Critical Race Theory will never turn into 1812 lawlessness. Four people are dead because of Christian Nationalism, not CRT.”

He called on Southern Baptist leaders and others to “fight the right fight for once.”

Christian humorist Phil Vischer, one of the creators of “VeggieTales” and co-host of the Holy Post podcast, sardonically [tweeted](#): “Watching protesters invade the Capitol with Christian flag and a giant ‘Jesus 2020’ banner. Lawmakers are in hiding because of marauding ... Christians??

Anyone still unsure Christian nationalism is an issue??"