

TikTok account spotlights dangers of Christian nationalism

January 9, 2024

WASHINGTON (RNS)—Standing outside the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, 2023, Georgia McKee witnessed two very different responses on the second anniversary of the infamous mob attack.

Circled together and holding candles, one group of faith leaders condemned Christian nationalism, calling it a “poisonous ideology” and “gross distortion of our Christian faith.”

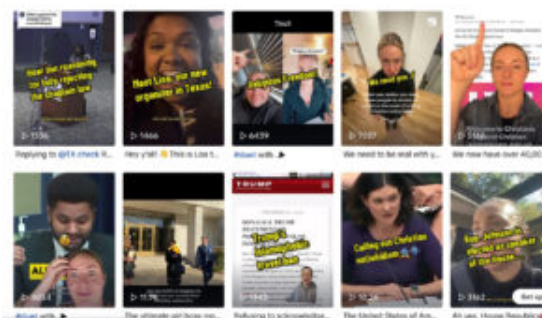
The other group marched in front of the Supreme Court building, shouting into megaphones, wearing MAGA hats, waving American flags and holding signs saying, “One Nation Under God.”

McKee took some videos on her phone, spliced them together to contrast the two gatherings and showed the final video to her co-workers at the [Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty](#), a coalition of Baptist denominations that advocates for the separation of church and state.

Next, she created a TikTok account and posted the video. In the year since, it’s had more than half a million views.

“That made us realize, oh, people like this content,” said McKee, digital communications associate at BJC. “We got lots of messages saying: ‘Thank you so much for showing this video. We need more of a Christian witness that is faithful to the message of Jesus.’”

Affiliated with BJC campaign



TikTok videos from the @EndChristianNationalism account. (Screen grab)

The [@EndChristianNationalism](#) TikTok account has gained more than 40,000 followers and earned 600,000-plus likes in the past year. The account is affiliated with BJC's [Christians Against Christian Nationalism](#) campaign, a grassroots movement that provides training and resources for combating Christian nationalism.

"It's not just about going viral for us," said McKee, who runs the account.

Raised in Texas, McKee grew up attending a Southern Baptist church where an American flag flanking the pulpit was commonplace. But in college at Belmont University in Nashville, Tenn., McKee began to reckon with what she saw as exclusionary elements of her faith.

She deconstructed, became spiritual but not religious and then joined an Episcopal church for a season. Today, McKee is a seminarian at Wake Forest University School of Divinity, where she's studying to become a Baptist minister in a more progressive Baptist tradition, like Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and Alliance of Baptists, "or whatever comes next," she told Religion News Service.

After a year of making videos where she leans into her now-trademark tiny clip-on mic and gives play-by-plays of Christian nationalism in action, McKee can spout off a definition for the topic without hesitation.

“Christian nationalism is a political ideology and cultural framework that abuses the name of Jesus for a very specific American goal,” McKee said. “Christian nationalism is not Christianity.”

Designed to educate viewers

Many of her TikToks are intended to educate viewers on the topic. She’ll highlight the Christian nationalism of figures such as Sean Feucht, Lauren Boebert and Marjorie Taylor Greene, while also celebrating Christians, such as Shane Claiborne and BJC Executive Director Amanda Tyler, who oppose the ideology. McKee also uses the platform to connect people to resources for addressing Christian nationalism in churches and in local politics.

“We’ve really seen the impact of online to offline organizing with TikTok,” McKee said. “We multiple times have helped people develop their public comment that they’re going to go and share that evening at their local school board or city council meeting.”

After stumbling across the @EndChristianNationalism account, Megan Fanning, who lives in Mansfield, began connecting with McKee this spring after Texas lawmakers passed a bill allowing chaplains in public schools.

“We’ve communicated about the chaplain policy ever since the bill was signed, because the school boards had six months to vote for or against it,” Fanning said. “She offered resources, a chaplain toolkit, fact sheets, educational PDFs.”

The resources led Fanning to email her school board members referencing

facts and information provided in the Christians Against Christian Nationalism toolkit.

Field organizer working in North Texas

Christians Against Christian Nationalism also hired its first field organizer, Lisa Jacob, to lead opposition to Christian nationalism in North Texas. Jacob delivered a rousing public comment condemning the chaplain bill at a Mansfield school board meeting in December, shortly before the board voted against implementing the chaplaincy bill in the school district.

“To have a field organizer from Christians Against Christian Nationalism come and speak at our school board meeting on behalf of our community against this chaplain policy meant so much,” Fanning said. “I like to think that community feedback might have made a difference in them voting against and rejecting the policy.”

Not just a ‘progressive’ issue

While the account certainly attracts mainline Christians, McKee said, it’s not just theologically progressive Christians who are engaged. McKee is intentional about avoiding theological or political debates that aren’t centered on Christian nationalism, an approach she says helps appeal to a broad audience.

“We’re seeing that even in the evangelical camp, even conservative Christians that I might not agree with on any other topic, are able to still say Christian nationalism is a topic that has to be talked about, that it has to be something that’s combated in all local churches, not just progressive churches,” said McKee.

“Fighting Christian nationalism, for it to truly end, it cannot be a

progressive issue. It has to be a Christian issue.”

In addition to attracting a range of Christians, and even many non-Christians, the account engages people of a variety of ages, especially millennials in their 30s and 40s. Having a space explicitly dedicated to opposing Christian nationalism on TikTok is crucial, McKee asserted.

It’s especially true, given the influence of conservative Christian celebrities such as Allie Beth Stuckey and Sadie Robertson Huff, who, McKee said, have been influenced by Christian nationalism.

“We’re seeing like this old school fundamentalism almost become trendy and cute,” said McKee.

Tim Whitaker, creator of the nonprofit The New Evangelicals who runs the organization’s hugely popular TikTok account, said part of @EndChristianNationalism’s success on the platform can be attributed to its focus on giving people verifiable facts.

“What I like about their account is that they’re giving a lot of just data. You know, hey, here’s what this person said, here’s what this person did,” Whitaker said.

Simply reporting instances of Christian nationalism is critical in a time when the average American is likely unaware of the extent to which Christian nationalism is fueling national politics, he added.

“I think it’s really important, going into 2024 more than ever, that there are Christians who are loud about resisting such an ideology and movement for the sake of all their neighbors,” Whitaker said.