

# Voices: ‘Here am I, send me:’ Our call and response

August 31, 2021

“Those who have served through the ages and have drawn inspiration from the Book of Isaiah, when the Lord says: ‘Whom shall I send? Who shall go for us?’ The American military has been answering for a long time. ‘Here I am, Lord. Send me. [Here I am, send me.](#)’

“Each one of these women and men of our armed forces are the heirs of that tradition of sacrifice, of volunteering to go into harm’s way to risk everything, not for glory, not for profit, but to defend what we love and the people we love.”

When I heard those remarks from President Joe Biden on Aug. 26, I was bothered by them and confused how Isaiah 6:8 was being used in this situation. Using the verse in relation to sending military personnel to war seemed completely out of context and a poor use of the text, even borderline dangerous.

However, at the same time, Rep. Dan Crenshaw, R-Texas—and no fan of Biden—[tweeted the same verse](#) from Isaiah in support of U.S. troops. Coupling that tweet with the president’s remarks, I wondered if this actually was a commonly used verse for the American military. Certainly, Rep. Crenshaw has no desire to imitate President Biden.

My ignorance was revealed with a quick Google search, which found numerous sites selling merchandise for military families referencing Isaiah 6:8, as well as various military support groups including the U.S. Army Ranger Association.

Additionally, in 2019, then-Vice President Mike Pence, speaking at Fort

Bragg, N.C., said the following: “I leave here today with renewed confidence. I know as long as we have men and women like all of you with the selflessness and the courage to serve; as long as we have heroes willing to put your lives on the line for ours and for our freedom, and as long as we have patriots who heard the call, ‘Whom shall I send? Who will go for us?’ And you said, ‘[Here am I. Send me.](#)’—I know we will protect our nation.”

In other words, the president was not referencing Isaiah 6:8 oddly as justification for war, but continuing a tradition and common refrain in this country to provide praise and admiration for those who have sacrificed so much to serve.

This is not an example of Christian Nationalism, which is something wholly different, but rather a use of civil religion, in the same way we use “God Bless America” or “In God We Trust.”

## **Civil religion vs. Christian Nationalism**

As historian Robert Bellah described, [civil religion](#) played “a crucial role in the development of American institutions and still provide[s] a religious dimension for the whole fabric of American life, including the political sphere. This public religious dimension is expressed in a set of beliefs, symbols, and rituals.”

As a Baptist who holds deeply to the separation of church and state, I am not a fan of civil religion, but I accept it as part of the fabric of our country, even while refraining from using it personally.

On the other hand, Christian Nationalism seeks to define America as a “Christian Nation” promoting a specific preferred culture and demographic.

A recent *Christianity Today* article described [Christian Nationalism](#),

propagated by scholars such as Samuel Huntington, as arguing “the United States government must defend and enshrine its predominant ‘Anglo-Protestant’ culture to ensure the survival of American democracy.”

“Sometimes,” the article continues, “Christian nationalism is most evident not in its political agenda, but in the sort of attitude with which it is held: an unstated presumption that Christians are entitled to primacy of place in the public square because they are heirs of the true or essential heritage of American culture, that Christians have a presumptive right to define the meaning of the American experiment because they see themselves as America’s architects, first citizens, and guardians.”

## **Isaiah 6:8 in political context**

This is not the manner in which Isaiah 6:8 has been used in the examples given above. Instead, the common reference, “Here am I, send me,” is more in the symbolic use of civil religion than an ethnic, anti-democratic sense present in Christian Nationalism.

One can say I’m merely parsing words here; however, while I do not favor the use of Isaiah 6:8 even in the ceremonial way of civil religion, there is a significant difference between civil religion and Christian Nationalism.

Civil religion is slippery syncretism. Christian Nationalism is militant ideology. We should strive to keep the two distinct in our minds to counter the particular threat to freedom posed by Christian Nationalism.

## **Prayers**

Most importantly, concerning the Kabul terrorist attack, we should offer prayers for the families of those killed and injured in that tragedy. It is a reminder of the violence constantly faced by the brave men and women and

all they and their families have sacrificed for 20 years.

I know there are different opinions on what should or shouldn't happen in Afghanistan. I'm no expert on it. I also know there is plenty of blame for all, but for now, let's offer prayers for our military and their families, our leaders and the people of Afghanistan.

*Jack Goodyear is the dean of the Cook School of Leadership and professor of political science at Dallas Baptist University. The views expressed are those of the author and not intended to represent any institution.*