

Courageous Conversation about Christian Nationalism

Why have a Courageous Conversation about Christian nationalism? Let's start by defining what we mean by the phrase, "Christian nationalism." *Nationalism* can and should be distinguished from *patriotism*. They are not synonymous terms. (For example, supporting the military and saying the Pledge of Allegiance does not make a person a Christian nationalist.) Being a Christian who shows pride or supports his/her country of residence does not make that individual a Christian nationalist. Support for the nation where we reside is not wrong; in fact, Christians are commanded to pray for those in political leadership (Romans 13).

Nationalism includes affirmations such as "all citizens should speak a certain language" and identifying with the nation as one's highest allegiance. Christian nationalism adheres to the belief that Christianity should be the cultural center of the nation.

This sample outline is in three sessions, since there are many tensions involved in this issue. Where exactly is the line between patriotism and nationalism? When does allegiance to God conflict with allegiance to country? How should Christians discern God's will, not just for their lives, but for nations and governmental policies? These questions should be discussed in an atmosphere that promotes listening to the underlying values of participants. Likewise, a learning environment should encourage participants to question their assumptions and see these issues from a biblical perspective informed by Christian tradition.

Session 1

If you are using a videoconference platform, consider doing a practice session to enable participants to become more familiar with the videoconference platform. Help them to use the chat features, to respond to a poll, to practice going to a breakout room and returning, and so on. This will help the videoconference platform become more of a tool for conversation and less of a distraction.

Setting for a Safe Environment:

- Setting the environment is important to provide participants the proper atmosphere of reverence, intentionality, respect, listening, and learning.
- Project or post a covenant or conversation guidelines. A covenant or guidelines will help participants know what to expect in the conversations and help set the proper tone for the conversation. (For samples, see ["Sample Guidelines for Courageous Conversations."](#)) It can be helpful to distinguish a safe space (where participants are cautious with their language so as to not offend) from a brave space (where exploratory questions are encouraged). Another option to mark God's presence is the use of candle. It can be lit before the opening prayer and extinguished following the closing prayer.
- Round tables or even circles of chairs without tables are useful for participants to be able to communicate within their small groups. [If using a videoconference platform such as Zoom, it is recommended to make use of the breakout rooms so that conversations can be more intimate and allow more participants to speak.]
- If holding an in-person event, as participants enter the room, have them choose a number that corresponds to a numbered table or set of chairs. Participants then sit at the corresponding table or circle of chairs. Six people per table or area is recommended for the best small-group dynamics. If you are using facilitators (and it is recommended that you do), assign one facilitator

per group. [If using a videoconference platform, randomly assign participants to breakout groups. It is recommended that groups be even smaller in video breakout groups (4-5, maximum).]

- Each table or open area of a circle of chairs should include a centerpiece (for example, a cross), some identifying marker for participants to know their table assignment (could use numbers or fruits of the spirit), and a talking stick and/or timer. Another optional component is to have cards with conversation starters for early participants to begin to talk to one another. A talking stick can be a small cross or a plastic two-minute game timer. The beneficial feature of the game timer is that it also serves as a timer to limit the speaker to two minutes before having to pass the talking stick and/or timer to the next participant. [If using a digital platform, have the facilitator or someone elected from the group use a smart phone or other device to monitor the time.]
- Factsheets. At the end of each session is a sample factsheet. This is not meant to be exhaustive or comprehensive. Rather, these are some foundational beliefs, Scripture references, and other resources to provide participants some footing into the conversation.

Needed:

Basket with numbers
Tables for small-group discussions
Table numbers for each table
Candles for each table
Small crosses or some other markers to serve as [talking sticks](#)
Printout or screen for displaying “Guidelines for the Conversation”
Printout of factsheet for each participant
Printout of [prayers \(See “Prayer Guide.”\)](#)
Large sheet of paper and markers
Tape or adhesive to post the large sheet of paper

Recommended:

Bell or chime for beginning and ending times of silence
Microphone to enable everyone to hear the speakers clearly

Estimated Timeline

The following is based on a 120-minute timeframe. Adjust as needed:

Opening Prayer (3 minutes)
Overview (5 minutes)
Micro-Groups (10 minutes)
Hymn (5 minutes)
Practice Dialogue (15 minutes)
Break (10 minutes)
Personal Assessment of the Situation (5 minutes)
Small-Group Time (50 minutes)
Large-Group Talk Back (15 minutes)
Closing Prayer (2 minutes)

Courageous Conversation

OPENING PRAYER

- Begin with silence and/or the lighting of a candle to represent God’s presence. This time of silence is important to center yourselves and mark the space and time as unique. Have a copy of the prayer for everyone to follow along or participate in the prayer. ([See “Prayer Guide” for sample prayers.](#))

OVERVIEW

- Point out and read the conversation guidelines. Reinforce that this is a brave space for people to freely express their opinions and perspectives. Emphasize that participants are to listen for the assumptions underlying their own and other people’s perspectives.

MICRO-GROUPS

- Form people into groups with no more than three people in each group. Allow each participant no more than two minutes to respond to the question, “What brought you to this conversation?” Remind participants that this is a time of naming and listening, not discussion – that will come later.
- [If using a videoconference platform, have the host share the screen to display the question or type the question in the chat panel for all participants to see. Then break into breakout rooms. In breakout rooms, participants could answer in alphabetical order, so there is less of a pause.]

HYMN – UPBEAT SONG OR HYMN (5 MINUTES)

- Singing together reminds us that although we do not think alike, we all worship the Triune God together. [If you are using a videoconference platform, you could play a YouTube video of a choir singing and invite participants to sing on their own. Another option would be to replace this hymn singing time with another relationship building question – “Who most influenced your Christian walk?”]

PRACTICING DIALOGUE (15 MINUTES)

- **Topic:** “Which do you prefer: hymns or praise songs?” Or “Which meal of the day is your favorite?” Or any other question that will allow for difference of opinion but not likely to produce heated argument.
 - Using one of the above questions, or choosing one of your own, allow participants to get a feel for this style of conversation. (Ideally, the practice topic is one where participants have different perspectives but are not overly passionate about them.) Most adults are used to butting in and talking over one another. A true dialogue style is uncomfortable for many participants. It can feel mechanical or forced. It is normal for participants to feel slightly constrained or frustrated. However, dialogue reinforces listening and learning.
 - After reading (or posting) the question, pause for one minute of silent reflection.
 - After the minute of silent reflection, whoever would like to speak first should use the talking stick or plastic timer. Whatever is being used as the talking stick should be passed to the next person who would like to speak. The individual who wants to speak can indicate this desire by raising a hand or by passing the talking stick to the right or left. Participants can pass if they don’t have anything to say. [If using a videoconference platform, you might go in alphabetical order or reverse alphabetical order.]

BREAK

PERSONAL ASSESSMENT OF THE SITUATION (5 MINUTES)

- Give time for participants to read over the factsheet. Allow them time to write out questions and comments. Ask them to include other experiences and scripture passages that inform their perspective.
- (The purpose of this exercise is twofold: (1) It gives participants a chance to write out and reflect on their beliefs [and assumptions]. (2) It will help counterbalance any ideas that might provoke or derail the conversation since participants have had a chance to calmly consider their positions.)

SMALL-GROUP TIME*

- This style of group dialogue emphasizes clarity of thought and naming assumptions or perceptions about the topic. The focus here is on attentive listening, not debating or persuading.
 - Ask participants to sit with their assigned table number. As with the practice dialogue, one minute of silence precedes the dialogue for each question. Talking sticks should guide the conversations. Post the questions for all to see. [See above recommendations if using a videoconference platform for the order of conversation and posting of the questions.]
1. **What concerns or values are most important to you in this conversation?** (15 minutes)
 2. **(If time permits) Where is the line between appreciation of an object, institutions, and people and idolatry?** (10 minutes)
 - Once complete, repeat the same process for the following questions:
 1. **What Bible stories or passages shape how you view this issue?** (15 minutes)
 2. **Do you believe America to be a Christian nation? What qualifies as a Christian nation? Can any nation truly be Christian?** (15 minutes)
 3. **(If time permits) Why might it be important to distinguish the freedom we experience in Christ from the political idea of freedom?**

LARGE-GROUP TALK BACK (10 MINUTES)

- **What did you learn? What did you hear that was new? or What did someone else say that you would like to affirm? What did you hear that has you thoughtful?**
 - This is a time for participants to hear from different groups. It is a time to share what they have learned or are still wrestling with. This is not the time for monologues.
 - One best practice is for this time to be facilitated by a trained facilitator or moderator. Facilitators keep the group focused on the process and enable participants to hear what is being expressed in the best possible light.
 - If using a videoconference platform, one option would be to combine two or three groups instead of doing this activity as one large group.
 - If possible, ask participants to use a microphone when they speak so that everyone can hear. Give a time limit for how long each person may speak. One way to emphasize attentive listening is to have participants state only what others have stated. This is intended to keep people from stating their own perspectives (and often pet agendas).
 - Before ending, allow any participant who would like to answer in one sentence, **“One thing that I will take with me from this conversation is . . .”**

CLOSING PRAYER

- End with a time of silence and a closing prayer. Have a copy of the prayer for everyone to follow along or participate in the prayer. ([See “Prayer Guide” for sample prayers.](#))

*For more detailed instructions about these models, consult [The Little Book of Cool Tools for Hot Topics](#) by Ron Kraybill and Evelyn Wright

Factsheet/Sample Talking Points 1

Teachable Points/Sample Factsheet (adjust as needed) (The following is a minimal representation of teachable points. Be aware there are many others that could be included. The aim of these outlines is more about listening and uncovering assumptions than hosting a debate or passing on information. As noted in the [Introduction to the Sample Courageous Conversation Outlines](#), the point is not providing more information or arriving at a consensus.)

Idolatry – Any undue adoration of a created thing, idea, person, or institution that we ascribe worth to above God. While commonly thought of as specific, tangible figurines as we might encounter in the Old Testament, more subtle forms of idolatry can be even more pernicious when these idols are not as tangible.

- A biblical example of a good becoming idolatrous can be found in Isaiah 22:7-11. Being prepared and even militarily for defense is good. But when King Hezekiah and the people trusted or had their security in that above God, then it became idolatry.

Patriotism – Patriotism centers on gratitude for one’s nation and support for its economic and other interests. Patriots desire the common good for all citizens and work towards that end through voting, service (jury, military, local government committees, etc.), and actively engaging in democratic processes (including protests).

Nationalism – The supporting of interests and values of one nation at the expense of other nations and identifying with the nation as one’s highest allegiance. Those who tend toward nationalism affirm that all should speak a certain language, have common ethnicity, and cultural values. Extreme nationalism supports isolationism, national superiority, and shuns foreign trade and cooperation with other nations.

Christian nationalism – Christian nationalism combines nationalism with the idea that Christianity is the identifying cultural center of the nation. In some American versions of Christian nationalism, people believe that laws should be enacted to uphold Christianity as the dominant religion. In more extreme versions, some believe that God’s appointed “chosen apostles” should govern and help transform many aspects of the culture – entertainment, policies, schools, and so on.

New Apostolic Reformation – This is a loose affiliation of Christians and churches that seeks to be a new stream of Christianity. Breaking from more traditional Pentecostal and Charismatic churches, the New Apostolic Reformation (NAR) believes God has appointed “apostles” to be governors of a “New World Order.” NAR places special emphasis on God’s direct revelation through specific people and experiences (such as dreams) above Scripture. It also goes by the names of “Dominionism” and “The Third Wave.” Why is this movement important? It has grown in influence through social media and with a few politicians regarding the importance of spiritual warfare in transforming the culture toward Christian nationalism.

Prophets – Biblical prophets were much more than those who could foresee future events. They often embodied their message and foretold God’s truths to the communities God called them to.

Freedom – Political freedom versus Christian freedom. Political freedom is the experience of liberty from governmental oppression. The freedom we experience in our relationship with Christ is liberation from the forces of sin and death. Christians experience freedom from sin and death and freedom for loving God and neighbor. (See John 8:31-51.)

- See also
 - “Article XXIII – Of the Rules of the United States of American and “Of the Duty of Christians to the Civil Authority of the Articles of Religion in *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church*
 - Article XVI – Civil Government of the Confessions of Faith in *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church*
 - ¶164 Article V. The Political Community in the Social Principles, specifically paragraphs C. *Church and State Relations* and F. *Civil Obedience and Civil Disobedience* of the *Book of Discipline*.

Session 2

Setting for a Safe Environment:

Set up the room with a small circle of chairs (4-8). See note below if using video conference platform.

Place “Guidelines for the Conversation” around the room in large print or on a projection screen (For samples of Guidelines see this [link](#)).

Needed:

Small circle of chairs

Paper and pencil for each person

Small cross or some other marker to serve as a [talking stick](#)

Printout or screen for displaying Guidelines

Printout of factsheet

Printout of prayers

Recommended:

Bell or chime for beginning and ending times of silence

Microphone to enable all to hear the speaker(s) clearly

Estimated Timeline:

The following is based on a ninety-minute timeframe. Adjust as needed:

Opening Prayer (3 minutes)

Overview (5 minutes)

Micro-Groups (10 minutes)

Opening Question (10 minutes)

Personal Assessment of the Situation (5 minutes)

Break (5 minutes)

Small Group Time (40 minutes)

Large-Group Talk Back (10 minutes)

Closing Prayer (2 minutes)

Courageous Conversation

OPENING PRAYER

- Begin with silence and/or the lighting of a candle to represent God’s presence. This time of silence is important to center the group and mark the space and time as unique. Have a copy of the prayer for everyone to follow along or participate in the prayer. [\(For examples see this link.\)](#)

OVERVIEW

- Give an overview of the main topic of discussion. Point out and read the conversation guidelines. Reinforce that this space is a safe place for people to express their opinions and perspectives freely and bravely.

MICRO-GROUPS

- Form people into small groups, with a maximum of three people to a group. Allow each participant no more than two minutes to name questions, fears, or hesitations about the topic. Remind the participants that this is a time of naming and listening, not for discussion – that will come later.
- [If using a videoconference platform, have the host share the screen to display the question or type the question in the chat panel for all participants to see. Then break into breakout rooms. In breakout rooms, participants could answer in alphabetical order, so there is less of a pause.]

OPENING QUESTION

- Form people into small groups of two or three people. Allow each participant to explore the questions, “When have you been most proud of the United States?” Or “When were you the least proud to be an American?”

PERSONAL ASSESSMENT OF THE SITUATION

- Give time for participants to read over the factsheet. Allow them time to write out questions and comments. Ask them to include other experiences and scripture passages that inform their perspective.
- (The purpose of this exercise is at least twofold: (1) It gives participants a chance to write out and reflect on their beliefs [and assumptions]. (2) It will help counterbalance any ideas that might provoke or derail the conversation, since participants have had a chance to calmly consider their positions.)

BREAK

SMALL-GROUP TIME*

- This style of group dialogue emphasizes clarity of thought and naming assumptions or perceptions about the topic. The focus here is on attentive listening, not debating or persuading.
 - Ask participants to sit with their assigned table number. As with the practice dialogue, one minute of silence precedes the dialogue for each question. Talking sticks should guide the conversations. Post the questions for all to see. [See above recommendations if using a videoconference platform for the order of conversation and posting of the questions.]
- 1. How do Christians discern God’s will and God’s presence? (10 minutes)**
 - 2. How can Christians discern whether a “message” is from God? How can Christians discern whether a specific person is a prophet of God? (10 minutes)**

- Once complete, repeat the same process for the following questions:
- 3. **How can Christians discern between misinformation and disinformation?** (10 minutes)
- 4. **What role do Christians have in stopping or keeping from spreading misinformation and disinformation?** (10 minutes)

LARGE-GROUP TALK BACK (10 MINUTES)

- **What did you learn? What did you hear that was new? or What did someone else say that you would like to affirm? What did you hear that has you thoughtful?**
 - This is a time for participants to hear from different groups. It is a time to share what they have learned or are still wrestling with. This is not the time for monologues.
 - One best practice is for this time to be facilitated by a trained facilitator or moderator. Facilitators keep the group focused on the process and enable participants to hear what is being expressed in the best possible light.
 - If using a videoconference platform, one option would be to combine two or three groups instead of doing this activity as one large group.
 - If possible, ask participants to use a microphone when they speak so that everyone can hear. Give a time limit for how long each person may speak. One way to emphasize attentive listening is to have participants state only what others have stated. This is intended to keep people from stating their own perspectives (and often pet agendas).
 - Before ending, allow any participant who would like to answer in one sentence, **“One thing that I will take with me from this conversation is . . .”**

CLOSING PRAYER

- End with a time of silence and a closing prayer. Have a copy of the prayer for everyone to follow along or participate in the prayer. ([See “Prayer Guide” for sample prayers.](#))

Factsheet/Sample Talking Points 2

Teachable Points/Sample Factsheet (adjust as needed)

The following is a minimal representation of teachable points. Be aware there are many others that could be included. The aim of these outlines is more about listening and uncovering assumptions than hosting a debate or passing on information. As noted in the [Introduction to the Sample Courageous Conversation Outlines](#), the point is not providing more information or arriving at a consensus.

- Scripture passages of note (a minor sampling)
 - Deuteronomy 18:20-22 – God is speaking to Moses about a prophet who will replace him. We do find some general principles about prophets: they can be proven to be true if what they do say in fact comes true. Another principle to notice is that we do not have to fear those who make false assertions.
 - Colossians 1:10-29 – In this passage, note freedom from sin (1:13-14), Jesus is head of the church (1:18); Paul as messenger (prophet) suffers for the message (1:24).
 - 1 John 4:1-9 – Discerning what is from God and what is false is a communal exercise (for example, notice the use of the plural in verse 6 – “we,” “us”). The test of truthfulness is love.
 - Hebrews 5:14 – Discernment is work that takes maturity and practice

- *Misinformation* – False or misleading information that is knowingly or unknowingly spread.
- *Disinformation* – Intentionally and/or strategically spreading false or misleading information with the purpose of deceiving. Disinformation is often used by governments and institutions to further their interests.
- Prophets/Prophecy and Discernment
 - *Prophets* – Biblical prophets were much more than those who could foresee future events. They often embodied their message and foretold God’s truths to the communities God called them to.
 - Old Testament Scholar Abraham Heschel repeatedly points out how the prophets were not merely announcers of judgment but were invited to suffer with and be in solidarity with the people (see Hosea as a prime example). Heschel writes, “Therefore, the prophetic speeches are not factual pronouncements. What we hear is not objective criticism or the cold proclamation of doom. The style of legal, objective utterance is alien to the prophet. He dwells upon God’s inner motives, not only upon His historical decisions” (Abraham Heschel. *The Prophets*, Ecco Press, 2001, page 29).
 - “Naïve or vulgar patriotism pandering to the natural instincts of the masses, the attitude of ‘My country, right or wrong’ was precisely what the prophets condemned . . . Indeed, *vox populi* [voice of the people], at least during the lifetime of the prophets, seems to have questioned their loyalty to state and country. Amos and Jeremiah, for example, were decried as traitors and exposed to abuse and attack . . . Pure patriotism may be an apt characterization of the so-called false prophets. These reassuring seers of good things were minions of monarchs and favorites of the people. The confidence with which they predicted peace, if it cannot be traced to their flattery of princes or to their corruptibility (Mic. 3:5), must have had its roots deep in the instincts and affections, in a certainty of divine protection for what normal man cares most about: life, country, security . . . Samuel, Nathan, and Elijah had already declared that God was no patron of kings, and the great prophets uttered threats not only against kings, but against country and nation, thus challenging the conception of God as the unconditional protector and patron...There is a prophetic ring in the words of Thomas Jefferson: ‘Indeed, I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just.’” (Heschel, *The Prophets*, 542-543).
 - *New Apostolic Reformation* – This is a loose affiliation of Christians and churches that seeks to be a new stream of Christianity. Breaking from more traditional Pentecostal and Charismatic churches, the New Apostolic Reformation (NAR) believes God has appointed “apostles” to be governors of a “New World Order.” NAR places special emphasis on God’s direct revelation through specific people and experiences (such as dreams) above Scripture. It also goes by the names of “Dominionism” and “The Third Wave.” Why is this movement important? It has grown in influence through social media and with a few politicians regarding the importance of spiritual warfare in transforming the culture toward Christian nationalism.
 - *Prophecy* is often misunderstood. It is often conflated with predicting the future. We see with the biblical prophets (including Jesus) that being prophetic often includes not only opposition, but also great suffering (and even death). The biblical prophets do not merely “preach” their message; they embody it (for example, Hosea and John the Baptist). The prophets are part of the message, and they risk their comfort and security to deliver it.
 - *Discernment* – Author and theologian Simon Chan is helpful in thinking about how Christians and the church can do the work of discernment. In reflecting on the role of church leaders,

- Chan writes, “The real leader is Christ, the head who communicates his will to the entire body, not just to a special class of leaders. The leader’s role is to make explicit what God is saying implicitly to his people. In practical terms, this means that no Christian leader has the right to lead unless he or she first learns to humbly listen to what God is saying in and through the ordinary members of the flock” (Simon Chan, *Spiritual Theology*, 210).
- Discernment is not easy work. Chan compares it to learning to play chess. He explains, “The first thing we do is learn the ground rules of the game. Knowing the ground rules of chess does not make anyone a good chess player, but it gets a person into the game. Both Scripture and Christian tradition furnish us with some ground rules for discernment, which beginners would do well to heed if they are to grow into discerning Christians” (Chan, 202).
 - Similarly, we read in *The United Methodist Book of Discipline*, “[John] Wesley believed that the living core of the Christian faith was revealed in Scripture, illumined by tradition, vivified in personal experience, and confirmed by reason” (**Book of Discipline**, 82).
 - “The genuine work of the Spirit characteristically brings greater unity to the body of Christ rather than division, since this work is always consonant with what deep is within the heart of the Father and the Son: ‘that they may be one as we are one’ (Jn 17:11). This biblical pattern of knowing a tree by its fruit is the ground rule of discernment, which the Christian tradition further elaborated” (Chan, 203).
- See also
 - *The Book of Discipline*, 2016. ¶105. Section 4 – Our Theological Task

Session 3

Setting for a Safe Environment:

Set up the room with a small circle of chairs (4-8). See note below if using videoconference platform.

Place Guidelines for the Conversation around the room in large print or on a projection screen (For samples of Guidelines see this [link](#)).

Needed:

- Small circle of chairs
- Paper and pencil for each person
- Small cross or some other marker to serve as a [talking stick](#)
- Printout or screen for displaying Guidelines
- Printout of prayers

Recommended:

- Bell or chime for beginning and ending times of silence
- Microphone – to enable all to hear the speaker(s) clearly

Estimated Timeline:

The following is based on a ninety-minute timeframe. Adjust as needed:

- Opening Prayer (3 minutes)
- Overview (5 minutes)
- Micro-Groups (10 minutes)
- Personal Assessment of the Situation (5 minutes)
- The Spiral (40 minutes)

Break (5 minutes)
Large-Group Reflection (20 minutes)
Closing Prayer (2 minutes)

Courageous Conversation

OPENING PRAYER

- Begin with silence and/or the lighting of a candle to represent God's presence. This time of silence is important to center the group and mark the space and time as unique. Have a copy of the prayer for everyone to follow along or participate in the prayer. ([For examples see this link.](#))

OVERVIEW

- Give an overview of the main topic of discussion. Point out and read the conversation guidelines. Reinforce that this space is a safe place for people to express their opinions and perspectives freely and bravely.

MICRO-GROUPS

- Form people into small groups, with a maximum of three people to a group. Allow each participant no more than two minutes to name questions, fears, or hesitations about the topic. Remind the participants that this is a time of naming and listening, not for discussion – that will come later.
- [If using a videoconference platform, have the host share the screen to display the question or type the question in the chat panel for all participants to see. Then break into breakout rooms. In breakout rooms, participants could answer in alphabetical order, so there is less of a pause.]

PERSONAL ASSESSMENT OF THE SITUATION

- Make sure each person has a piece of paper and pencil for this exercise. Give participants five minutes to write down biblical stories, passages, doctrine, facts, and other opinions that support their ideas about the separation of idolatry and patriotism.
(The purpose of this exercise is at least twofold: (1) It gives participants a chance to write out and reflect on their beliefs [and their assumptions]. (2) It will help counterbalance any ideas that might provoke or derail the conversation, since participants have had a chance to calmly consider their positions.)

THE SPIRAL*

- This style of group dialogue allows participants to voice their perspectives freely. If needed, ask speakers to use a microphone so that all can hear.
- In the room, place six chairs in a circle. Include a cross or some other symbol to serve as a talking stick within the circle. It is a good idea to include other symbols as well (candles, altar, etc.). Allow participants to sit anywhere **except** the circle. After a time of prayer or silence, invite whoever would like to enter the circle to do so. Once the circle is full [it is fully acceptable if this takes some time], one of the participants may use the talking stick to speak. Be sure to designate a time limit. Once the individual has completed speaking, he or she passes the talking

stick to the person on the left. Individuals may return to their seats after the person on the left has completed speaking. Once people leave their seats, the seats within the circle are open for someone else to take. Thus, people spiral in and out of the circle.

- If using a videoconference platform, have the first four or five participants who volunteer to become the “inner circle” conversation. After each person speaks a given number of times (two or three), have them spiral out for a new round of participants. One option would be to have them spiral out one at a time with a new participant joining the “inner circle” or wait and have all new participants.
- The topics or questions could include – **When does our allegiance to fellow Christians conflict with our allegiance to our country? When does our allegiance to God conflict with our allegiance to our country? What’s the line between healthy patriotism (healthy pride) of country and Christian nationalism? What does healthy patriotism look like for Christians and the church? Why might Christian nationalism be problematic? Why might Christian nationalism be hazardous for evangelistic efforts of the church?**
- After approximately twenty minutes of using the spiral in this method, the facilitator could allow a little more dialogue back and forth by allowing participants in the circle to stay until after they have spoken twice.

BREAK

LARGE-GROUP TALK BACK (20 MINUTES)

- This time is for the larger group to reflect on some of the statements that were made during the spiral. The aim is to reflect on the perspectives heard from other participants.
- This is a time for participants to hear from different groups. It is a time to share what they have learned or are still wrestling with. This is not the time for monologues. This can also be a time for participants to respond to a question such as: **What will be different for you or what will you do differently after this series of conversations?**
- One best practice is for this time to be facilitated by a trained facilitator or moderator. Facilitators keep the group focused on the process and enable participants to hear what is being expressed in the best possible light.
- If using a videoconference platform, one option would be to combine two or three groups instead of doing this activity as one large group.
- If possible, ask participants to use a microphone when they speak so that everyone can hear. Give a time limit for how long each person may speak. One way to emphasize attentive listening is to have participants state only what others have stated. This is intended to keep people from stating their own perspectives (and often pet agendas).
- Before ending, allow any participant who would like to answer in one sentence, **“One thing that I will take with me from this conversation is . . .”**

CLOSING PRAYER

- End with a time of silence and a closing prayer. Have a copy of the prayer for everyone to follow along or participate in the prayer. ([For examples see this link.](#))

*For more detailed instructions about these models, consult [The Little Book of Cool Tools for Hot Topics](#) by Ron Kraybill and Evelyn Wright.

Factsheets/Sample Talking Points 3

Teachable Points/Sample Factsheet (adjust as needed)

The following is a minimal representation of teachable points. Be aware there are many others that could be included. The aim of these outlines is more about listening and uncovering assumptions than hosting a debate or passing on information. As noted in the [Introduction to the Sample Courageous Conversation Outlines](#), the point is not providing more information or arriving at a consensus.

- Scripture passages of note (a minor sampling)
 - Psalm 96:5
 - Isaiah 22:7-11
 - John 8:31-51
 - Romans 12:1-2
 - Colossians 1:10-29 – In this passage, note freedom from sin (1:13-14), Jesus is head of the church (1:18); Paul as messenger (prophet) suffers for the message (1:24).
 - Philippians 3:20
 - Hebrews 13:13-14
 - Revelation – One of the underlying questions in the book of Revelation is whether we live according to the values of New Jerusalem (The fullness of the kingdom that is coming and only God can bring) or the values of fallen Babylon (a symbol of Roman and other oppressive forces). [Especially, note how those who have intertwined themselves with the economic and political forces of Babylon mourn its fall in chapter 18.]
- *The charge of atheism* – The first Christians were charged by the Roman authorities with atheism, not because they didn't believe in *God*, but because they failed to extend allegiance to the *gods* of the empire (Caesar). At times in the early church, Christians were martyred by the Roman Empire because their allegiance was to Jesus as Lord not to Caesar as Lord. Their radical allegiance to Jesus as Lord put them at odds with their government.
- *Patriotism* – Patriotism centers on gratitude for one's nation and support for its economic and other interests. Patriots desire the common good for all citizens and work toward that end through voting, service (jury, military, local government committees, etc.), and actively engaging in democratic processes (including protests).
- *Separation of church and state* – One of the unique features of the United States was keeping the government from forcing an official religion. This allows for the free exercise of religion. This is not freedom from religion. This unique governance was unknown in this form in Jesus' day. (While Rome allowed for some freedom for religion, it also required allegiance to the Roman Caesar and the paying of taxes with the image of Caesar on the coins—hence idolatry.)
- *Nationalism* – The support of interests and prosperity of one nation at the expense of other nations and identifying with the nation as one's highest allegiance. Those who tend toward nationalism affirm that all citizens should speak a certain language, have common ethnicity, and cultural values. Thus, loyalty to the nation can be entangled or enmeshed with one's identity. Extreme nationalism supports isolationism, national superiority, and shuns foreign trade and cooperation with other nations.
- *Christian nationalism* – Christian nationalism combines nationalism with the idea that Christianity is the identifying cultural center of the nation. In some American versions of Christian nationalism, people believe that laws should be enacted to uphold Christianity as the dominant religion. In more

extreme versions, some believe that God's appointed "chosen apostles" should govern and help transform many aspects of the culture – entertainment, policies, schools, and so on.

Additional Resources

The following resources are not an endorsement of any particular viewpoint. Rather these are some of many potential resources that could be of benefit for those looking for more information or in help to broaden perspectives.

Books

- [*Doing Ministry with Working Class Whites: Blue Collar Resistance and the Politics of Jesus*](#) by Tex Sample (Abingdon Press, 2008)
- [*Hijacked: Responding to the Partisan Church Divide*](#) by Charles E. Gutenson and Michael Slaughter (Abingdon Press, 2012)
- [*Jesus and John Wayne: How White Evangelicals Corrupted a Faith and Fractured a Nation*](#) by Kristin Kobes Du Mez (Liveright, 2021)
- [*Kingdom Coming: The Rise of Christian Nationalism*](#) by Michelle Goldberg
- [*The Prophets*](#) by Abraham J. Heschel (Ecco Press, 2001)
- [*Spiritual Theology: A Systematic Study of the Christian Life*](#) by Simon Chan (IVP Academic, 1998)
- [*Touchdown Jesus: The Mixing of Sacred and Secular in American History*](#) by R. Laurence Moore (Westminster John Knox Press, 2003)
- [*Working Class Rage: A Field Guide to White Anger and Pain*](#) by Tex Sample (Abingdon Press, 2018)

Articles

- Dale M. Coulter, "Neoevangelical Christianity and the Rise of the New Apostolic Reformation" *Firebrand* (January 18, 2021), <https://firebrandmag.com/articles/neoevangelical-christianity-and-the-rise-of-the-new-apostolic-reformation>.
- James Calvin Davis, "Faithful Patriotism" *Englewood Review of Books* (July 1, 2021), <https://englewoodreview.org/james-calvin-davis-faithful-patriotism-essay/>
- Emma Green, "Betraying Your Church and Your Party," *The Atlantic* (January 28, 2021), <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2021/01/adam-kinzinger-voting-impeachment-christian/617848>.
- Maya Jaradat, "How Americans Can Address Christian Nationalism in Their Congregations and Communities," *Deseret News* (February 7, 2021), <https://www.deseret.com/indepth/2021/2/7/22254802/how-to-address-christian-nationalism-extreme-militant-white-pastors-citizens-deradicalize-democracy>.
- Paul D. Miller, "What Is Christian Nationalism?" *Christianity Today* (February 3, 2021), <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2021/february-web-only/what-is-christian-nationalism.html>.
- Christopher P. Momany, "Reaping a Whirlwind: We Ignore Truth at Our Peril," *UM News* (January 29, 2021), https://www.umnews.org/en/news/reaping-a-whirlwind-we-ignore-truth-at-our-peril?mkt_tok=eyJpIjoiT1dJMlpEWtBZak5oWkdWbCIsInQiOiJlMINTMm5DUVFOShlvS3gzUEJwN1gza2d5NTRJQ0lpSGx6eG56VExVQ0FvWTU5ZHdoTTJ2M0dMUmF2ZnJlalc1WEZkUUUt1QXo0dVlV0RFdnZkM0FtZ1wvTUhzSOZpdndkt2dheEtnMDMxSVc3Sys1SmJWZGk5

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Petitions/Statements:

- Christians Against Christian Nationalism
<https://www.christiansagainstchristiannationalism.org/statement>