



December 12, 2022

The Honorable Jamie Raskin, Chair
The Honorable Nancy Mace, Ranking Member
U.S. House Committee on Oversight and Reform, Subcommittee on Civil Rights and Civil Liberties
2157 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

RE: Subcommittee Hearing, “Confronting White Supremacy (Part VII): The Evolution of Anti-Democratic Extremist Groups and the Ongoing Threat to Democracy,” December 13, 2022

Dear Chairman Raskin, Ranking Member Mace, and Distinguished Members of the Subcommittee,

Out of deep concern for our multi-racial, multi-faith democracy I am honored to submit the following statement to the Subcommittee on Civil Rights and Civil Liberties ahead of the upcoming hearing on “Confronting White Supremacy (Part VII): The Evolution of Anti-Democratic Extremist Groups and the Ongoing Threat to Democracy.” My name is Reverend Paul Brandeis Raushenbush and I serve as president of Interfaith Alliance Foundation, a national nonpartisan advocacy organization that takes as our motto “protecting faith and freedom.” Since our inception in 1994, we have championed an inclusive vision of religious freedom, promoted policies that protect freedom of belief for people of all faiths and no faith, and worked to ensure that all Americans receive equal treatment under the law.

For many of us at home and abroad, the January 6th insurrection demonstrated the potent threats our nation faces from antidemocratic forces. While the mob that attacked the U.S. Capitol included self-identified Proud Boys, Three Percenters, and other far right groups, some of the most indelible images from that day prominently featured religious symbols and language. In the aftermath, many are coming to understand the role of Christian nationalism as a driving force for antidemocratic violence for the first time.

As a Baptist pastor, I recognize the profound harm this movement poses to Christianity and the positive role that members of our faith can play in a pluralistic nation. I also share an abiding respect for my neighbors of different faiths and of no faith and believe them equally deserving of the rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Ahead of tomorrow’s hearing, featuring testimony by my colleague Amanda Tyler of the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty, I offer the perspective of a person of faith and member of the clergy who is watching many of his co-religionists embrace a distorted interpretation of our sacred tenets.



I. **Understanding Christian Nationalism as an Anti-Democratic Movement**

Christian nationalism is a cultural framework that conflates American identity with an exclusive form of religious identity. Rooted in the myth that we were founded as a Christian nation and therefore enjoy special favor by God, proponents of Christian nationalism seek a fusion of religious and civil life - to the detriment of both. Christian nationalism incorporates anti-democratic notions of white supremacy, nativism, patriarchy, and authoritarianism, seeking to concentrate power in a select group.

As a worldview, Christian nationalism draws on the symbols and language of Christian religious life in service of a political and cultural goal. Supporters tend to believe that the federal government should declare the United States a Christian nation, believe our laws and policies should be guided by a particular interpretation of Christian principles, support the display of religious symbols in public places and prayer in schools, and view our national success as part of a divine plan.ⁱ While January 6th was a most vivid example, we have seen that many who hold to Christian nationalist views feel they have license to undermine free and fair elections in service of their quest for dominance.ⁱⁱ

In reality, Christian nationalist ideology is a perversion of faith and represents a fundamental misunderstanding of the promise of religious freedom. I come from a family that includes both Christian and Jewish Americans who have contributed to the building of this country. They include philosophers, professors, government workers, civic leaders, college presidents, pastors, and a Supreme Court justice. On a personal level, I fiercely reject the Christian nationalist insistence that my Jewish family members have a secondary place in American society. And as the leader of organization dedicated to fostering an inclusive democracy, I oppose Christian nationalism as my patriotic duty to work across faiths to affirm our shared humanity, protect our individual freedoms, and deliver on our sacred promises.

II. **White Christian Nationalism**

I commend the Subcommittee for engaging in an examination of our history that is as painful as it is urgent. My statement would be incomplete without a recognition that the Christian nationalist conflation of religious and national identity has deep ties to racial subjugation. White proponents of slavery justified the dehumanization of enslaved Africans, even those who converted to Christianity, using Christian scriptures. The North's victory in the Civil War gave rise to "the religion of the Lost Cause," providing texture and grounding to a regressive worldview that connected an idealized Christian past with an ongoing investment in white supremacy.ⁱⁱⁱ This fusion movement would be brought to bear throughout the 20th century through the rise of the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s, through opposition to communism and the Civil Rights Movement, and, later, to support the amorphous "war on terror."^{iv}

Across centuries, proponents wielded two conflicting ideas: that the United States holds a special status because of God's favor and is also in a state of moral decay, requiring action by "real" Americans to regain



power and control. Contemporary supporters of Christian nationalism aim to achieve this goal by declaring the United States a Christian nation, reintroducing prayer in schools, and more.

Yet even as the contemporary iteration of this movement gains more mainstream attention, its vision for society remains far from our current reality. But sociologist Andrew Whitehead has documented growing support for Christian nationalist views and their ultimate end, of particular concern for the Subcommittee. “Comfort with violence,” Whitehead recently wrote, “is a natural byproduct of Christian nationalism’s obsession with power. At times, the only way to get people to do what they should—as God commanded—is with the use (or threat) of force.”^v

III. Conclusion

Americans adhere to nearly 3,000 religious and spiritual traditions, protected by the First Amendment right to believe as we choose without fear of discrimination or harm. The Establishment Clause safeguards this diversity of belief by setting out the expectation that the government will not play favorites among religious traditions or favor religion over nonreligion. Christian nationalism rejects these constitutional guarantees, instead seeking to privilege Christians above all others. Interfaith Alliance is dedicated to working side by side with people from every political and religious background across the country to mobilize against Christian nationalism.

The call to act is already upon us. The 2022 midterm elections saw an unprecedented slate of candidates that endorse this extremist ideology. The good news is that the American people overwhelmingly rejected Christian nationalism, from secretary of state races, to gubernatorial and U.S. Senate candidates.^{vi} I urge the members of this Subcommittee to follow the example of the voters and ensure Christian nationalism has no place in our government, now and in the future. In doing so, Congress can live up to its constitutional mandate to protect religious freedom, allowing people of all faith traditions and none to flourish together as equals, with dignity and respect for all.

Respectfully,

The Rev. Paul Brandeis Raushenbush
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ⁱ Andrew Whitehead and Samuel L. Perry, Taking Back America for God: Christian Nationalism in the United States, p. 8 (2020).

ⁱⁱ Emma Green, A Christian Insurrection, THE ATLANTIC (Jan. 8, 2021), <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2021/01/evangelicals-catholics-jericho-march-capitol/617591/>.

ⁱⁱⁱ Robert P. Jones, White Too Long: The Legacy of White Supremacy in American Christianity, p. 81-92 (2020).

^{iv} See Dr. Anthea Butler, White Evangelical Racism: The Politics of Morality in America (2021).

^v Andrew Whitehead, 3 Threats Christian Nationalism Poses to the United States, TIME MAGAZINE (Sept. 22, 2022), <https://time.com/6214724/christian-nationalism-threats-united-states/>.

^{vi} Kathryn Joyce, Did Christian Nationalism Lose in the Midterms? Sort of — But It's Not Going Away, SALON (Nov. 10, 2022),

<https://www.salon.com/2022/11/10/did-christian-nationalism-lose-in-the-midterms-sort-of--but-its-not-going-away/>.