

Aphorisms on Christendom haunted by the Specter of ‘Christian Nationalism’

Introduction

*As I was writing for a major publishing project a few years ago, an editor struck several uses of the term **Christendom** from the draft article, informing me that the term and notion of **Christendom** were to be excluded from the major work then in its infant stages. In the meantime, the allegedly banned expression has appeared in some articles that have already appeared in this ambitious online publishing venture. One might wryly observe that the term and idea of the **Ummah** will surely appear in the Islamic section of the project here obliquely referred to. What’s sauce for the Christian goose is manifestly not sauce for the Islamic gander ...*

*Since the 1960s at the latest the whole Western world has decisively washed its hands of the reality of **Christendom** and all that it denotes and connotes. Back in 2003 John Paul II was unable to persuade the European Union to include in its Constitution Christianity along with ancient Greek and Roman civilization and the Enlightenment among the roots of Europe. Since the enactment of its 1982 Constitution, Canada has leapt with vigor upon the European bandwagon to the point that expression of robust Christian conviction could now afford a basis for criminal prosecution. Abandonment of Christendom leads not to middle of the road neutrality but to feverish embrace of the religion of Canaan with its brutal disregard for the value of*

human life.

*The Church and her ethos have long cast warm beams of healing light over surrounding society, causing the institutions and operation of public life to reflect in however weak and inadequate a manner the truth and reality of God in Christ. In recent years ongoing aftershocks of the global earthquake that is Christianity have been contemptuously dismissed by spokesmen of the Left as **Christian Nationalism** and it would appear that a few still committed to the venerable model of **Christendom** have in response accepted use of this nomenclature in respect to themselves. Even amid the ruins of the tragic apostasy of the West, some appear to be kept awake at night by the dread specter of **Christian Nationalism**. This article, a preview of which was given fourteen years ago already (See [There'll always be an England? — LOGIA](#)), aims to defend the notion of **Christendom** and longs to see its bold restoration in the public sphere, while respectfully questioning whether a significant number of North American Lutherans are actually under the eerie spell of the bogeyman known as **Christian Nationalism**.*

*Assuming the online resource www.britannica.com to be linked to the authoritative Encyclopedia Britannica and to be a font of reliable information, I am startled to register a certain overlap of its definition of **Christian Nationalism** with what used to be familiar under the rubric of **Christendom**:*

Christian nationalism, [ideology](#) that seeks to create or maintain a legal fusion of Christian [religion](#) with a nation's character.

Advocates of Christian [nationalism](#) consider their view

of [Christianity](#) to be an [integral](#) part of their [country's](#) identity and want the government to promote—or even enforce—the religion's position within it.

*Am I wrong to suppose that the nomenclature of **Christian Nationalism** has been coined by enemies of the Faith rather than by traditionalist Christians of the historic confessions? Given its murky provenance, it should surely be avoided by orthodox believers of goodwill rather than crudely brandished as a weapon for the settling of old scores.*

I Two citizenships, the greater transcending but not annulling the lesser

Almighty God grants two unequal but coordinated citizenships to those who live under the lordship of Christ in His Church. In unchallengeable first place stands membership in the 'commonwealth' ([πολίτευμα](#)) of eternal duration situated in Heaven (Phil 3:20) but of conceivably more than passing earthly value is the one concomitant with membership in an earthly city. In the case of St Paul this was bound up with his origin in Tarsus ('no mean city', Ac 21:39), which entailed the boon of birthright citizenship in the Roman Empire (Ac 22:25-27). While the former immeasurably dwarfs the latter, earthly citizenship remains a good gift of the Creator God Who providentially watches over the world He made and continues to preserve. As they live here below under the care of God's Left Hand, Christians do well to avoid a Quietistic escapism that would tune out responsibility for the good order of this fallen yet also redeemed world.

II The Church a Diaspora given as leaven in the lump of the nations

Christians have followed in the footsteps of many of their Jewish forbears as a Diaspora among the nations (1 Pet 1:1, Jas 1:1), a company of pilgrims wandering through the Wilderness of this passing world. The Lord intends this Diaspora, to use a familiar expression, to bring Christ to the nations and the nations to the Church. 'Accidental' events associated with the rise and fall of world empires led to the Hebrew Scriptures' being rendered into Greek in the Septuagint Bible, whereby Providence prepared the world for the mission of the Christian Church, placing the 'Godfearers' of New Testament times in the searchlight of the Gospel, which swept them into full inclusion in the people of God.

III Christian Patriotism of divine institution

The comfortable, lazy, and perennially tempting option of Quietist retreat from the public life of this world is divinely precluded by Jeremiah's appeal to the first batch of Jews taken into captivity in Babylon: 'But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare' (Jer 29:7 RSV). Hence comes St Paul's command that the Church engage in liturgical prayer for the rulers of the Roman successor structure to the Babylonian Empire (1 Tim 2:1ff.). In the background of the Church's striving for the welfare of the various earthly cities in which she finds herself and of her petitions to the Lord on their behalf lies the sovereign will of the Risen Christ that all nations submit to the scepter of His gracious rule (Mt 28:19).

IV National distinctiveness painted from the rich palette of the Divine Artist

The division of mankind into distinct nations arose from the providential will of God attested in Genesis 11:8 and confirmed in the apostolic proclamation (Ac 14:16). Hermann Sasse's reflections, in the context of racist Nazi tyranny, on the essence of nationhood and of what makes a 'people', repay careful study: nationhood is not neatly congruous with 'race', but involves a call of God that binds people of various origins into a particular nation.¹ To this day many nations remain determined in large part by ethnicity, whereas in North America a distinctive people has formed through successive waves of immigration added on to the original inhabitants of this continent. This blending into a harmonious whole of people of differing ethnic origins and skin colors would have been inconceivable had not the United States and Canada been shaded and shielded by the protective tree of 'Christendom'.

No nation is under conscientious obligation to accept unlimited immigration, which can undermine public order and cohesion.

V In order to flourish, the nations must kiss the scepter of Christ the King

The Risen Lord commissioning His apostles on the Galilean Mountain envisages and intends the nations' willing submission to His gracious scepter; the target of mission is not atomistic individuals but whole societies rooted in time and place. Moreover, the seer of Patmos intimates that national distinctiveness is not, as is the holy estate of marriage, a phenomenon restricted to this passing eon: precisely the nations, not simply saved humans abstracted from their origins, shall walk in the uncreated light of God and the

¹ Hermann Sasse, 'Vom Sinn des Staates' (1932), in: *In Statu Confessionis*, 2 vols, ed. Friedrich Wilhelm Hopf (Berlin und Schleswig-Holstein: Verlag die Spur GMBH & CO, 1976) II:344-348.

Lamb, and the kings of the earth shall bring into the Heavenly City ‘the glory and the honor of the nations’ (Rv 21:24, 26). This testimony suggests that nationhood may be more than a transitory result of the Fall.

VI The providential emergence of Christendom

As the Christian mission prospered under the Lord’s blessing, whole nations kissed the gracious scepter of Jesus, Armenia being the first to do so in AD 301. Entire nations passed into the blessed condition that has long been known as ‘Christendom’, a term understood by Luther as congruous with the holy Church *stricte dicta* (Large Catechism III,48²) but usually also taken more widely to refer to those nations whose governing institutions and overall culture are suffused with the ethos that flows from the sacral union of Bride and Bridegroom. Disaster awaits nations that take the exit ramp from the highway of Christendom.

Since the net of the Church’s mission has always caught good and rotten fish (Mt 13:47-50) and the field of this world has always yielded wheat and tares (Mt 13:24-30), Christendom has never not been a ‘mixed bag’. Historians must describe her face, as an artist painted that of Lord Protector Oliver Cromwell, ‘warts and all’. The Church’s passage through this fallen world always corresponds to Israel’s Wilderness Wanderings, with entrance into the Promised Land occurring only with death and/or the Return of the Lord in glory.

² ‘Darumb sollt’s [es=Ecclesia] auf recht Deutsch und unser Muttersprach heißen ...ein heilige Christenheit.’ *Bekennnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche*⁸, 656.

VII Christendom down, mankind out

That Christendom, i.e., the presence in created time and space of the Church and her concomitant culture, is to be prized and cherished, not dismissed with contempt or held in low regard, is evident from the inevitable consequences of its demise.

Military attacks on Christendom produced the antichristic phenomenon of Islam from the 7th century onwards. A century ago, (to use Richard Rex's fine phrase³) 'as the baptismal waters recede[d]', the related systems of Soviet Communism, Italian Fascism, and German Nazism emerged with dire effects. Considering the bitter fruits of those developments, only a combination of ignorance and malice could lead any Christian to exult in or behold with indifference the (one hopes temporary) passing or eclipse of Christendom in time and space. For all its faults due to the sins of its members, Christendom has been the best matrix for human flourishing in the history of the world, a fact attested by the nostalgia shown by agnostics and even by the new atheists of a quarter century ago for past Christendom and its ongoing resonance. Many such figures in public life now profess a 'cultural Christianity' that we must pray the Lord to fan in their cases into the flame of living faith, hope, and love.

Contemporary Europe proves the horror that follows the eclipse of Christendom in public life. France, once lauded as 'eldest daughter of the Church', introduced the most recent Olympic Games with a blasphemous

³ [Disintegrating England by Richard Rex | Articles | First Things](#)

parody of the Last Supper,⁴ and its authorities recently heavily fined a television station for stating that abortion is the leading worldwide cause of death.⁵ The United Kingdom, which two years ago witnessed the anointing and crowning of a sacral monarch, is now a polity where praying outside a temple of Moloch (viz., an abortion center) has become a punishable crime⁶ and where a counselor who professes a traditional Christian understanding of marriage has been dismissed from a 'Catholic' school.⁷ There is no neutral public space. But since all time and space is now, in virtue of the Ascension, under the Kingship of Christ, His people can do no other than seek the acceptance and acknowledgement of His rule in all spheres of life.

VIII Empirical Christendom a mirror of the local confessional mix

Christendom reflects the historical and geographical particularity of specific places and times, in many cases producing clearly contoured manifestations of the Church that resulted in what have been known as 'confessional States' such as, even so recently as a century ago, Lutheran Sweden or Roman Catholic Italy or Orthodox Greece. From an early stage of North American political development, the Christendom of the United States and Canada has mainly been of multi-confessional and multi-denominational shape, though it must be admitted that Reformed DNA has had a major, even preponderant

⁴ Read this news report and then maintain with a straight face that 'Christian Nationalism' is the problem! [Paris Police Arrest Christians Protesting Olympic Opening Ceremony – The Daily Sceptic](#)

⁵ [French TV Channel Fined for Calling Abortion the World's Leading Cause of Death — The European Conservative](#)

⁶ [UK man convicted after silent prayer outside abortion clinic](#)

⁷ [I was fired for social media posts about being a good Christian wife... if it was LGBTQ issues, I would have been praised: Counsellor suing Catholic school says celebrating traditional values is now taboo | Daily Mail Online](#)

impact on Christendom in the United States from the time of her origins. Moreover, some churches continued to enjoy established status in some of the former colonies for at least a generation following the formation of the United States. Ironically, though, even as the European State Church system present in some of the first States waned as the 19th century wore on and as Anglicanism failed to achieve an ecclesial monopoly in the Maritime Provinces and Ontario and through its adhesion to Confederation even Quebec never became an undiluted confessional State, Christendom in the sense of a public culture born of and sustained by the Church remains stronger in the United States than in the European lands from which so many of our forebears came. The remnant Christendom of North America, while still leaven in the dough of our culture, could never take on the aspect of a historic confessional State. Moreover, while vigorous in comparison with its Western European counterparts, where the constituent nations have sunk far into the abyss of viciously anti-Christian paganism and in some cases are succumbing to the pressures of insurgent Islam, North American Christendom is in frail and harassed condition and certainly not poised with any surety to become once again a dominant cultural force.

IX 'Patriotism' more wholesome than 'nationalism'

The celebrated writer George Orwell (Eric Arthur Blair d. 1950) can help the forging of appropriate conceptuality through his distinction between 'nationalism' and 'patriotism', the former being an attachment to one's own fatherland or motherland that invariably involves hostility to the citizens of

other countries and polities ('My country right or wrong').⁸ Conversely, patriots love their own soil and setting and the members of their wider community up to the level of what is known as a nation without wishing ill to neighboring polities. From the time of Jeremiah's appeal to the Jewish exile community in Babylon, 'Christian patriotism' has been a fruit of the Spirit, a godly disposition of the souls of her children that the Church should foster as a loving mother. Christians may not suppress their confession on exiting their church buildings but can do no other than seek the maximal expression of the holy lordship of Christ and the tender motherhood of the Church in all facets of public life; the absence of such an aspiration could only arise from lack of love of neighbor.

X 'Liberation Theology' a sordid aberration

In the second half of the century from which we emerged almost twenty-five years ago, influential theologians shaped the movement of Liberation Theology that distorted the Gospel to serve the purposes of Marxist ideology. After being appropriately critiqued by John Paul II and his chief assistant Joseph Ratzinger who went on to reign as Pope as Benedict XVI, Liberation Theology has been revived and promoted during the tenure of Jorge Bergoglio as Bishop of Rome. Liberation Theology distorts the proper relationship that exists between the temporal liberation produced through the Exodus from Egypt and the perfect 'Exodus' achieved by Christ through His Passover from the world to the Father (see Lk 9:31), with Moses appearing as a more suitable model for modern man than Christ rather than vice versa. The 'Critical Theory' developed by Marxist sociologists and philosophers has led to brutal

⁸ Scottish and Welsh Nationalists unapologetically cultivate visceral dislike, even hatred, of their English neighbors.

dismantling of the divine orders of marriage and family life and even of created sexual distinction. We may discuss how great a volume of ‘social democracy’ is fitting for the wellbeing of people who enjoy the benefits of limited, representative government, while acknowledging that Socialism per se entails the thrusting into serfdom of its supposed beneficiaries.

XI The Third Reich a dread foe of Christendom not its misunderstood ally.

The woeful historical amnesia of our time has led not only to the Liberation Theology whose proponents turned blind eyes to the horrors of Marxist Communism whose errors, as Hermann Sasse put it in the early 1930s, ‘have been refuted by rivers of ink in Germany and by rivers of blood in Russia.’⁹ Alas, by way of reaction to the ‘Woke’ insurrection against traditional values produced by unthinking embrace of ‘Critical Theory’, a small number of professing Christians on the fringes of conservative Churches have latterly succumbed to the temptation of viewing the leading personalities and distinctive policies of Nazi Germany in a favorable light. Christian institutions of learning should acquaint their students with the lethal combination of collectivist, socialist, secularist, and even downright pagan notions that came together to form the toxic ideology of German National Socialism. No case can be made for the ‘Christian credentials’ of Adolf Hitler and his cohorts, who demanded that members of the Nazi Party leave the Churches of their Baptism through the act of *Kirchenaustritt*. Nazi racial theory, along with any form of racism that would assume the inferiority of one or more ethnic groups to another, is simply and purely evil and merits the solemn anathema of

⁹ Sasse, ‘Vom Sinn des Staates,’ 331.

Christ's Church. Lest false conclusions be drawn from this premise, let it be acknowledged that all cultures are not evil—such practices as widow-burning suttee and human sacrifice are intrinsically evil, to use the terminology of sound moral theology. Before lawyers acting on behalf of the Canadian Government suggested that litigants against their harsh handling of the leaders of the Freedom Convoy were racists motivated by the desire to promote 'white supremacy', they should have checked out the ethnicity of the friends and acquaintances of the targeted persons. Full participation in the Christian culture of the Anglosphere has nothing to do with skin color.¹⁰

XII 'Christian Nationalism' a tainted term with no positive potential

Christians in general and theologians in particular need to bear in mind that words are not mere adiaphora but powerful signs that come loaded with content that can either help or hinder God-pleasing expression. There is thus good cause to be wary of embracing the terminology of 'Christian Nationalism', whose provenance seems not to come from any good place in the wide sphere of the Christian Church or Christendom. The contemporary Reformed theologian Carl Trueman sagely notes that, 'The term "Christian nationalism" has become a canard used by secular progressives (and some Christians) as a rhetorically pejorative catchall for anyone who holds to any

¹⁰ As Registrar of a seminary for fifteen years or so, I was troubled by the request of the Association of Theological Schools to be informed of the 'race' of students. Given the growing volume of 'interracial' marriage blessed with offspring on North American soil, it was sometimes difficult to give an accurate answer to the question, the Registrar's office sometimes having to ask students themselves to make this self-determination. Should the issue of a marriage of a European with an Asian marry a spouse from a union of an African with an Arab, an honest reply to the inquiry of the ATS must surely take the form of the submission of a DNA report. While 'race' can be straightforwardly ascertained and stated in many parts of the world, here in North America it may be wiser and morally more advisable that we look on each other as members simply of the 'human' race.

number of traditional conservative views.’¹¹ Muddled anachronism is at work should anyone label the foundation of the American Republic a product of ‘Christian Nationalism’: the Preamble to the Declaration of Independence is a statement of Enlightenment philosophy bearing the intellectual DNA of John Locke and the French philosophes, and the situation of the young nation and her rulers in the context of Christendom was explicable in terms of their own genealogy and of the reinforcement of Christian identity produced by the First and Second Great Awakenings. Study of the Founding Fathers would surely demonstrate a fusion of Enlightenment and historic Christian elements in the minds of most of those who shaped the early Republic.

Christians seeking to explore the relationship between Church and Culture or Church and State in the context of the right understanding and application of the teaching concerning the Two Kingdoms or Two Governments (not to mention the interaction of the Three Orders and Estates) should avoid playing to the world by casting aspersions of so-called ‘Christian Nationalism’ on those who appreciate and seek the continuance or restoration of Christendom among us. This is especially the case should one take one’s definition of this term from such malignantly secularist sources as the mainstream media or journalists at home in the mental world of recent Democratic and Liberal Governments in Canada and the United States. Be it noted that the Government headed by Justin Trudeau most vigorously and brutally rejected both the Christian Church *stricta dicta* and the whole ethos

¹¹ [Carl Trueman: Protestant Futures and Friendships | VirtueOnline – The Voice for Global Orthodox Anglicanism](#)

and culture of Christendom *late dicta*, even going so far as to condone a years-long campaign of arson against churches. While some theologians and churchmen of Reformed confession may happily accept the label of ‘Christian Nationalists’, care must be taken not to apply this term as a slur against unsuspecting courageous Christians who draw from their own historic heritage to bear witness against totalitarian threats on North American soil. Least of all should this suspect nomenclature be brandished against the authors and signatories of the Niagara 2020 Declaration,¹² which has been formally accepted by two Lutheran congregations in Ontario and which did no more than lucidly express the historic mindset of conservative Canadian Protestantism. Evangelicals are the most despised and threatened citizens of a Canada whose governing regime seeks to enforce the religion of the Canaanites whom the advancing Israelites were bidden to displace in the Promised Land. To describe Evangelicals as the Untouchables of Justin Trudeau’s Canada would not be overblown rhetoric. Moreover, the Freedom aka Truckers’ Convoy of early 2022, whose peaceful leaders remain in the crosshairs of the judicial system of an authoritarian Government, was a pluralist, multi-racial, and multi- (including ir-!) religious movement that spontaneously arose to protest a totalitarian regime hostile to human flourishing. Certainly, some believing and confessing Christians were involved in its leadership and support, and this movement was and is compatible with the ethos and orientation of Christendom. But playing into the arms of a maliciously anti-Christian, totalitarian regime by affixing a ‘Christian Nationalist’ label on courageous opponents of tyranny would be a sinful use

¹² [The Niagara 2020 Declaration](#)

of language which calls for repentance and retraction. Meanwhile, Lutheran Christians should beware of understanding the image of God's Kingdom or Government with His Left Hand according to the immanentist and ungodly notion of *laïcité* that proceeded from the French Revolution and that has been enforced with increasing severity in France for the last century. 'The earth is the Lord's, and all that therein is: the compass of the world, and they that dwell therein' (Ps 24:1 BCP).