

Editorial

Religions Series: “Christian Nationalism in the United States”—Ebook Introduction

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While Christianity in American history remains a vibrant subfield, the subject of Christian nationalism in the United States remains understudied. The best survey on the topic, Robert T. Handy’s *A Christian America: Protestant Hopes and Historical Realities*, was last updated in 1984. The long absence of studies is particularly striking, given that related abstractions such as “civil religion” and “culture wars” receive regular updates. Recently, a number of historians have returned directly and indirectly to the subject of Christian nationalism, including John Fea (Fea 2016), Steven Green (Green 2015), Amanda Porterfield (Porterfield 2015), David Sehat (Sehat 2011), Emily Conroy-Krutz (Conroy-Krutz 2015), Matthew Sutton (Sutton 2004), Kevin Kruse (Kruse 2015), Michael Thompson (Thompson 2015), and Sam Haselby (Haselby 2015), among others. Their scholarship teaches us several lessons. First, we should avoid “decline and revival” narratives and understand Christian nationalism as a construction (a “myth,” as Green terms it) that has arisen at various times in various places to accomplish a myriad of work. Second, Christian nationalism has been advanced by a diversity of persons and groups favorable and hostile to the idea, not just by evangelical Protestants. Third, Christian nationalism can be operational even when its keywords “Christian nation” and “Christian America” are absent. Finally, and most importantly, “Christian nationalism” is a discursive site where politics and history meet—where assertions of identity and power are conjoined.

The essays in this Special Issue will assess and apply (or relate) those lessons to a number of new subjects, events, and time periods within American history. Our intent is not to document every instance of Christian nationalism from every possible perspective. Rather, our aim is to prove the utility of “Christian nationalism” as an analytical concept—like “civil religion” or “culture wars”—to understand continuity and disjuncture throughout U.S. politics, culture, and society. Our respective definitions, redefinitions, and reframing of Christian nationalism should spark further investigations into its multiple manifestations and impact.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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