

Is white Christian nationalism a distortion of Christianity?

## **We assume there are no ancient precedents for Christian bigotry.**

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Rachel Weisz playing Hypatia in *Agora* (2009)

I was reading something on [Twitter](#) that made me think of a question many are asking now: is white Christian nationalism a genuine expression of Christianity or is it a distortion of it? In other words, are white Christian nationalists practicing a kind of syncretism that mixes pure biblical Christianity with racist and nationalist beliefs?

**My opinion:** white nationalists are not necessarily distorting Christianity. Here's my reasoning...

- 1.** Calling this a distortion assumes that there is one pure "Christianity" when, in fact, there have always been various expressions of Christianities with some providing sanction to oppression and others resisting it. (More on this in point #6).
- 2.** Charging white Christian nationalism with syncretism (i.e. blending pure Christian/biblical beliefs with culture etc.) is a bad move. Historically, the charge of syncretism has often been used against non-white, non-western cultures. You want to smuggle in some Platonism and pagan rituals into your faith? No problem. African or Indigenous spirituality? HERETIC.

This charge is also patently false. All religion, including what some deem biblical/orthodox Christianity, is deeply syncretic. Beliefs are blended with beliefs all the way down. It's virtually impossible to conceive of a Christianity without the influence of ancient near eastern/Jewish/Greek beliefs. The language and ideas in the bible did not simply drop from the sky but were always interacting with the ideas, stories, and customs of the surrounding culture.

- 3.** Dominant expressions of Christianity have been mixing with white nationalism for a very long time. At least since modern nation-states have existed.
- 4.** I think that some people can sincerely hold strong beliefs about Christian doctrines and still be racist, sexist, nationalist. Etc. I mean—look at the Protestant reformer Martin Luther! One of his books was literally titled "On the Jews and Their Lies." Just because someone is bigoted does not mean their faith is not sincere.
- 5.** With all that said, I do think it's possible to argue that white Christian nationalism goes against the tradition of Jesus and against various prophetic traditions within the bible. But this is a slightly different claim. The bible itself is not uniform but polyphonic—containing many voices. Just as there are biblical passages decrying injustice, there are ones defending cruelties such as genocide.
- 6.** Last but not least, calling this a distortion of Christianity seems to assume that there are no ancient precedents for Christian bigotry. But there are plenty. I want to highlight two from late antiquity.

This is what John Chrysostom, an archbishop and church father, [said](#) this about the Jews:

“Inns are not more august than royal palaces. Indeed the synagogue is less deserving of honor than any inn. It is not merely a lodging place for robbers and cheats but also for demons. This is true not only of the synagogues but also of the souls of the Jews...”

Now, I don't want to conflate what John Chrysostom said with white nationalism or with colonialism. They're not exactly the same thing. But what it does show is that the seeds for Christian bigotry run quite deep even within the figures lauded by theologically conservative Christians who want to oppose white nationalism today.

Consider the Christian mob that killed Hypatia in the city of Alexandria. Talk about a Christian misogyny combined with a lust for political power!

(If you want to learn more about Hypatia, who was a super interesting badass philosopher, and about bigoted Christians in late antiquity, I highly recommend watching the film [Agora](#) (2009). Obviously, it takes some liberties with the historical record but I think it gets many things right.)

**Conclusion:** I understand that the urge to call white Christian nationalism a distortion of Christianity comes from a good place. But I think it's mistaken.

This is America.

This is Christianity.

I've made my peace with it. I believe we need better expressions of Christianity centered on God's love for the marginalized. I believe we need a Jesus that is often beyond the dominant Christianity. Staying in denial of the fact that white nationalism can be genuinely animated by Christian traditions won't help me or anyone.