

shift from a historical moment in which the conspiratorial energies of the John Birch Society were marginalized to our moment, when a loose populism has brought such energies into the mainstream (pp. 168–74). Importantly, they establish that those attracted to this shift are less inclined to actual political engagement, preferring symbolic victories over substantive policy (p. 183). The concluding chapter on race generates some unexpected nuance beyond the boilerplate observation that religious hubris is overwhelmingly white in America. They note that a variety of patriotic attitudes are present among racial minorities—for example, culturally conservative African American disciples can support liberal policies—that those in the “back of the pews” must nonetheless contend with a broader Christian nationalist sense of urgency, and that a religious legacy must be defended under duress (p. 215).

The contributions of *The Everyday Crusade* are considerable, both to a range of academic literatures and to general readers going forward. That said, from my perspective as a scholar of religion I would raise several questions as I think along with the authors. Broadly speaking, their rigor in documenting a range of attitudes leaves me with questions about the story behind these attitudes. Although their historicization is welcome, my own concerns as a scholar and citizen have to do with the how and the where of such attitudes; for example, I would ask which media, which persons of influence, and which institutional forces are cultivating and manipulating such attitudes. I also had questions throughout about whether religion, in all its complexity, can be properly understood as simply attitudinal. I was often left unsatisfied with descriptions of religious beliefs as “value systems” (145) or as imbuing believers with a sense of purpose. To me, this is more than a quibble because the communal, ritual, and disciplinary aspects of religion seem so central to the public, confrontational face of Christian nationalism. Acknowledging the importance of religion to participants in these surveys did not always adequately capture the reasons for the weaponization of religious attitudes.


I was also struck by an occasional elision of American religious exceptionalism and Christian nationalism. These phenomena are, of course, closely interwoven, historically and at present; and it is one of the authors’ main claims that the latter represents a sharpening of the former (p. 28). However, the gravity of the phenomenon Americans currently face—with its disinformation, its regular contempt for democratic procedure, its militant whiteness—represents something quite distinct from dreamings of a New Israel or a conviction that the United States is the indispensable nation.

These questions in my judgment do not diminish the many accomplishments of this fine book. Indeed, the authors are to be commended for providing a broad contextual account of a category so often lazily circulated among journalists. What is more, *The Everyday Crusade*

is not shy about its own political convictions, making its contributions even more important in these fractious times.

### Response to Jason C. Bivins’s Review of *The Everyday Crusade: Christian Nationalism in American Politics*

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Jason Bivins’s generous review of *The Everyday Crusade* affirms that critical dialogue across disciplines and methodology can be collegial, challenging, and productive. We do not disagree with any of his thoughtful observations and critiques. Rather we seek here—to use his delightful phrase—to “think along” with him about how scholars from political science to religious studies can harness their collective theoretical and empirical prowess to tackle the challenge to American democracy posed by Christian nationalism.

Three points made by Bivins especially merit comment. First, we need sustained attention to the “who” and “where” of the articulation, dissemination, and amplification of Christian nationalism. Our book is an unapologetically survey-based accounting of the prevalence and impact of attitudes we classify as Christian nationalist; we leave unanswered the questions of how these ideas come to be lodged in some people’s hearts and minds but not others and why the same attachments to God and nation can lead some “disciples” to espouse belligerent, xenophobic policies while others understand the same commitments to call for social justice and the embrace of all our neighbors. A partial explanation for such variation, as Bivins documents in *Embattled America*, are the individuals, media persons, and politicians who shape the content of these ideas, package them for mass consumption, and champion them on all available platforms. Media and communication studies of these ecosystems are critical to illuminate the mechanisms that inject Christian nationalism into the body politics.

Second, Bivins correctly challenges our treatment of the role of religion in people’s everyday lives. Religion is not just a set of attitudes but is also a coherent, deeply held worldview used by human beings to understand their place in the universe. We appreciate his gentle chiding, even as we reaffirm the value of surveys with their relatively impoverished indicators for capturing such a complex and personal construct. But the larger point is that, if public opinion scholars are to make sense of why Christian nationalism has come to dominate contemporary commentary on American politics, we must incorporate the

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painstaking scholarship of our colleagues in religious studies and in the religion and politics subfield of our discipline, so that we can build richer attitudinal and behavioral models.

Third, we must be more precise in delineating related ideas. As Bivins points out, we often elide the difference between the concepts of American religious exceptionalism and Christian nationalism. Other tempting synonyms are ethnonationalism, right-wing populism, and religious extremism. The distance between these concepts is important to maintain if we are to develop more complete explanations of how citizens conceive of their commitments to democracy so that we can pinpoint when and

why they are willing to accept the erosion of norms and institutions central to the preservation of individual liberty. Conflating them or using Christian nationalism as a catch-all label for the expression of any religiously informed views in the political sphere is theoretically misleading and politically unhelpful. Bivins argues persuasively in *Embattled America* that we achieve little when we belittle religious adherents or treat any political espousal of religious values as illegitimate. The true danger to democracy lies not in our distinct, even polarized, preferences but in a failure to recognize as legitimate the limits placed on our ability to achieve those ends by the democratic process.