



# WORD&WAY

## **Healthy Separation: Understanding How Christian Nationalism Threatens Democracy and Gospel**

Online Extended Engagement | March 11 - April 11 2025 | 1 CEU

The course begins with a free public online panel, on March 11th at 7pm. Please register [here](#). Engagement begins after the panel, with resources to explore leading up to optional weekly Zoom sessions and reflection via online Discussion Board during the next week.

Optional Weekly Zoom sessions on March 17, 24, 31 and April 7 at 7pm

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### Facilitators:

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## **Class Description**

Earn Continuing Education credit through online, synchronous, and asynchronous opportunities for connection. With Christian Nationalism on the rise and the idea of church-state separation under attack, it's imperative that the history and logic of this principle be re-introduced to curious Christians and the wider public, alongside the present threats and radical implications — for both religious institutions and the government — of undermining its protections. From historical knowledge to contemporary understandings to practical guidance on what you can do to make a difference, this is an opportunity for connecting faith to action.

## Learning Outcomes

1. Connect with others who are similarly curious and concerned.
2. Deepen your understanding of Christian Nationalism and church-state separation in ways that are historically informed and relevant to contemporary public life, especially with regards to how human rights are under threat today.
3. Discover strategies and receive practical guidance on steps you can take as an individual, with your faith community, or as part of other civic groups to protect democracy and foster religious pluralism.
4. Gather tools to responsibly discern how to interpret the frameworks and information conveyed by news and media sources.

## Policies and Commitments

### Engagement and diversity

The Seminary intentionally challenges participants to lead in a diverse world where there is an increasing need for leaders who have the capacities to encounter complexity, listen thoughtfully, and lead from places of authentic self-awareness and theological integrity. In these gatherings, we will appreciate and affirm our differences by sharing resources and worship materials across denominations, appreciating our different cultural backgrounds, and making intentional space for theological and ecclesial variations.

### Inclusive and Expansive Language

Language can intentionally or inadvertently include or exclude people from important conversations. For this reason, we promote the use of inclusive language. For our purposes, inclusive language is language that promotes a diverse and just environment for all in which the broadest possible range of people are represented and included in communal conversations. This includes language about God, humanity, cultures, nationalities, ethnicities, races, and religions, especially when we talk about sex, gender, sexual identities, social class, age, and differing abilities.

### Zoom Classroom Etiquette

Plan to join the Zoom meeting before our gathering is scheduled to begin. Mute your microphone or telephone unless you are speaking. Use a headset or headphones to minimize feedback and echoes. When your camera is on,

try to refrain from distracting others and be aware of what is in view in your camera. Let the facilitator know (via chat) if you need to turn off your camera for any reason, including a poor internet connection.

We value your participation! Being present on Zoom with your camera on is an important part of our sessions together and an essential component for Continuing Education credit to be offered in a participation class without grades.

## Class Materials

Assigned materials for each session are detailed below in the weekly schedule. **No books are required for this course.** However, if you want to read in advance or beyond the course, the following volumes are recommended:

Butler, Anthea. *White Evangelical Racism: The Politics of Morality in America (2nd Edition)*. UNC Press, 2024

Gorski, Phillip & Samuel Perry. *The Flag and the Cross: White Christian Nationalism and the Threat to American Democracy*. Oxford University Press, 2022.

Kaylor, Brian & Beau Underwood. *Baptizing America: How Mainline Protestants Helped to Build Christian Nationalism*. Chalice Press, 2024

Lambert, Frank. *Separation of Church & State*. Mercer University Press, 2014

Tyler, Amanda. *How to End Christian Nationalism*. Broadleaf Books, 2024

## Schedule

While we will commit to engaging together each week for the four-week duration of the class, the schedule will maintain a flexible modality to maximize accessibility. Synchronous (Zoom) gatherings are encouraged but optional, with recordings provided for those who prefer to engage at their own pace.

Those who desire to gather synchronously may meet on Zoom at 7pm on Monday evenings to engage together in real time. Those engaging asynchronously can view the recorded session and then weigh in through discussion boards on our Learning Management System before the next

week. The online portal is a great way for everyone to connect, regardless of your chosen modality!

We will kick-off our extended time together on 3/11 with a panel discussion featuring the two course leaders and two faculty experts from the Moravian and Lancaster communities. The panel will broadly set the frame of the conversations that will be explored more fully through this course. Then, during the rest of March and the first week of April, we will continue with deeper research, discussion, and application of these themes.

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## 3/11 at 7pm: Opening Zoom Panel

Greg Carey, Brian Kaylor, Riddick Webber, & Beau Underwood

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### WEEK 1: How Church & State Became Separated

- Introduce yourself on Canva by 3/16. Specifically speak to what made you sign up for the course and one thing you hope to learn about/discuss during our month together.
- Read ["We tried Christian nationalism in America. It went badly."](#) by Bob Smietana of Religion News Service.
- Listen to ["Getting Jefferson Right"](#) podcast episode from Michael Coulter and Warren Throckmorton.

### 3/17 at 7pm Zoom Presentation and Discussion

Session will be recorded for asynchronous engagement.

Our first session will focus on the history of church-state separation, including debates in colonial America between those who wanted a form of Christian Nationalism and those who instead argued for religious liberty for all. We'll focus particular attention on how these historical debates are often taken out-of-context by religious and political leaders today to make misleading arguments about the U.S.'s founding that serve ideological interests

### Post-Session Reflection

When you hear the phrase "separation of church and state" what comes to mind? To the extent this idea has negative connotations in our society today, why do you think that has come to be the case? What arguments can be made to reclaim this idea for more constructive purposes?

Please speak to some or all of these questions in 600-800 words and post your response on Canvas by 3/21. You are encouraged to continue the conversation by respectfully engaging with each other's reflections throughout the week.

## WEEK 2: How Separation Works

- Read ["The Supreme Court is taking a wrecking ball to the wall between church and state"](#) by Ian Millhiser of Vox
- Listen to Brian Kaylor's [Dangerous Dogma interview of Rachel Laser](#), President and CEO of Americans United for Separation of Church and State.

### **3/24 @ 7 pm ET Zoom Presentation and Discussion**

Session will be recorded for asynchronous engagement.

Our second session will cover the major constitutional issues, ideas, and court cases that govern religious establishment and free exercise in the United States. We will discuss the evolution of this legal framework, while emphasizing the problems and possibilities of the status quo.

### **Post-Session Reflection**

What is the proper role of religion in public life? Where's the line between protecting religious liberty and providing one group with a privileged position in society and government? Do you think that line is currently drawn well by our courts and political leaders? Why or why not?

Please speak to some or all of these questions in 600-800 words and post your response on Canvas by 3/28. You are encouraged to continue the conversation by respectfully engaging with each other's reflections throughout the week.

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## WEEK 3: Contemporary Threats

- Read ["Civil Religion as a Gateway to Christian Nationalism"](#) by Brian Kaylor and Beau Underwood from the University of Chicago Divinity School's *Sightings*.
- Watch either (or both, if you have the time!):
  - Anthea Butler on ["White Christian Nationalism"](#)
  - David Gushee on ["Defending Democracy from its Christian Enemies"](#)

### **3/31 @ 7 pm ET Zoom Presentation and Discussion**

Session will be recorded for asynchronous engagement.

From political rhetoric to legal challenges to alarming public policy developments, the separation of church and state is being actively undermined across the United States by those promoting Christian Nationalism. Our third session will connect these dots as to the motivations and actors eroding this foundational democratic principle.

### Post-Session Reflection

What is your working definition of Christian Nationalism? Is there a difference between that ideology and civil religion? Where do you see Christian Nationalism showing up in our society today, both nationally and, in your particular context, more locally?

Please speak to some or all of these questions in 600-800 words and post your response on Canvas by 4/4. You are encouraged to continue the conversation by respectfully engaging with each other's reflections throughout the week.

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### WEEK 4: What You Can Do

- Read [Chapter 12](#) of *Baptizing America: How Mainline Protestants Helped Build Christian Nationalism* by Brian Kaylor & Beau Underwood
- Read "[Giving Public Testimony at A Legislative Hearing](#)" & look to see if you can find the process for testifying in your own state legislature (either on state House & Senate sites or from a state advocacy group)

### 4/7 @ 7 pm ET Zoom Presentation and Discussion

Session will be recorded for asynchronous engagement.

Our final session will feature practical advice on how you can act to protect church-state separation. From educating others about Christian Nationalism within your spheres of influence to testifying at legislative hearings to contacting federal representatives and joining national advocacy groups, we'll discuss how your voice can have the greatest possible impact in promoting a healthy separation between church and state.

### Post-Session Reflection

Where do you see opportunities for influence? After taking this course, how do you plan to further engage this topic in your church community, personal networks, or in new ways? What skills do you want to learn or refine that will help you in that effort? What support do you need from others and where might you find it?

Please speak to some or all of these questions in 600-800 words and post your response on Canvas by 4/11. You are encouraged to continue the conversation by respectfully engaging with each other's reflections throughout the week.

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