

#1389 Tell Stories, Not Myths: Origins of the War on Christmas, Revealed!

JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT: [00:00:00] Welcome to this special holiday episode of the award-winning Best of the Left Podcast in which we shall learn about the origins of the war on Christmas and the Christian persecution complex more broadly, but with a particular focus on how that sense of persecution has been funneled and focused into support for Republican politicians.

Before we get started though, in this last new episode of the year of ours. I just need to mention one last time that we are technically still in the break glass in case of emergency financial situation that started at the beginning of this month. To reiterate for the uninitiated, we suddenly lost our Amazon affiliate funding at the beginning of December, which is like losing 400 members all at once, and we're still climbing out of that hole. After a major wave of support, though, from both existing and new members, we are only about 75 members short. So we lost 400, we've now gained back enough that we're only 75 members short of being made whole.

And this is the last time I'm going to be talking about it here at the top of the show. So if you're like me and you've been hearing me talk about this and thinking to yourself, I'm going to be sure to do that the next time he reminds me. This is it. This is your last reminder. So if you can become a member or want to gift a membership, please do we also gratefully accept one-time donations if you just want to help chip in to get us through this rough patch. Details for everything are at bestoftheleft.com/support, linked, of course, in the show notes.

And now, onto the show with clips today from the *Straight White American Jesus Podcast*, the *Thinking Atheist*, the *Benjamin Dixon Show*, the *Interfaith Voices Podcast*, and *AJ+*.

The Myth of the Christian Nation - Straight White

American Jesus - Air Date 10-17-19 **DANIEL MILLER - HOST, STRAIGHT**

WHITE AMERICAN JESUS: [00:02:00] Once upon a time, as you will know, but many of our listeners might not, Baptist were staunch advocates of separation of church and state, and they believed in that and supported that. And I did. And so I had taken this class that really blew up this myth of Christian America a little bit.

And the reason this is significant as I walk into the church office one day and we had a secretary who was a little bit older, probably late fifties, who was listening to something on talk radio -- I'm not sure exactly what -- but the theme of Christian America came up. And I -- and this is the folly part of it, in my young, idealistic, 22 year old, fresh out of college, everybody loves new ideas naivete -- entered into this conversation about America is actually not a Christian country; if you look at it, most of the founders were not Orthodox Christians. And I said, Thomas Jefferson, if he were to walk into our evangelical church, wouldn't make a good member. And I talked about why and so on. And I thought this would be enlightening. And I don't know why. I don't know what I thought in retrospect, this is ridiculous. But she burst into tears. And I'm not just crying, not a tear or two she's sobbing. And she's telling me about her father who fought in World War II to defend Christian America and our rights to do

this and my right to believe follies like that it isn't a Christian country and so forth. And I was really caught off guard and something again, in retrospect, this is obvious that hit me was: wow. Number one, how deep this current is -- this notion that we live in a "Christian country" and the deep emotional investment that people have in that story.

And so I wanted to start with that as background, that one of the ways this story and this mythos of Christian America often comes out in public discourse, is this appeal to "Judeo-Christian values" or a sort of shared Judeo-Christian heritage. And so I want to throw it over to you and say, what's the problem with that? And/or related to that, why do you think it's a myth to say that America was founded as "a Christian nation"?

ANDREW SEIDEL: [00:03:56] Sure. So there's a lot of fun stuff to unpack in there and I can't wait to get down in it.

So let's just start with the term "Judeo-Christian principles" or even just Judeo-Christian, because right there, you've got a big problem.

And really it's a difficult term to pin down because it's fake, I think from a scholarly standpoint, there's no real solid definition of what the phrase Judeo-Christian meant. And I think I get in -- this is so important -- I think I get into it on like page two of the book, *Founding Myth*.

Judaism is Judaism because of rejects Christianity. And Christianity is Christianity because it rejects Judaism. That's a quote that I threw in at the beginning of the book from, I think a Jewish theologian. The adding of Judeo onto "Judeo-Christian", it's a sop, it's a fig leaf thrown out to make an exclusive and exclusionary term seem a little bit more inclusive.

And it was done, really the term gained a lot of strength after World War II when having an exclusionary Christian movement in the wake of the Holocaust seemed pretty ominous and awful. So that's really where you saw the term start to gain in popularity. But really it's just meaningless and it's thrown out there to make Christian nationalism slightly more palatable.

But at its most basic level, Christian nationalism is the idea that America was founded as a Christian nation, that we are based on these Christian principles. And most importantly, I think is that we've strayed from that foundation. We've gotten away from it. And by using that narrative, Christian nationalists today can try to pass policies and laws that take us back to that Christian founding.

Really, I think the, at its most basic level, the goal is to redefine what it is to be an American. So that to be an American is to be a Christian and to be a Christian is to be an American. And then to redefine the law, according to the Christian nationalist identity. And I think that kind of wraps a lot of what you were talking about -- the emotional heft that this mythos has comes from that central push, really trying to redefine what it is to be an American.

DANIEL MILLER - HOST, STRAIGHT WHITE AMERICAN JESUS: [00:06:11] I often do this with my students in a really simple way where I'll just put like the 10 Commandments up on the screen or something, and I'll say, how many of these do you really feel like ought to be laws, like contemporary US laws? And the point is very few, almost none of them. And that's what I'm illustrating is that it's not as deep as they think it is.

If I could ask you for a minute to put your constitutional lawyer hat on, talking with somebody and they say, but no, it's based on broad Christian values, right? That's the thing. Okay, maybe not personal beliefs, the laws reflect these broad Christian values in your technical constitutional lawyer sense, how would you respond to that? What would you say to the lay person is the kind of constitutional framework we have? What practice of law or understanding of law does it actually reflect?

ANDREW SEIDEL: [00:06:59] I think that the answer to that is very clearly the Enlightenment.

The argument that I make in the book, however, is, I'm working to undermine Christian nationalism entirely. The question that I asked when I set out to investigate when I was writing *The Founding Myth*, I asked a simple question: Did Christian principles positively influence the founding of the United States of America? And the answer to that is no, they didn't. And in fact, it's a good thing they didn't. Because of those Christian principles are often -- and especially the ones that are central to the Christian nationalists identity -- they're often thoroughly opposed to the principles in which the United States was built.

That's what you're getting at when you're putting up the 10 Commandments on the board for your students, right? The first commandment is: I am the Lord your God, you shall have no other gods before me. It would be difficult to write a sentence that is more opposed, at odds with, our First Amendment.

You're gonna have as many gods as you want in this country. You can worship them. You don't have to have any gods, you don't have to worship anybody. That is one of the central promises of America. You have the freedom of religion here. And the first commandment is absolutely fundamentally and thoroughly opposed to that.

So one of the things that I try to do in the book and the arguments that I try to make is to walk through every single one of the 10 Commandments and show why it is opposed to our founding principles, and then walk through some of those principles that are really central to the Bible that Christianity really relies on.

So the idea that Jesus died for our sins, vicarious redemption through human sacrifice. The idea of original sin. I look at the governments that are in the Bible. I look at justice in the Bible. I look at how the Bible demands obedience. And I compare those principles that are really crucial and central to the Bible, to the principles that our nation was founded on.

And everywhere you just see this fundamental conflict and it's irreconcilable.

The Founding Myth: Why Christian Nationalism Is Un-American (with Andrew Seidel) - The Thinking Atheist - Air Date 5-16-19

SETH ANDREWS - HOST, THE THINKING ATHEIST: [00:08:53] I was a kid in private Christian school and I look back at it and the level of revisionist history that took place is - it's cultish. No, it's just a cult. It was George Washington never told a lie—he was a saint. "I chopped down the cherry tree." I'm a very, very, very young child being, for the first time, introduced to one of our founding fathers, and what you have is this sort of sainthood anointed to a

man, a good Christian man, who was our first president and who upheld the righteousness that God wanted for an American leader. And then you have all of the others and of course, all of our founders were believers in the Christian God and held to the Christian Bible. And they founded this nation as a Christian nation.

I remember when I was much younger and stupid, I remember saying that you can't separate church and state because without the church, there is no state. That's how heavily brainwashed I was as a Christian youth. And I think to myself, I knew nothing about the founding fathers, and yet when I go and have conversations now with people who talk about Thomas Paine, John Adams, Jefferson, whoever, they remain one, ignorant of the facts, but two, hugely convinced that these were not just deistic God believers, but Christian theists. Correct?

ANDREW SEIDEL: [00:10:22] Yes. There's a huge thread of that running around and there are tons and tons of books written on this, and like I said, I devoted a couple of chapters to it. George Washington's a great example and in fact the myth about him not being able to tell a lie after he chopped down the cherry tree, that comes from a book written by a guy named Mason Weems, who was a parson actually, he was a religious leader and he wrote his book on Washington specifically to sell. He did not care about historical truth at all. We know the story about the cherry tree is made up, and this is the same guy who gave us the myth about Washington, praying in the snow at Valley Forge, which now hangs in the Capitol prayer room in the United States Capitol building, which is kind of amazing. Didn't happen, just like the cherry tree thing didn't happen.

I mean, and Washington, is again a Great example, when he did go to church, he didn't take communion. He went to church rarely. He rarely, maybe once or twice, referenced Jesus in his personal letters and the thousands and thousands of pages of personal letters that we have. He was on his death bed for quite a while, could of easily called for some religious solace, could of taken last rites. Specifically did not want to do that. And generally, didn't talk about religion publicly at all. Certainly not his personal religion. So this is a guy where by all intents and purposes, if he is religious is very private about it. Certainly never used his religion as a political weapon.

SETH ANDREWS - HOST, THE THINKING ATHEIST: [00:11:54] Have you gotten it all into the Jefferson Bible?

ANDREW SEIDEL: [00:11:57] Yeah. Oh yeah. The main point that I try to make though, is that this is a fascinating question and it's really interesting, and I love having that argument, but that it actually doesn't matter. Their personal religious beliefs do not matter. To show that they are relevant to the argument that a Christian nationalist is making, a Christian nationalist still has to do two things. One, they have that have to prove first that they are Christians, which is very, very difficult to do. Second, they have to prove that that religion then influenced the founding of the United States, which none of them try to connect those dots. And three, they have to go to great lengths to show that they didn't want state and church separate. And that is simply not possible. The founders were very clear, they were more unified on this subject than they were on the others, that religion and government would be better off not mixed together.

And to me that is the central argument that we need to be having when we're talking about the founders. We shouldn't be engaging on the "yeah, they were deists, they would have

been atheists today," fighting back against the idea that they were Christian, we should not be engaging on that. It really doesn't matter to the central point that we are in the central fight that we are trying to have.

SETH ANDREWS - HOST, THE THINKING ATHEIST: [00:13:13] Does it not though speak to intent? The intent of the founders was this, it was driven by personal belief.

ANDREW SEIDEL: [00:13:20] I use a couple of examples in the book that religious ideas don't claim ownership over every other idea generated by that particular mind. The guys who invented blue jeans were Jewish, but we don't go around calling them Jewish blue jeans. It makes no sense to do that. And the same thing with vaccines, we don't go calling them Jewish vaccines, they're just vaccines. They still would have to prove that those principles, the Judeo-Christian principles or Christian principles influenced the founding of the United States, which is that the argument that this book takes on and disproves. And you simply can't successfully make that argument because Judeo-Christian principles are so fundamentally opposed to the enlightenment principles on which the United States was built. That is fair to say that Judeo-Christianity is un-American.

SETH ANDREWS - HOST, THE THINKING ATHEIST: [00:14:10] So the founders come here to escape the overreach of a church state government, the Church of England. They come here and in the Declaration of Independence, they do mention God. Yes? I mean, some people bring that up as an argument, "Hey look, they invoke God in their Declaration of Independence from the Church of England."

ANDREW SEIDEL: [00:14:30] Yeah, the Declaration's a really popular argument for the Christian nationalist. So I devoted two chapters in the book to that. There are a couple things to note. There are four basic references that people use, Christian nationalists use, to try to make this argument. The laws of nature and of nature's God, their creator, divine providence, and the supreme judge of the world. First thing we should note is none of those is Christian. The laws of nature and of nature's God, if anything, to me that sounds Pagan not Christian. The only one of those that is in the Bible is creator, which is also something that's unique to, or not unique to any religion. Every religion, pretty much centers around this creator belief. So these are not, we can't call them even Judeo-Christian references. At best they are very, very deistic at best.

There's another thing to note, which is that two of those were only added later, at the very end of the drafting process. But to me, the bigger question here is, the bigger point that I try to make is that the Declaration of Independence is an anti-biblical document. It is specifically rebelling against a government and dissolving the political ties against the government. Mind you, King George was the defender of the faith and the head of the Anglican church too. And. You couldn't do that and be a devout Bible believing Christian at the same time. The Bible says that in Romans 13, it says that the rulers here on earth were ordained by God. And if the founders had believed that they would not have rebelled against King George in the first place. The Declaration, the fact that it is a document that rebels makes it inherently anti-biblical. So again, we see this fundamental conflict between values of the United States and the values of Judeo-Christianity.

The Myth of the Persecuted Christian and the Inverted Golden Rule Part 1 - Straight White American Jesus - Air Date 3-10-20

PAUL DJUPE: [00:16:22] The belief that Christians are being discriminated against, which is the nature of the question, actually was much higher in places like Mississippi, where of course there are very many, the vast majority are Christians and most are evangelical Christians. And that finding was the least, that there was very little discrimination, in places like Vermont and Oregon, where there are very few evangelicals.

So it's almost the exact opposite of what you'd expect. People that are living amongst co-religionists, where there are very few people in positions of power to discriminate against Christians, that's where the belief that discrimination is greatest exists.

BRADLEY ONISHI - HOST, STRAIGHT WHITE AMERICAN JESUS: [00:17:04] It's a fascinating finding, and one hypothesis that you put forward in the piece, and this is the piece in *Religion in Public* and just came out last week, is that it's not from experience that this narrative is taking shape, right? It's not that people in Mississippi or Georgia or places where there are many Christians are experiencing that on a daily basis at work, at school, and coming home and saying, wow, it's really tough to be a Christian here.

Your hypothesis is that media leaders, pastors are feeding this narrative into pulpits and living rooms. And that's where people are taking hold of it. What leads you to that conclusion?

PAUL DJUPE: [00:17:40] Yeah, it's a couple of things. And the first is just the logical conclusion that in a place like Mississippi or Alabama, there really are almost nobody who's an out atheist, for instance, that owns a local company or is the mayor or governor, or what have you, that could impose their values or start to discriminate against [them]. It's a place where you get asked, as soon as you meet someone, what church do you attend, right? What are you doing on Wednesday night? Would you like to come to my house? That sort of thing.

So there's just no structural opportunity for that kind of discrimination against Christians in the South, for instance. And then, so you think about a place like Vermont, maybe there is, but then of course we find almost no evidence that, or no belief really, that Christians are discriminated against. So that's the one side of it.

Just looking at really high profile folks, you could always find this kind of language that secular culture is coming for Christians. You could always find that going back decades. And that's where the "war on Christmas" sort of notion came up.

It was really a fringe kind of argument that was almost laughable. But at this point it's really become mainstream, so much so that you have the president of the United States coming out and saying that Christian's rights are threatened, that if you let Democrats take over, if you impeach me, they're going to come for you. It's going to be a civil war. Ralph Reed said not that long ago that it's going to be open season on Christians. Really dramatic language from people that have very large audiences. And so that's mostly where I'm talking about

that. It almost can't be experienced given where people that espouse this view are living. Just really this kind of language is really prevalent these days.

BRADLEY ONISHI - HOST, STRAIGHT WHITE AMERICAN JESUS: [00:19:29] One thing we've discussed quite a bit over the last month on this show has been the idea of Christian nationalism as an umbrella for other facets of both identity formation and opposition. And when you hear the war on Christmas or that it's going to be open season on Christians, immediately what I think is that's code language, right? It's going to be open season on Christians who are white, who are native born, who are cisgendered, who abide by a patriarchal structure. And so open season on Christians really means open season on this sort of multi-dimensional picture of what a Christian might be in this country.

It's interesting to think back on my own experiences that, when I was an evangelical youth in the nineties, I remember this narrative of persecution. And I remember like really getting fed in church and then going to school and like believing it. Oh yeah. Were the persecuted minority. And then what happened before my basketball games, we'd all pray. Like we're standing there 15, the coaches included, praying in Jesus' name all the while walking around.

There were so many Christians, right, on the team and in the culture that we would pray in Jesus' name, despite there being Jewish people on the team, despite there being Buddhist people in the team, the Christians got to pray in Jesus' name. And then we went out and we talked about how persecuted we were.

When I read your piece, I was really interested, and you just use it here a minute ago, in the word "elites", and I'm just interested in that word choice. Can you tell me how, why you use that word?

PAUL DJUPE: [00:20:56] Yeah. There's a lot to talk about here, so let's talk about elites and then we can dig back into the connections I think what we're about here in Christian activism.

But I think this really is an elite-driven notion. Just like you can go back and find the war on Christmas was really an elite driven notion as well. And it's just expanded because it's so incredibly useful for a number of different kinds of issue entrepreneurs, organizational entrepreneurs, to keep people together. So no, I don't want to say that this is made up because I think there is a profound and real threat that Christians feel. But a lot of it is done in order to hold together a Republican majority, to hold together the constituencies of Christian right organizations. Without that, a place you can see it in Vermont and New Hampshire, they can just blend into the culture 'cause everything's fine and people don't feel discriminated against, but that really cuts into the organizational vitality of some organizations that have a tremendous amounts of lose.

Republicans have been governing now with a minority of the population for well over a decade. And mostly that's built on evangelicals outperforming or out voting the rest of the population. They've been voting at incredibly high rates. They're punching way above their weight for more than a decade now. And if they don't do that, they're going to lose. And that's really all there is to it. So they need to find the number of different ways to do that. And one of them is Christian nationalism and you flip that around and say, that's a positive side of it. The negative side of it that would motivate would be this fear, driven by persecution and discrimination beliefs. And so I think they're really work hand in hand. But

it's definitely driven and promoted by Republican elites obviously. And that's a new innovation to use it so blatantly . but this kind of language has been used for awhile by Christian right elites. And you can see that on the conspiracy theory side, as well as some of the more kind of mainstream Christian right organizations.

Conservatives Have Mastered Art of Playing Victim While Committing the Crime - The Benjamin Dixon Show - Air Date 10-25-20

BENJAMIN DIXON - HOST, THE BENJAMIN DIXON SHOW: [00:22:53] Conservatives have mastered the art of being both in power, but pretending as though they're out of power. Conservatives have mastered the art of pretending as though they are oppressed when in actuality they are the oppressors. Very straightforward, when Donald Trump won in 2017, they won power. They had all the branches of the government, but they instantly, and immediately acted like they were powerless so that they can forward narratives that would make it seem like justice is on their side. The reason they always talk about stuff like the war in Afghanistan is because they understand that there is a value to being able to convince their supporters that they are on the side of justice and they are the ones who are being oppressed, therefore we should galvanize your righteous indignation and you should stand up and fight against the oppression of people who are in power.

They understand that if people individually, if an individual feels like they have been slighted, it energizes the pursuit of justice inside of them. Somebody steals your lunch, you feel like you have a righteous cause to go and snatch your lunch back. Somebody steals your car, you feel like you have been slighted, you feel like you've been victimized, you feel like you've been oppressed, and you have the right to go and seek justice.

That energy that you get from the feeling of being oppressed or done wrong or abused or mistreated or cheated; that feeling that you get is powerful. It's powerful enough to overthrow empires. Every narrative that you pick up and the Bible it has like a narrative of justice. Like it has the people who feel like they have been oppressed by Group A who are now rising up to get victory over Group A. Same thing throughout history. This is why it's so important to the conservatives that we don't teach history from the perspective of the people's history. I believe his name is Howard Zinn's book, who gives the narrative of American history from the perspective of the Indigenous people from the workers and the labor rights movement. Because it's a totally different narrative. The real story of America places the narrative of the just in the hands of the people who are trying to survive America.

Conservatives 100% understand that it is necessary for them at all times to have power and to pretend as though they're powerless, because if they don't pretend like they're powerless, then people become complacent. People won't have that anger. They won't have that "righteous indignation." They won't feel like they are suffering. They won't feel like they are oppressed. And more importantly, it makes these people who have all the power in the country, look at people who have no power and look at people from the trans community and all of a sudden, the big bad wolf for Fox News viewers and conservatives are group of people who literally have the least amount of power in our society.

So the reason no I'm talking about this is because we saw this happen in real time in 2017. Donald Trump came into power. He had the White House, he had the Supreme Court, he had the House of Representatives, he had the Senate. More or less he had the Supreme court. But they had an overwhelming majority of power and they could do anything that they wanted to do. They had all the power. And what do they do instantly? One, they wheeled that power to get all the tax breaks that they wanted, but two, they instantly started conversations about a civil war as if they were oppressed. It is the master stroke of propaganda to be able to have all the power in this country and to pretend like you're powerless. To be able to pretend as though you are oppressed when in reality you are the oppressor. And that is the master work of conservatism in this country.

And it is on purpose because if the people ever get the sensation that they're wrong, that, "wow, wait a minute, I'm oppressing this group." That will utterly neutralize, that will neutralize a conservative movement. If any of their supporters ever get a moment of a brief epiphany to realize, "wait a minute. You mean I've been the one oppressing this group?" That's why they reject racial bias training. That's why they reject critical race theory. That's why they reject *The People's History of the United States*. That's why they reject all of these notions because they cannot let their supporters ever get the sensation that they are wrong, that they are the oppressors. Because what happens when you get the inclination that you've done wrong, and that you've been the oppressor? If you have any type of empathy in you whatsoever, you are not a full-blown sociopath like most of the Republican leadership and Donald Trump most certainly is, then you will instantly feel the sensation of guilt and you would start to consider the other person's perspective. In order for them to never consider your perspective, you have to always be more powerful than they are, even though simultaneously you're powerless.

Graywolf Rainsfall said, "I call it the Trayvon Martin effect. Whereas the victim is the murderer and the murderer is painted as the victim to defend the indefensible.

I couldn't have said it better Graywolf, I'm going to put it back on the screen. The Trayvon Martin Effect were the victim is the murderer and the murderer is painted as the victim to defend the indefensible. This is the handiwork of sociopaths who understand what's necessary to always remain in power. To always remain in power you have to snatch justice, the very idea of justice. You've got to snatch that away from people who you oppressed. The way they maintain it is by snatching away the narrative of justice from the people who have been abused and systematically oppressed in this country. And trying to find ways of making the oppressive group, the group that does the oppression, feel like they are the victims. That's why every Christmas we have a war on Christmas because they got to make sure that these Christians feel, evangelical Christians specifically, feel like they have been victimized in this country.

The Myth of the Persecuted Christian and the Inverted Golden Rule Part 2 - Straight White American Jesus - Air Date 3-10-20

BRADLEY ONISHI - HOST, STRAIGHT WHITE AMERICAN JESUS: [00:30:23] I wanted to bring up the idea of feelings because it seems that that narrative express . . . It, it puts into words

and it puts into a story feelings of threat that it's not that you're going to take away our rights, and this is me talking, it's that we're going to lose our power. We're going to lose our dominance. And so we have to frame this as we are being persecuted. And, this is a trite saying but it bears repeating that when you're used to privilege and power, equality feels like you're the victim. When all of a sudden things become more equal for others, it feels like you're somehow the victim when from, from many other perspectives it's just the idea of trying to get everyone on equal footing rather than victimizing or persecuting or what have you on any particular group. So,

PAUL DJUPE: [00:31:07] Yeah, I think that's well said. I think the dynamics that we're seeing here are almost unintelligible unless you understand that they're coming from this position of power and really unquestioned, right? I mean, these basic assumptions about how society works, about what you do on certain days of the week are just so ingrained that any upsetting of that is really shocking. Right? So, some of it gets down to values and how that's represented in American politics, but it goes much deeper than that into how we greet each other, what holidays we celebrate. It really, to some, feels fundamental and crossing every element of of their culture.

And so, once you start to view it from that angle, you start to hear the diverse communication from elites that targets all of these different aspects, it really starts to feel totalizing, and that once you think about it exactly, as you said, reverberating around Wednesday night Christian Bible study groups. That's where I think that fear really starts. Especially when you think that there's almost no counter-narrative that's being expressed. If you're not interacting on a regular basis with religious nuns, if you don't know any, if there's none in your family, if nobody's willing to come out and talk about it, there's no kind of counter that would say, Oh, I know this person. They're not like this. So, put all those things together, and I think you're exactly right to say that this really is emotional thing, and that emotion can be a really strong driver both to support a particular set of groups but also to set off and exclude another group.

BRADLEY ONISHI - HOST, STRAIGHT WHITE AMERICAN JESUS: [00:32:54] For sure. And that last point you brought up seems really important, which is if . . . You can pump this story . . . Elites, Republican and christian elites, can pump this story into churches and schools and living rooms. And then the last part you said seems so important to me, which is if you don't know folks, if you don't know anyone who's part of the group you think is persecuting you, then it's so easy just to create a demon, create a boogeyman. And it's also easy to say, well, I don't know any so there must not be that many of them, but they're just over there in California or they're over there in New York City or they're over there in Washington, DC trying to come and get me, even though every time I look around, I don't know any of these people. Where do they get off running the country? Where do they get off taking power or claiming they have the right to govern? I don't know any of these people. Look around. I only know the churchgoing, bible-believing, mainly White, christian people. So, one of the things that's also brings up is if you don't know any folks outside of your group, if you live in a homogenous society, you often think that the folks outside of your group have ill intentions toward you. You wrote another really great piece. This is from December of last year, so just a couple of months ago, but it's called *The Inverted Golden Rule: Are atheists as intolerant as evangelicals think they are*. I want to get to that idea of the inverted golden rule. I just think it's fantastic, but can you break down the findings of that piece for us real quick?

PAUL DJUPE: [00:34:19] Sure. It's related in some ways, following the same sort of elite communication that I was talking about in the piece that motivated today. But the general idea is the same: that there have been a number of folks like president Trump and others that have said that Democrats and atheists are coming for you. They're going to strip from you your basic rights and liberties. I mean, not just things that we disagree about public policy, about abortion and tax cuts, whatever but this is about your freedom of speech. Your basic freedom of religion is going to be under attack if power shifts. And so, at some point a few years ago, we decided to actually ask people, Hey, what do you think if the tables were turned and these groups were in power? Would they respect your rights and liberties? And we asked a couple of different groups. We had Republicans, we had Democrats and atheist and others, and pretty surprised to find out that there were a lot of folks and especially among evangelical christians that thought that Democrats and atheists were going to strip them of their liberties.

It's been a long standing survey and research tradition to ask about political tolerance. And this goes back to the 1950s with the Communist scare asking about political reform, would you extend basic rights and liberties to other groups? So, that was kind of the big frame that we were starting with, and then we flipped it and asked about this tables-are-turned kind of thing. So, we have data on whether Democrats and atheists would extend rights and liberties to evangelicals, and it turns out that they would. Now, it's not perfect. They're not going to do it in every situation that you could imagine, and that's pretty common among Americans. Americans aren't that tolerant of other people. But Democrats and atheists are more tolerant of evangelicals than evangelicals are of Democrats and atheists.

I don't know that we're too surprised by this, but then we can think what's motivating this. And I think it comes back to this, the same story that we're talking about today and what I term the inverted golden rule. So, the vertical golden rule is do unto others as you think they'll do unto you. Right? So, they're gonna take away your liberty so you better take away theirs first, is the idea. And that's not necessarily scriptural.

BRADLEY ONISHI - HOST, STRAIGHT WHITE AMERICAN JESUS: [00:36:55] What you found is 65% of atheists would give the rights to engage in political activities to their evangelical counterparts, but the number of evangelicals willing to give those rights to atheists or others was something like 32%. So half. Only one third of evangelicals are willing to allow the liberty to engage in these political activities to the people they deem as their political and cultural opposites. Yes.

PAUL DJUPE: [00:37:29] That's exactly right. I mean, so that's really low. You can't really sustain a democracy if you're -- this is the gist of it, right? -- You can't really sustain a democracy if you think, if I lose to this group, I'm not going to be able to advocate for my own political positions. I'm not going to be able to speak. I'm not going to be able to organize. I'm not going to be able to teach, earn a living. There's almost no recourse then except violence to try to prevent these people from from taking power. And so now you understand why there's talk about a coming civil war, right? And so they're trying to re-engineer this kind of narrative in reverse to say, if you let those people take charge then you're going to have no recourse but civil war that's what's happening. So, the importance of this is that you really need to act now to prevent this coming apocalypse.

BRADLEY ONISHI - HOST, STRAIGHT WHITE AMERICAN JESUS: [00:38:28] We had an episode during the impeachment inquiry that was on evangelicals and civil war. And, the rhetoric surrounding impeachment was, this is the beginning of a civil war, right? Just last month, Jerry Falwell, Jr. got together with the Governor of West Virginia. And the Governor of West Virginia said, you know, if you live in Virginia and you feel like your county and your community is being given over to these liberal, progressive, Democratic elites, then you're welcome to secede from Virginia and join West Virginia. Right? In some ways it was a laughable press conference, but symbolically it really represented this idea that there's no ability to work together. And in fact, we don't want to work together. Pluralism, dialogue, discussion: that's really not what we're after. We're either after power or if we're not going to be in power then violence. Those are our options.

The Power Seekers: How Christian Nationalists Look at the White House - Interfaith Voices Podcast - Air Date 6-12-20

ANDREW WHITEHEAD: [00:39:25] President Trump gave a speech that was very authoritarian about bringing law and order. You can draw a line historically to other presidents that have used that and the racial undertones of that law and order and cracking down on troublemakers, those types of things, and declared himself an ally of peaceful protesters. But then right after that, they cleared the square using flash grenades and tear gas. Even the clergy of the church that he was going to go stand in front of, those people were forced away from their own church who had been there all afternoon giving out water. So, he walked over and after giving this speech about cracking down on troublemakers held up a Bible and took pictures, didn't go in the church, didn't talk to the clergy of the church, didn't open the Bible, didn't quote from the Bible, didn't recite anything from the Bible.

So, it was really wild to see this juxtaposition. For us, I think squaring that authoritarian rhetoric with then these religious symbols of a Bible held in the air in front of the church, Christian nationalism really helps us make sense of what was going on there. And I think what you can see, throughout his presidency and even before as he was a candidate, when his back is up against the wall, he is going to speak out to those that have most consistently supported him which are White evangelicals. And now for us, we think Christian nationalism, which is very popular among White evangelicals, helps explain exactly why. And so those religious symbols were basically used to help baptize that authoritarian speech as "this is a part of God's plan, and Trump is the only person who can save us" from them, as he says it, the people that are rioting, or whatever else.

And so again, Christian nationalists in the US don't necessarily need Trump to be religious, to open a Bible, to go to a church or pray with clergy. They want to see someone who says, I see you. And I hear you. I will help enact your particular vision for the country by providing access to the levers of power and so that they can use those then to transform the culture in their own image. And I think Monday was one of the most perfect distillations of that relationship.

AMBER KHAN - HOST, INSPIRED: [00:41:48] Can you give us a little background on what you study and what got you interested in it?

ANDREW WHITEHEAD: [00:41:55] Yeah, I would love to. So, Christian nationalism as we define it is this desire to see the US be distinctively Christian in its national identity, its sacred symbols and its public policies, and the desires to see Christianity privileged in the public sphere above other religions. But in our research over the years that culminated in a book that my colleague Samuel Perry at the University of Oklahoma, that he and I just released this year, we find that associated with Christian nationalism are a lot of other things like authoritarianism, even White supremacy and sexism. So, when people are arguing for, we want America to be more Christian, especially if those people are White and Protestant, they have a very specific vision for what that America should be. And a lot of times it's to benefit and privilege their own group above and beyond other groups.

AMBER KHAN - HOST, INSPIRED: [00:42:58] What do you mean when you say those who may realize or not that they are part of this movement seek to privilege Christianity, White Christian identity over others.

ANDREW WHITEHEAD: [00:43:12] The idea of privilege is multifaceted. But what it gets down to, I think, is that when we talk about Christian nationalism and seeing Christianity privileged in the public sphere, what we're really saying is that they have access to power. And so one example that you can see is when you hear people talking, they say, we need to get the right people in office, Christians, and embrace this Christian nationalism ideology. If we can get them in office, then the US is going to be on the right path.

AMBER KHAN - HOST, INSPIRED: [00:43:42] When somebody says, I want the right person in office, how do you as a social scientist then unpack what that means.

ANDREW WHITEHEAD: [00:43:52] I think a lot of times it's just seeing who then they're supporting and then go and look at those people. And a lot of times who they're supporting [will] say they're a Christian, that God has blessed the USA, and we need to enact Christian principles, and they'll use those code words, a kind of the subtext of, this is the way that it's always been in the way that always should be. And that's what they want to do. So, I think that helps us see exactly what they mean when they say 'the right person.' Look at who then they're supporting, and you'll see that -- again from President Trump on down and through the years, this isn't a new phenomenon; it's been with us -- they'll always be pointing to the United States is blessed because of God, and we need to return to that. We need to rely on that. We need to follow the Bible. All of those things.

AMBER KHAN - HOST, INSPIRED: [00:44:41] Does that just mean blessed in a general sense, or does it mean blessed to deliver certain outcomes?

ANDREW WHITEHEAD: [00:44:49] When they say blessed by God, it isn't neutral because then they feel, and they'll tell us this over and over, that in order to either maintain that blessing or to return to that blessing, we need to do X, Y, and Z. And generally, these other actions that we need to do to stay blessed as a nation will generally be in favor or privilege their in-group and probably hurt some out-group because a lot of times it becomes tribal. When they say God has blessed us, they see a very particular God. And it's generally the God of White Protestant Christianity.

AMBER KHAN - HOST, INSPIRED: [00:45:27] Unpack the word 'troublemakers' for me, because I want to understand what you hear when you hear the President say, trust me, I'll take care of the troublemakers.

ANDREW WHITEHEAD: [00:45:39] So, two things: when we measure Christian nationalism, you're right in that some of these phrases that we ask Americans sound so innocuous. When Trump especially in this example is talking about troublemakers and cracking down, based on research, Josh Davis, a colleague of ours that has written on this and others, and historians, too, are showing that some of those phrases are really . . . They began to emerge in the 1980s in reference to inner-city, Black Americans -- there were racial implications to saying troublemakers or cracking down. And so those that even in our own research we find [those] that sympathize with Christian nationalism or strongly embrace it they're more likely to agree that police treat Blacks the same as Whites. And they're more likely to agree that police shoot Blacks more often than Whites because Blacks are inherently more violent than Whites. And so when we're talking about state-sanctioned violence towards Black communities, when Trump is saying he's going to crack down on troublemakers, these shows of force in the past have fallen on minority communities more often. And for White Christian nationalists, they won't just approve them, but they'll see them as necessary because they have seen that this out-group or they have identified this outgroup, these troublemakers or, in other quotes, you'll see people talking about thugs or Black thugs, using these words to basically say that this group is deserving of state violence, that we have to use that in order to keep them in line.

Jay's Comments introducing clip from The O'Reilly Factor

JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT: [00:47:21] I just want to toss in here a little bit of a bonus clip because it fits so perfectly, I can't let the opportunity go by, but it's going to take me as long to explain it as it will take you to listen to it. This is from the golden age of Bill O'Reilly, which is perfect for a War on Christmas episode.

He was a four-star general in the War on Christmas before he was fired for sexually harassing everyone he ever met. But this clip is actually not about the War on Christmas, it's about immigration policy, but you will see why the two are connected because this is a demonstration of how to be both intellectually consistent and intellectually bankrupt.

Because for Bill, whether it's about immigration, workplace harassment or Christian persecution, it's all about maintaining that W.C.M.P.S. and here he is discussing it with John McCain.

Bill O'Reilly and John McCain on Immigration and the White Christian Male Power Structure

BILL O'REILLY: [00:48:15] Change, pardon the pun, the whole complexion of American. Am I wrong?

SEN. JOHN McCAIN: [00:48:20] No, you're right. The second thing that on the left there against this is the temporary worker. As you know, we say two years, go back for a year, two years, go back for a year. They don't want that. They don't want them to have to go back.

People can come and work.

BILL O'REILLY: [00:48:34] Do you understand? And I'm not saying this in a condescending way. You're smarter than I am. But do you understand what the New York times wants and the far left want? They want to break down the White, Christian, male power structure of which you are part. And so am I, and they want to bring in millions of foreign nationals to basically break down the structure that we have. In that regard Pat Buchanan is right. So I say that you've got to cap it with a number.

The Man Who Mobilized The Evangelical Vote - AJ+ - Air Date 4-15-18

IMAEYEN IBANGAL - HOST, AJ+: [00:49:05] This is the story of the man who helped turn conservative evangelicals into a political force.

I want to talk a little bit about how much our family respects and admires Paul Weyrich. I want to be like Paul Weyrich when I grow up.

Paul Weyrich has been called the main architect of the religious right. Here he is in 2005.

PAUL WEYRICH: [00:49:24] Those people were not active in politics, and I served as sort of a coach. To get them active in the political process.

IMAEYEN IBANGAL - HOST, AJ+: [00:49:36] He also cofounded, conservative think tanks like the heritage foundation and the free Congress foundation. And he managed to galvanize the evangelical vote around a man who wasn't even an evangelical

RONALD REAGAN: [00:49:49] God bless America

IMAEYEN IBANGAL - HOST, AJ+: [00:49:55] because a similar thing happened in 2016. What's the election of president Donald Trump,

DONALD TRUMP: [00:50:00] two Corinthians, right? Two Corinthians three 17. That's the whole ballgame. Is that the one? Is that the one you like? I think that's the one you like. Cause I loved it.

IMAEYEN IBANGAL - HOST, AJ+: [00:50:09] Hey fam. I'm in Mayan and this Sunday. We're going to look at the man behind the evangelical political movement and how it wasn't abortion that created the religious right in the United States.

you might've been told that the movement began with Roe V Wade, but according to Randall Balmer, a religious historian, it actually began with Paul Weirich.

RANDALL BALMER: [00:50:36] One of the most cherished myths. Of the religious, right? Is that this is a movement that God has origins in reaction to the Roe V. Wade decision. It's a great story.

It's been repeated many, many times. It is also utter.

IMAEYEN IBANGAL - HOST, AJ+: [00:50:52] It was wire X calculated effort that made the religious right. A political force. And his plan took years to complete.

PHYLLIS SCHLAFLY: [00:50:59] Conservatives were wandering around, lost in the liberal wilderness. And then Paul wirey came to Washington,

IMAEYEN IBANGAL - HOST, AJ+: [00:51:06] when arrived in Washington, DC in the late 1960s, he was to the right of more liberal Republicans, which made him a minority within his own party.

Back then the world of religion and politics were largely separate, but Weirich was determined to change that by courting white evangelicals, the group had retreated from politics after the so-called scopes monkey trial in 1925, which really centered around teaching evolution in schools, not only did white evangelicals lose.

But they also were humiliated in the public eye.

RANDALL BALMER: [00:51:34] Paul Weirich, according to his own account, had been trying since the 1964 presidential campaign to get Angelicals active in politics. He tried everything. He said he tried the school prayer issue and he tried the abortion issue. He tried pornography

IMAEYEN IBANGAL - HOST, AJ+: [00:51:49] in the end.

Weirich landed on school segregation in the city,

ARCHIVAL AUDIO: [00:51:52] some carried a doll and a miniature coffin, an effigy of federal judge Skelly. Right. The law of the mission of five Negro girls. The family was the Braves in new Orleans last week.

IMAEYEN IBANGAL - HOST, AJ+: [00:52:02] And I have to give you a little bit of a backstory first. So please stay with me.

In 1970 public schools in seven States were racially segregated. This was over a decade and a half after the us Supreme court ruled segregated schools were unconstitutional. With it's Brown vs. Board of education decision, and Mississippi was one of the States fighting hardest against integration state leaders claim that their freedom of choice system allowed black children to attend white schools.

In reality, black families were subject to intimidation. If they tried to enroll. And some white families were so opposed to integration that they abandoned public schools altogether in Holmes County, Mississippi. There were no white students left in the public school system after just two years of desegregation.

So where were they all going? Well, between 1966 and 1970, the percentage of private schools in the state Rose and the number of students attending those schools tripled. Most of this growth occurred in black majority districts.

RANDALL BALMER: [00:52:58] There were segregation academies, church sponsored that were applying for tax exempt status.

IMAEYEN IBANGAL - HOST, AJ+: [00:53:06] Then in 1969, a group of African-American parents in Holmes County sued the treasury department to prevent three new segregation academies from getting that tax exempt status. And they won

RANDALL BALMER: [00:53:16] the court ruled that any organization that engages in racial segregation or racial discrimination is not by definition.

The charitable institution.

IMAEYEN IBANGAL - HOST, AJ+: [00:53:29] The following year, president Richard Nixon ordered the IRS to enact new policy denying exemptions to all segregated schools in 1971, the green V cannoli district court case ruling upheld the new IRS policy. And evangelical leaders. Didn't like it, which is where Paul Weirich reenters our story.

RANDALL BALMER: [00:53:48] Paul Weirich finally found the issue that would to get the attention of people like Jerry Falwell, who had his own segregation Academy in Lynchburg, Virginia, Bob Jones, Jr. Bob Jones university, and a broader array of evangelical leaders.

IMAEYEN IBANGAL - HOST, AJ+: [00:54:02] Why Rick and Paul managed to shift the grounds of the debate. They turned it into a conversation about government interference and religious freedom instead of what it really was.

A defense of racist policies. They use the issue to attack democratic president and evangelical Jimmy Carter, even though it was Republican president Richard Nixon, who came down hard on segregation academies, Bob Jones university lost its tax exemption status a year. And the day before Carter was inaugurated.

So why don't have figured out how to win over evangelical leaders? But to win elections, he still needed an issue to get grassroots evangelical voters to the polls. He realized that defending racial discrimination might not be it. Now, this is where the abortion debate comes in. Here's Falwell in 1982.

JERRY FALWELL: [00:54:46] It began in January of '73 when the Supreme Court in Roe vs. Wade ruled abortion legal on-demand.

IMAEYEN IBANGAL - HOST, AJ+: [00:54:55] But pause. Bomber says evangelical leaders didn't pursue abortion as an issue right away.

RANDALL BALMER: [00:55:00] Jerry Falwell by his own admission did not preach against abortion until February of 1978, more than five years after the Roe V. Wade decision of 1973. The key moment for abortion comes in the 1978 midterm elections.

Weirich then resolved that he would go out and elect some improbable.

IMAEYEN IBANGAL - HOST, AJ+: [00:55:26] Why were through all his effort into getting anti abortion, Republican candidates elected in Minnesota and Iowa. The

RANDALL BALMER: [00:55:32] final weekend of the campaign. Pro-lifers leafleted church parking lots. And two days later in an election with a very low turnout, all four democratic nominees lost to pro-life Republicans,

IMAEYEN IBANGAL - HOST, AJ+: [00:55:51] the square wire, it realized abortion was the issue he could use to bring evangelicals to the polls and maybe even turn them against one of their own president.

Jimmy Carter, before he was elected, Jimmy Carter was a Southern Baptist. Sunday school teacher.

JIMMY CARTER: [00:56:06] And what does the Lord require the. But the dude justly and to love,

IMAEYEN IBANGAL - HOST, AJ+: [00:56:13] he embodied the idea of progressive evangelicalism and one, the presidential election in 1976 in 1979, Falwell created a group called the moral majority, but the term was actually coined by wiring the moral majority declared war on abortion and homosexuality.

Then the group enlisted the help of Francis Shaffer. Shaffer worked with C Everett Koop to produce a series of films called. Whatever happened to the human race and toward the country, screening them for evangelical audiences. Here's what the films look like.

FRANCIS A SCHAEFFER: [00:56:45] The fact that human life is being evaluated is demonstrated by some of the major issues which are being debated by society today.

Abortion. Infanticide euthanasia.

RANDALL BALMER: [00:56:58] And as that series of films begins to travel and circulate across North America, evangelicalism become finally attuned to the abortion issue in advance of the 1980 presidential year,

IMAEYEN IBANGAL - HOST, AJ+: [00:57:11] Ronald Reagan, courted, conservative evangelicals, anti one, their support, despite the fact that he signed the bill, making it easier for women to have abortions back when he was the governor of California.

Here he is employing explicitly religious language in his acceptance speech.

RONALD REAGAN: [00:57:26] Can we begin our crusade joined together in a moment of silence. Prayer

IMAEYEN IBANGAL - HOST, AJ+: [00:57:33] Reagan is a man who wasn't even a regular church attendee yet during his presidential campaign, he spoke to 10,000 evangelicals out of Raleigh in Dallas, Texas.

He talks about the unconstitutional regulatory agenda directed by the IRS against independent schools. AKA. Fabrication academies.

RANDALL BALMER: [00:57:52] He mentioned creationism. He also mentioned the internal revenue service going after the tax exempt status of segregation academies. He does not mention abortion in the course of that speech.

So even as late as August, 1980, the Republican party was not sure that abortion would work for them as a political issue.

IMAEYEN IBANGAL - HOST, AJ+: [00:58:12] Listen, there are a number of reasons Reagan won the election, but he very well might have tapped into something that Trump and Steve Bannon utilized.

RANDALL BALMER: [00:58:21] In the 2016 election, 81% of white evangelicals voted for Donald Trump, a man who at least on the face of it does not seem to be a logical representative for family values.

Kevin jaffles, hadn't been able to persuade at least themselves that they are victims of some sort of religious discrimination.

DONALD TRUMP: [00:58:41] Cristiana it's under siege.

IMAEYEN IBANGAL - HOST, AJ+: [00:58:44] Barbara also says there are parallels between the beginnings of the religious, right. And the rhetoric that Donald Trump used during his presidential campaign,

RANDALL BALMER: [00:58:53] the 2016 election allowed the religious right.

Finally, to circle back to the founding principles of their movement and the founding principles. Sadly enough, are racism. And racial segregation.

The Myth of the Christian Nation Part 2 - Straight White American Jesus - Air Date 10-17-19

DANIEL MILLER - HOST, STRAIGHT WHITE AMERICAN JESUS: [00:59:07] Thank you for all of that.

The issues that you're raising about the need to keep people from the imposition of religion, what you're describing as the incompatibility of a kind of religious dogmatism or even theocratic model, and the founding of the US republic are really important.

I wanna flip the page or flip the script on this. My co-host Brad was at a conference where you spoke recently. And one of the things you said that stuck with him, and that's important to me, is that the notion that we're not a Christian country, that's not just for the benefit of non-religious people not having a religion foisted upon them, but it benefits religious people as well. And you of course will know this, but a lot of our listeners don't and I've brought this up, one of the things I always find fascinating is for example, the language of "separation of church and state" people will say that's not in the Constitution. And right, of course, that language isn't, it comes from Thomas Jefferson. Lots of people recognize that. But what I've always found fascinating and I tell people is that he actually used that language of "a wall of separation" in his letter to the Danbury Baptist Association, to a group of Baptists who supported the First Amendment, who were concerned because of their own context in Connecticut, they didn't have those kinds of legal protections, and people are often surprised to find out -- and I consider myself still an old school Baptist in the sense that Baptists were one of those religious minority groups that really supported the foundation of the First Amendment and believe strongly in it.

So I wonder if we could talk about that for a minute. And what do you see? How does this separation of church and state, how does that benefit religious people? How has that to their benefit? Not just for benefit of people who want freedom from religion, but for people who want freedom of religion, freedom to practice their religion?

ANDREW SEIDEL: [01:00:46] It's a really great point. And I think it's probably one that secular Americans could stand to make a little bit more of.

The way that I like to explain it to people is that there is no such thing as the freedom of religion without a government that is free from religion. Secular government is a prerequisite to genuine religious Liberty. And you're absolutely right on the history. Historically in this country, it's the religious minorities that have been the most supportive of state-church separation for that very reason.

And you saw it throughout the founding of the colonies. There was three Catholic representatives to the Constitutional Convention and they had some of the best lines about this. Daniel Carroll had a great line saying that "the rights of conscience will little bear the lightest touch of the governmental hand."

And I think it really is an important point for everybody listening to understand that if you give the government any bit of religious power -- Alexander Hamilton wrote in the Federalist 69 that he was speaking of the president, but he said that our government has "no particle of spiritual jurisdiction" -- if you give a government any particle of spiritual jurisdiction, you are asking for your rights of conscience, for your religious free exercise rights, to be violated.

And to me, there's a really other interesting aspect of the history here too, which is that when you look at it, it is the religious minorities that support it. And then the instant they get power, they change their mind. John Locke, who was a pretty big influence on the founders wrote about this. He said that when there something along the lines of when religion's not in power, they oppose persecution, but as soon as they become the masters they persecute everybody.

John Calvin, the Protestant reformer wrote out of that as well. And then as soon as he got some power he burned Servetus. And it's this fairly common thing that in the minority religion understands the benefit of the secular government, but when they attain that secular power, then they use it to impose their religion on others, which is exactly why the rule ought to be a government should be absolutely free from religion, should be entirely secular, because there is no freedom of religion without a government that is free from religion.

DANIEL MILLER - HOST, STRAIGHT WHITE AMERICAN JESUS: [01:03:00] Yeah. Some of my work is in a sort of critiques of the concept of secularism or a certain concept of secularism, but where that gets confusing or complex for people is in exactly that point, that to critique a certain kind of notion that says religion can have no role in public life, people shouldn't be allowed to share their religious views or something, which I oppose, you have to have a secular government, right? You have to have a secular state for exactly what you describing. You have to have a government that won't impose religious belief or prohibit non-harmful religious beliefs or practices. And of course there's debate on where the boundaries of those things are. But you're right; to protect people's free exercise, they have to have those protections.

And I often do this with my students where I'll ask them to make the argument first that the US is one of the most religious countries in the world. And they'll do that. They'll talk about that. And then I'll flip it and say, I want you to make the argument that the US is one of the most secular countries in the world. And the point is to create that kind of disconnect for

them of, wait, how can you argue both things about the US? When of course we have this enshrined secularism in the written Constitution, which lots and lots of places don't, and even if they practice that it's not locked in the same way. But yeah, and it's an argument that I make to students that the reason you can have, especially religious dissenters and religious minorities, is precisely that protection.

ANDREW SEIDEL: [01:04:18] And it gets even more fascinating too, because there does seem to be this paradox. But if you really break it down, I don't think it's paradoxical at all. It seems to be that citizens living under secular governments tend to be more religious than the citizens in countries with established churches.

If you just compare the US and England, and that doesn't calculate, that doesn't compute for a lot of people. But it actually is exactly what you would expect to see: in a country with an established church, you've got a monopoly. And so the priestly cast is entitled, they don't have to do anything to get followers, to get access to funds. They are entitled to that through the government. Churchmen get lazy. Nothing's going to happen. Whereas if you have a free market, essentially, operation of religion, because there is no established church, if a churchman gets lazy to the flock and go right across the street and worship.

So in America you have essentially this free market of religion and it exists because we have a secular government that can't aid one religion over another or religion over non-religion. And that secular government is actually why you have such a vibrant religious diversity here in America.

And it's crazy too, because it seems like a paradox, but Adam Smith, writing in the year of our independence, 1776, predicted this. And so did James Madison. They figured out that this was going to happen. A lot of people really don't understand that, but it's not just that it guarantees your freedom of religion. It actually also means that the society overall is probably going to be more religious.

DANIEL MILLER - HOST, STRAIGHT WHITE AMERICAN JESUS: [01:05:55] Yeah, it's interesting too. Sociologists and others will note that one of the markers of American religiosity for a long time, going back to the colonial period, and certainly after, and with westward expansion and so on as its various sort of entrepreneurial nature of it. And I think that's part of why, right? There was this kind of competition.

Summary

JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT: [01:06:13] We've just heard clips today, starting with The Straight White American Jesus podcast talking with Andrew Sydel about why the tenets of Christianity are at odds with the founding values of America. The Thinking Atheist also spoke with Andrew Sydel and focused on the emotional connection people have to the idea of a Christian nation. Straight White American Jesus in two parts discussed the fallacy of Christian persecution in America. Benjamin Dixon broke down how the only way for oppressors to hold onto power is to maintain a sense of justice for their cause by insisting that they feel persecuted themselves. The Interfaith Voices podcast used Trump's Bible photo op during the George Floyd protests as a window into the minds of Christian nationalists who support him, and AJPlus told the story of Paul Weirich, the person who

deserves the most credit for marrying the evangelical movement and the Republican party in unholy matrimony.

That's what everyone heard. But members also got a bonus clip also from Straight White American Jesus discussing the ironic twist that it is the separation between church and state that has helped America become as religious as it is with Christians holding such a firm grasp on power. For non-members, that bonus clip is linked in the show notes and as part of the transcript for today's episode, so you can still find it if you make the effort. But to hear that and all of our bonus content delivered seamlessly into our podcast feed, sign up to support the show at bestoftheleft.com/support or request a financial hardship membership because we don't make a lack of funds a barrier to hearing more information. Every request is granted; no questions asked. And now we'll hear from you.

Upped membership pledge and referring friends - Nick from California

VOICEMAILER: NICK FROM CALIFORNIA: [01:08:09] Hey, Jay probably already knew I've kicked up my pledge. Actually, I renegotiated with the New York Times. I hadn't done so last year and they raised the price and you know you get all those promotion rates. So like I renegotiated with them and I'm giving you the most of the remainder of my media budget. And I got the introductory rate of the New York Times. We got to give it to you in your time of need. Hope that helps. And, I'm going to get you those five referrals, cause I need to have this Best of the Left art. I don't need a hoodie. I don't even think I can buy - I could buy it but I don't really need it, but you have this artwork that I can only get if I can refer five people did seem to motivate me. That I must have this. It's true though, as silly is that absolutely is, I think I felt a little competitive. So there's no way I'm getting get to 50. I'm not very good salesman, if I did I'd make more money.

But I did send it to everybody I thought would actually listen to the show and I told them the circumstance, "I don't normally do this kind of thing, it's not my character, but the show is good work, you'd like their opinions, and they lost their ad revenue," sort of true - I want to get into it over messenger, "and you need to help them out and listen." So hopefully we grow the audience get the good work you're doing out there. The great news, the great media coverage you're doing, and hopefully you get those 400 members or very least 400 members worth, that extra \$3 from every existing member, and you get on stable footing.

Alright man, good luck. Just know that we're out here doing our part. Trying to get you back on stable footing. Better than without Amazon destroying the world anyway I guess. Hopefully in the end. All right, take care.

Where's Amanda? - Zach the Theologian

VOICEMAILER: ZACH THE THEOLOGIAN: [01:10:13] Hey Jay, it's Zach the Theologian. I just got done listening to your COVID response posts and it's cathartic in a way because they're saying what I'm thinking; they're angry like I am. I'm angry at the end of it still because all we're doing is revealing increasing levels of incompetence and increasing levels of dispassion, really for our fellow humans.

And my thoughts are just what I'm missing. And I checked this for the last two or three, and you guys are having your money troubles and I understand that, but where is Amanda telling me that now that I'm angry and informed, here's what I can do about it. Because I want an outlet. I have the anger. I have the anger that you called for. The cathartic angry description, but I don't really know what to do. Like I support you the best that I can, but what can I do? Where's Amanda telling us what we need to do? That's my question.

All right, thanks Jay. Keep up the great work. I hope that people keep having the money rolling for you. Thanks, bye.

Final comments on health care administration and communist Christmas recommendations

JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT: [01:11:25] Thanks to all those who called into the voicemail line or wrote in their messages to be played as VoicedMails. If you'd like to leave a comment or question of your own to be played on the show, you can record a message at (202) 999-3991. Or write me a message to Jay@BestoftheLeft.com.

First of all, to Nick, thanks for the kind messages and all of the support. But I got to ask, what did you think of the special wallpaper? You can't get it for any price anywhere. It was the motivation for you to engage in the Refer-o-Matic. We heard that you signed up, I can confirm that you reached that magic number of five referrals. And for everyone else, I sent Nick an email and asked the same question, and I just haven't heard back in time for this commentary. But I'm dying to know: what did you think of the special phone and tablet wallpapers that were the motivation for referring the show?

On that note, a quick thanks to a new referrer, David W. who succeeded in making his first referral. If anyone wants to sign up, the link is right in the show notes, or you can go to BestoftheLeft.com/refer.

And secondly, in response to Zack the theologian: obviously, thank you for your message. And I fully understand where you're coming from. That feeling you're having is exactly the reason why we do activism. In this particular case we did know that the relief bill was pretty much on the verge of being finalized, and so we didn't think it was worth a whole activism segment that would be out of date almost immediately. But there is more to it.

So in response to your actual question as to where Amanda has been in general, here's what she's been up to. So she worked straight through the election, as we all did. You know, we pumped out as much content as we could in the run-up to the election, putting activism segments in just about every episode, I think.

And right after that, understandably, we all needed a break, but that's also about the time that she began dealing with the healthcare industry. Again, long time listeners will know that Amanda has a chronic disease, sort of, but not quite cancerous tumors, not quite cancer, but not quite, not cancer. So anyways, she has a handful of tumors in her leg, which he's had before for 15 years or something like that.

So it's something that just gets dealt with in an ongoing way. And periodically she has to engage with the healthcare system. And the new twist -- I mean the regular horrors are all

still there -- but the new twist is that she's now not just expected to pay through the nose for all of the services and deal with multiple agencies and health care and primary care and the specialists. She doesn't just have to do all of that. She now has to do the work of the administrative staff. So when she tries to get a referral from her primary doctor to go see the specialist doctor, the administrative staffs have now begun to tell her that it's her job to take the information that they give her about the referral to the specialist. The patient is now the go between.

Whereas before, the primary doctor office would speak directly with the specialist doctor office. And literally this is what happened: a vice president of the corporation that runs not even the health insurance company involved, but the company that employs the doctors in some collaboration of doctors, decided that that's what should happen. But instead of the administrative staff doing the administrative work, it's now the patient's job to do the administrative work for them. We literally don't know what the administrative staff does anymore, other than to give Amanda codes and bizarre information that means nothing to her and said, okay, now, call the referral office for the specialist and give them this information that we just gave you and everything should be fine.

So right after the election, she started dealing with that. Pretty soon thereafter, we had the financial emergency hit and we all kicked into high gear, having barely recovered from the election.

So Amanda was doing design work for our merch store, logistics for the Refer-o-Matic, brainstorming for hours per day with me trying to figure out what we should do about our situation, and literally a bunch of other stuff that I can't remember.

And that brings us right up to within the last week or two. And she's been working double time for her other communications client, so that she could take a little bit of vacation over the holidays, because our other client isn't as accommodating as this show is, thanks to our members. Last year, I polled the members asking how much vacation time we should take, and they voted to give us a French number of weeks off, way more than I had been taking based on my own judgment. And so we get to have this vacation time from the show, but she has to get her other client all squared away, pre-loading a bunch of work through the holidays so that she can finally get some time off and we can sort of hurry up and relax.

We've both been scrambling to close out the work for this year. So I told her that she got called out for being absent recently. And so this is what she whipped up in just a couple of minutes:

"Welcome to today's activism. Now that you're informed and angry, here's what you can do about it.

"This is your reminder that the Georgia Senate runoff election is just a few weeks away on January 5th. If you're looking for an effective way to help Reverend Warnock and Jon Ossoff beat two cartoonishly corrupt and cowardly Republican senators and put Mitch McConnell in the minority again, here's what you can do.

"Go to ShowingUpforRacialJustice.org/GainingGround. That's SURJ and they have partnered with Southern Crossroads to form the Gaining Ground campaign, which is focused on making

sure white people do their part to help establish Democratic control of the Senate to have more favorable conditions for progressive policies.

"Wherever you are, you can sign up to phone bank and call white Georgia voters or donate to the effort. If you live in Georgia, you can sign up to canvass at one of their five field offices throughout the state. So head to ShowingUpforRacialJustice.org/GainingGround right now to get involved.

"We've also linked in the show notes to Amanda's activism segment from early November that includes five other ways to support get-out-the-vote efforts in Georgia before the runoffs. So check that out too."

You happy now, Zach? I added that last part. She didn't say that .She was very nice and gracious about the whole thing.

And so now just a last couple of notes before we finish off of the year.

This is just a quick reminder that I was reminded of today, which is for anyone who decides to partake in a viewing of *It's a Wonderful Life*, you can take some extra enjoyment in knowing that it was investigated by the House Un-American Activities committee for promoting communism. So that's a bonus jolt of enjoyment you can get from that.

Also, and I may have recommended that people put this on their radars last year, but I really recommend the new version of *A Christmas Carol* co-produced by FX in the US and the BBC starring Guy Pearce. It is definitely pretty dark. It's probably not suitable for most children. I just looked it up. Common Sense Media says it's good for 15 plus, and I would say that's about right. It takes the story into some new and really interesting directions, putting more focus on Scrooge's abuses as an employer and not just regarding Bob Cratchit either. And for the anticapitalist-minded among us, I find the whole package from start to finish to be more satisfying than any other version I've seen. I wish that Hulu was paying me to say this; they are not, but that is where I think Americans can find it to stream. And I think those in the UK should be able to find it on the BBC iPlayer. If you live elsewhere, give it a search and see if you can find it in your country.

Thanks again, of course, to anyone who's been signing up for memberships, gift memberships, making one-time donations, buying our merch, or signing up for the Refer-o-Matic to help keep the show going strong. Right now in our time of need, as always, this show only exists because you all make it possible. Keep the comments coming in at (202) 999-3991, or by emailing me to Jay@BestoftheLeft.com.

That is going to be it for today. We will be back next year, but keep an eye on the feed for some "Best of" episodes and bonus material.

Thanks to everyone for listening. Thanks to Deon Clark and Erin Clayton for their research work for the show. Thanks to the monosyllabic, transcriptionist trio, Ben, Dan, and Ken for their volunteer work, helping put our transcripts together. Thanks to Amanda Hoffman for all of her work on our social media outlets, activism segments, graphic design, web mastering, occasional bonus show co-host and everything else she does. And thanks to those who support the show by becoming a member or purchasing gift memberships at BestoftheLeft.com/support.

For details on the show itself, including links to all of the sources and music used in this and every episode, all that information can always be found in the show notes on the blog and likely right on the device you're using to listen.

So coming to you from far outside the conventional wisdom of Washington, DC, my name is Jay!, and this has been The Best of the Left podcast, coming to you twice weekly, thanks entirely to the members and donors to the show from BestoftheLeft.com.