Rev's Reflections

What to do about Christian nationalism

On Saturday I got to spend the beautiful day indoors with people of faith from all over Rhode Island, talking about Christian nationalism, the phenomenon in which identities of Christian faith and American patriotism are conflated, often with a bit of white supremacy thrown into the mix. The result is something so "natural" to many that they can't even see it, and actually end up using it as the lens through which they see the world. They may not see their lens, but everyone around them does.

The keynote speaker, Amanda Tyler, an attorney and author of *How to End Christian Nationalism*, posited that this inherently political (and NOT religious) worldview is like racism in that it is by definition systemic, and nearly impossible for its greatest defenders to see in themselves. With that in mind, she said it's never helpful to label anyone a Christian nationalist. At least not if you want to have any kind of conversation that could help them humanize their "enemies."

There was one chart Ms. Tyler projected onto the screen from the Public Religion Research Institute that I want to share. I just wish I could find it online. The chart visually describes four levels in a continuum from "adherence" to "rejection" of Christian Nationalism, relative to ten (or so) different faith traditions.

At the top, Evangelicals have the most adherents (67%) and least rejectors (<10%). At the bottom, UUs have the least adherents (<1%) and the most rejectors (60%). Our UCC/Congregational friends (and hosts for the day) are right above us. Believe it or not, Buddhists are smack in the middle, with roughly equal representation in all four categories. We all have lots of people in the middle, who sympathize or are skeptical of some or all of its tenets.

That means we do have work to do.

First, and perhaps most importantly, we can refrain from labeling individuals — or even entire religions — as Christian nationalists. It doesn't help the conversation. We may not have adherents among us, but we

have some who sympathize relative to an issue or two. Talk to them openly and listen.

Second, we can be careful in our language, so that we don't conflate Christianity with Christian nationalists. They aren't the same thing. Just talk to those UCC neighbors for a reminder of that fact. Support the Christians who — like us — believe Jesus was a force of compassion who loved the outcasts. Support the Christians who believe in the separation of church and state.

Finally, we need to know some scripture. When you hear someone refer to a Bible passage that just don't sound right, look it up. Google it. Read some commentary on it. Learn about the context, and what the brown rabbi called Jesus had to say about it. For your own edification. Maybe if you know a bit of scripture well enough, you can share it with someone lost in misinformation.

Obviously it's going to take Christians to end Christian nationalism in the same way it will take white people to end racism and men to end misogyny. And we can do our part to help.

In Peace,
Rev Denis