

Paper F2

Responding to Christian Nationalism

Worship, Faith, & Order Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Andy Braunston (CoSecretary, Worship, Faith, and Order) Andy.braunston@urc.org.uk
Action required	Decision
Draft resolution(s)	Resolution 11 Assembly Executive instructs the Worship, Faith, and Order Committee in collaboration with other churches and partners to provide liturgical, pastoral and theological resources to enable the Church to proclaim and live out the gospel of Jesus Christ and confidently navigate the challenges to it thrown up in our time.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	The Worship, Faith, and Order Committee wishes to develop a series of liturgical, pastoral and theological resources, in partnership with other churches and agencies, which enable the Church to navigate the dangers posed by Christian Nationalism and its appeal to 'blood and soil' and which will help local churches respond confidently to the challenges of the age.
Main points	Forms of Nationalism which seek to exclude and limit racial and cultural diversity are dangerous and are distorting Christian theology and coopting Christian symbolism meaning many people feel, at best, bewildered, or, at worst, unsafe. Christians are called to live without fear, see our ultimate identity in Christ, rejoice in diversity, and proclaim the coming Kingdom. Blood and Soil nationalism finds no justification in the Gospel.
Previous relevant documents	Fall of the Wall Conference between the United Reformed Church and the Evangelische Kirche der Pfalz: https://urc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/1638/82/resolution-mauerfall-ekp-urc-091119.pdf
Consultation has taken place with...	

Summary of impact

Financial	None.
External (eg ecumenical)	

Responding to (Christian) Nationalism

Introduction

Forms of Nationalism which are expansionist, dangerous, and which use faith to legitimise themselves haunt our world like a spectre.

Christian Nationalism is utilised by these movements in America, Russia, and Hungary which are also on the rise in France and Germany and the UK. Christian Nationalism as a movement perverts the message of the Gospel seeking to divorce it from the message and example of Jesus to bring good news to the poor, proclaim release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, free the oppressed, proclaim the year of the Lord's favour, and to love our neighbours as ourselves.

So-called Christian Nationalist movements seek to divide societies into superior and inferior races, to secure power in the hands of those they approve of and to disenfranchise, if not also to destroy, those they do not. Despite Jesus' words that his Kingdom was not of this world, Christian Nationalism seeks political and social power.

In the UK a narrative of blaming migrants for many of the nation's problems after years of underfunding has reached danger point. An understandable fear of crime has fuelled anger (and ignored the fact most crime is committed by British Citizens) and been turned towards hotels housing asylum seekers which have been targeted by angry mobs committing violent disorder; crimes committed by asylum seekers are amplified as if they were the only risky offenders.

Well-funded campaigns to festoon lampposts with Union flags have been well-documented leaving many people feeling, at best, bewildered and, at worse, frightened. A 'blood and soil' Nationalist agenda seems to incite fears about migration in a people left behind by elites who are the new ruling classes. Anger from the realisation that wealth generated by the superrich doesn't trickle down to the rest of us is misplaced onto those who have not caused our problems.

Stretched public finances, where people demand Scandinavian levels of public services with American levels of taxation, result in politicians forever urging us to understand their difficult choices. Riots in England and Northern Ireland in the Summer of 2024, the flag raising in 2025, and the attraction of some figures on the far right here all lead many to feel a sense of gloom.

Most recently Stephen Yaxley-Lennon's attempt to capitalise on the "put Christ back into Christmas" has resulted in Christian hymns, symbols, and people being coopted into a wider blood and soil Nationalist narrative. There's a profound lack of trust in both our institutions and our news outlets. This drives people to extreme politics and, in Europe and America, those extremes seem to be into the far right.

Definitions

Nationalism is a simple, modern, idea that the nation should be congruent with the state. Rather than vast empires made up of different peoples, nationalists believe each people should be able to determine their own destiny, govern themselves, and be free from

outside interference. Nationalism aims to build and maintain a national identity based on shared social characteristics such as culture, geography, language, ethnicity, religion, language, and tradition. It is an idea that is held to be self-evident and, since the 20th Century, something to which many peoples have aspired, and to which many continue to aspire.

Sometimes different nationalisms clash – in Spain the idea of one state for all the Spanish people and the idea of Basque independence; in Turkey, Iraq, and Syria, Kurds want their own state instead of being ruled by various other countries, and, closer to home, nationalisms in Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland compete with, and sometimes complement, a sense of British nationalism.

Nationalism can be seen as a reaction to globalisation where societies have been transformed by financial reforms leading to the free movement of capital, a lack of regulation of the market, privatization of once publicly owned companies, free trade, and reductions in government spending. In reaction to globalisation, people assert their national interests – sometimes positively (a desire to keep food standards high, for example) and sometimes negatively (blaming immigrants for austerity).

Nationalism takes many forms; in the years following the Second World War anti-colonial nationalism saw many countries emerge from the British and French empires. In civic, or liberal, nationalism the nation is defined as a political, not ethnic entity. Welsh, Irish, and Scottish Nationalism, for example, is civic and holds that the future of the country in question should be determined by those living there. Ethnic, or 'blood and soil' Nationalism, on the other hand, is where the nation is defined by ethnicity and where access to the nation can't be achieved by cultural assimilation.

Religious Nationalism associates belonging to the nation with membership of a particular religious tradition creating a common bond amongst the peoples of a nation. Britain, for example, was created to be a Protestant nation in the face of a predominantly Catholic Europe, Ireland in fact, if not in theory, saw itself for many years as a Catholic state, Turkey sees itself as a predominantly Muslim state despite a history of secularism and the presence of religious minorities.

Christian Nationalism refashions the Christian good news into an exclusivist sense of the nation's election by God in order to achieve prominence, or dominance, in the political and social life of the nation. We see Christian Nationalism at work now in America, Hungary, and Russia with shades of it at play in France and Germany and a growing move to use Christian ideas, symbols and iconography by the far right in the UK.

Responding

The Worship, Faith, and Order Committee wishes to develop a series of liturgical, pastoral and theological resources, in partnership with other churches and agencies, which enable the Church to navigate the dangers posed by Christian Nationalism and its appeal to 'blood and soil' which will help local churches respond confidently to the challenges of the age.

The work of the Committee is guided by these, preliminary, guiding theological convictions:

Faced with the trials and torments of our time, the United Reformed Church asserts its primary mission to proclaim the Lordship of Christ as we celebrate his first coming and look forward to his coming again. In our encounter with Jesus we find, in God alone, the resources needed to proclaim God's word into the specific contexts within which we find ourselves.

- To those who are afraid, we proclaim Christ's perfect love which casts out fear. (I John 4: 16b – 21)
- In the face of the divisions of the culture wars, we affirm that humanity is made in God's image. (Genesis 1: 26 – 27)
- In a world ever more suspicious of difference, we declare that God rejoices in diversity and does not desire linguistic, cultural, or ethnic uniformity. (Genesis 11: 1 – 9)
- In an age where leaders prioritise their own class, party, or group over others, Jesus reminds us that our neighbour is often someone we'd rather not know, yet alone love as ourselves. (St Luke 10: 15 – 37)
- In a world on the move, we proclaim God's care for the migrant and God's command to care for them. (Leviticus 19:33-34)
- In cultures ever more concerned with social identities, we proclaim our primary identity, as the baptised, is in Christ; an identity that completes and crowns all others. (Galatians 3: 27 – 28)
- To those who peddle lies, we proclaim Jesus as the Way, the Truth, and the Life. We commit ourselves to telling the truth and being trustworthy. (St John 14:6)
- As Christians we pray for those who lead our nations and seek the good of all, whilst remembering that the coming Kingdom we proclaim is not of this world. (St John 18: 28-37)
- As some churches are tempted to become mere agents of the state, we boldly remind ourselves we are citizens of Heaven. (Philippians 3:17 – 21)
- When tempted to despair we remind ourselves of the Psalmist's cry to trust in God alone. (Psalm 146:3-4)