



Faculty Work Comprehensive List

10-25-2022

**God and Country? A Review of The Religion of American
Greatness**

Scott Culpepper

God and Country? A Review of The Religion of American Greatness

Abstract

"Miller reveals his conservative leanings at the very beginning of the book and notes that he has critiques of progressivism that he would like to share as well."

Posting about the book *The Religion of American Greatness* from *In All Things* - an online journal for critical reflection on faith, culture, art, and every ordinary-yet-graced square inch of God's creation.

<https://inallthings.org/god-and-country-a-review-of-the-religion-of-american-greatness/>

Keywords

In All Things, book review, The Religion of American Greatness, nationalism, Christianity, Paul D. Miller

Comments

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God and Country? A Review of *The Religion of American Greatness*

Scott Culpepper

October 25, 2022

Title: *The Religion of American Greatness: What's Wrong with Christian Nationalism?*

Author: Paul D. Miller

Publisher: IVP Academic

Publishing Date: July 5, 2022

Pages: 274 (Hardcover)

ISBN: 978-1514000267

Paul Miller's *The Religion of American Greatness: What's Wrong with Christian Nationalism* adds to a growing body of literature examining the development of Christian Nationalism and warnings of the dangers it poses to the future of American Christianity and democracy. Miller brings two unique elements to his treatment of Christian Nationalism. First, he holds conservative political views and a long personal history of service in government and education to support his record. Like his friend David French, who writes the forward to the book, Miller represents an endangered breed of classical Republicans who have found themselves marginalized by the very party they called home for most of their lives. Second, he brings his experience working with the National Security Council and the CIA into the conversation, giving the reader insights into the influence of Christian Nationalism from someone who's viewed it from the inner corridors of power.

The majority of writers on Christian Nationalism tend to hold more progressive views. Miller reveals his conservative leanings at the very beginning of the book and notes that he has critiques of progressivism that he would like to share as well. He explains in the preface that he considers *The Religion of American Greatness* to be one third of a fuller argument that he envisions completing in three separate volumes. The first—the current critique of Christian Nationalism—deals with the excesses of his own people and the movements he has supported for most of his life. Miller expresses a conviction that he has a duty to deal with those excesses first in order to address “the mote” in his own eye. He projects a second volume addressing American political progressivism and a third that advances his own vision for how American democratic politics can function effectively from a Christian perspective.

Miller's first volume offers a number of helpful elements. He notes the growing problem of tribalism and how it has framed more strident versions of American nationalism. His early chapters explore whether absolute commitment to Christ can be compatible with some forms of Christian nationalism, which demand absolute allegiance to a particular version of American

democracy. Miller makes the pivotal declaration, “Anglo-Protestantism is not necessary for American democracy.”¹ He provides a strong historical argument tracing the development of democratic ideals from the Greco-Roman world through the city states of Renaissance Italy to the classical liberalism of the Enlightenment. His point is that democracy has thrived in a variety of contexts and the reasons for its rise and dissolution was not dependent on Christian commitment or a lack of it. While Christians can serve democratic societies well by fostering morality and responsibility, which was a notion held by many American founders, Christians can also damage democratic institutions when more fundamentalist versions of the faith insist on cultural dominance rather than coexistence with other religions and philosophies.

Miller also argues that nationalism cannot provide a solution to problems raised by identity politics in American culture. In fact, Miller believes that nationalism enhances identity politics and raises the stakes by further dividing Americans². Christian Nationalism adds the weight of religious conviction to a philosophy that inherently divides rather than unites. Miller’s chapter on nationalism and the Bible offers an interesting exploration of texts often used by Christian Nationalists.³ He does an excellent job framing these passages in their original historical and linguistic contexts, showing how Christian Nationalist interpretations do violence to those passage rather than honor them as holy scripture. It is here that Miller may be most effective at reaching his intended audience. He wants to construct a convincing and usable argument for reasonable conservative Christians willing to entertain the possibility that Christian Nationalism is harmful for both Christianity and American democracy. Addressing the issue scripturally is likely to be most effective for this particular audience—if they are willing to hear him out.

Miller’s text is helpful for any reader who wants to better understand the history of Christian Nationalism and why it poses a problem. For readers wanting a more expansive introduction and sharper critique of Christian Nationalism, Samuel Perry and Andrew Whitehead’s *Taking America Back for God* or Philip Gorski and Samuel Perry’s *The Flag and the Cross* occupy that niche well. Miller’s text fits well as a companion to those texts from a more conservative perspective. *The Religion of American Greatness* can travel deeper into the conservative evangelical subcultures of America and possibly convince the rank and file most steeped in ideologies of Christian Nationalism to reconsider their stance. Miller has crafted an important tool for extending those conversations. Sadly, it remains to be seen whether even conservative stalwarts like Miller and French can continue to exert influence in cultures where purity tests have become increasingly erratic and nonsensical. When purity is determined by checking the right boxes rather than embracing any kind of consistent moral or theological position, can anyone remain an unequivocal insider? Our hope must be that it is still possible even as realities on the ground cast a looming shadow over that hope.

1. p. 77

2. p. 108

3. p. 112-142