

Theological Resistance to U.S. Christian Nationalism

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U.S. CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM is hardly a new threat. Moreover, this nationalism and the ways it shows itself in the phenomenon of Donald Trump's rise to the U.S. presidency are not the only threats, perhaps not even the greatest threats, of our time. I argue in this essay that Christian nationalism is best countered by resisting the U.S. imperium's corporate-warrior elite, an elite that continually prioritizes the corporate interests of a small percentage of U.S. population and then reinforces those interests with military force and presence abroad and militarized policing and surveillance at home. Theologically, resisting a corporate-warrior elite will require acknowledging and confessing the complicity of many of us in corporatized and militarized U.S. culture. The most important theological move, however, is our retrieval of a vigorous prophetic tradition that resists today's corporate-warrior elite as a structure of injustice and a repression of the poor that is destructive of both U.S. society and global well-being.

Towards a "Critical Report"

A truly "critical report" on Christian nationalism, then, does best to stress that this nationalism is a threat primarily *as it is part of a larger threat*. The argument stated above is meant to point to this more encompassing problem. This broader problem is what Enrique Dussel has theorized as a "prevailing system"¹ that services the "corporate warrior elite." Again,

1. Dussel, *Ethics of Liberation*, 215–17. See all of ch. 4, "Ethical Criticism of the

this elite works through brutal militarization and policing networks—within the U.S. and abroad, continually reinforcing interests, practices, and structures of neoliberal capitalism, white supremacism, and a hegemonic masculinity.² Together, these structures and interests make disposable the bodies of all the poor. These structures and interests especially attack, confine, and daily devalue black and brown bodies, bodies of poor women, bodies of those who do not conform to gender and sexuality norms, bodies of "other" religious adherents—especially Muslims; not to mention that the corporate-warrior elite also devalues *any* persons who can be made with disabilities: indeed the elite devalues *any* persons who can be made subordinate or "other" to a prevailing system that celebrates or condones its interests. I am suggesting that the field over which imperial dominance and repression hold sway is the field in which also the "intersectionality"³ of these many repressions, of these various discriminations and structured forms of violence systemically interplay and are played off against one another.

"From Ferguson to Palestine," as cried out by many of the best political movements of our time, marks the geopolitical space of suffering in our present political moment. "Resistance" today must inhabit and challenge the imperial geopolitics of U.S. domination "from Ferguson to Palestine" and at all points everywhere and in-between. The comprehensive nature of the challenge—even when we remain limited to local practices—calls forth a holistic and radical prophetic theology.

In an earlier book, *Religion, Politics, and the Christian Right: Post-9/11 Powers and U.S. Empire* (2005), I offered a description of this prevailing system, this U.S. corporate-warrior elite, within a broad vision of U.S. religion and politics. Those arguments were both political and historical. I will not replay those analyses here, though signs of that analysis will emerge in what I offer here.

The real challenge today is to keep to the fore this prevailing imperial system of U.S. corporate-warrior elites. I'm not sure that many in the so-called resistance to Trump are up to this. Many instead limit focus to issues of Trump's racism, to his misogyny or to his purported ignorance and lack of fitness for office. All these are worthy points of critique, but they fall short of what needs to be done. They fail to challenge the larger historical

Prevailing System" (215–90).

2. Haymes et al., eds., *Routledge Handbook of Poverty in the United States*, 1–2.
3. Crenshaw, *On Intersectionality* (forthcoming).

and political context of U.S. imperial drives for national and global sovereignty, and the repression and suffering that result from those drives.

Can We Criticize U.S. Imperialism? Will We?

Will the critics of Trump and Christian nationalism also critique the prevailing system of U.S. imperialism? Too often Trump's admittedly racist, atrocious, even dangerous antics and policies are decried while his opponents fail to criticize the aggrandizement of power economically and militarily that the U.S. exercises abroad. The primary examples are Democrats, whether in the name of Hillary Clinton or Barack Obama, who complain about Trump but then lose their voice in the face of U.S. wars and corporate exploitation. The same Democrats who say they want to take down Trump because he's the worst thing they have seen are largely silent—certainly not effective for change—in the face of U.S. mass incarceration at home and U.S.-enabled imperial devastation in Yemen, Honduras, Palestine, and other places. Liberals lament Trump's "shithole" language but fail to analyze and resist the U.S. policies that for years have opened up abysses of political suffering for other people and for "othered" societies, cultures, religions, and ways of life. Even so, the peoples at those sites of suffering find ways of fighting back with dignity and power expressed in everyday existence. It is precisely by forging real and effective solidarity with those peoples in struggle, *against* U.S. imperialism and its corporate-warrior elite that real resistance and a comprehensive prophetic theology might emerge, and by which real "critical" reporting and thinking can arise.

Who will take up *this* kind of resistance? Who will say, as Angela Y. Davis did at a 2016 conference on the "black radical tradition," that many of us need to let go of the solace and advantage we have found in a nationalist "allegiance to America." Davis intoned, "I know as black folks in the U.S. we have thrived on nationalism. But there comes a time when we have to let it go. We have to let it go."⁴

Davis's call is not an easy one to issue. It is not one that gets much traction in U.S. society, even among activists. This is so even when the worst of U.S. imperial wars are on display. Harvard philosopher William James, for example, supported anti-imperialist groups in criticizing the U.S. imperial war in the Philippines and gave voice to the problem in 1903:

4. Davis, "Police, Prisons and the Neoliberal State." See the video (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T6B6BfyGUiQ>) at the 2:00:56 mark.

*To the ordinary citizen the word anti-imperialist suggests a thin-haired being just waked up from the day before yesterday, brandishing the Declaration of Independence excitedly and shrieking after a railroad train thundering toward its destination to turn upon its tracks and come back. Anti-imperialism, people think, is something petrified, a religion, a thing that results in martyrdom, for which to 'discuss' means only to prophesy and denounce.*⁵

But for those who live on "the underside of history," as Dietrich Bonhoeffer is oft-quoted as saying, which means to live under the boots and prevailing systems of imperial formation, there is no luxury to dismiss anti-imperialist struggle as mere crazy-man talk. Counterimperial struggle is a resistance that daily life requires. The resistance was always there in revolts among African slaves whose forced labor in the Americas powered European capitalism and U.S. imperial formation. That resistance often forms as a persistent "quiet encroachment" among those exposed to imperial subjugation, as Asef Bayat argues in *Life as Politics: How Ordinary People Change the Middle East*. Studying quiet encroachment in Cairo, Bayat writes, "I am referring to the lifelong struggles of the floating social clusters—the migrants, refugees, unemployed, underemployed, squatters, street vendors, street children, and other marginalized groups whose growth has been accelerated by the process of economic globalization."⁶ Such means of mobilization from ordinary and daily "quiet encroachment are the conditions for later and productive revolts, say, by Palestinians against the U.S.-Israel alliance or by Egyptians against U.S. imperial interests in Egypt. These are real-world occurrences or possibilities. Counterimperial struggles *do* exist. Granted, one can find crazed forms of anti-imperial cries. We should not forget, though, that as empires "overreach," and they nearly always do, the daily resistances can build toward revolt and exploit the fissures opening up when imperial powers overreach.⁷ Revolutionary journalist Mumia Abu-Jamal gave voice to this hope-making truth when he wrote:

Conventional wisdom would have one believe that it is insane to resist this, the mightiest of empires, the victor in the Cold War, the empire that devastated Iraq and all that. But what history really

5. James, "Philippine Question," 1132.

6. Bayat, *Life as Politics*, 46.

7. On the long tradition of subjugated but invisible peoples and their special techniques of resistance, see Gordon, *Hawthorn Archive*, 113–202.

*shows is that today's empire is tomorrow's ashes, that nothing lasts forever, that to not resist is to acquiesce in your own oppression. The greatest form of sanity that anyone can exercise is to resist that force that is trying to repress, oppress, and fight down the human spirit.*⁸

The process of erosion of U.S. empire has already begun. In the very process of explaining, in his lucid and thorough trilogy of studies of U.S. empire, former CIA analyst and historian Chalmers Johnson in fact documents “the end of the American Republic,” viewing this end as a rising *Nemesis* against U.S. imperial policies.⁹ The imperial U.S. will face, may already be facing, effective challenges to its global power and at multiple world sites. As Martin Luther King Jr. argued in 1967 with a force that has still gone unheeded by liberals, conservatives, and many architects of U.S. power, U.S. counterrevolutionary action and economic pursuits have put the country “on the wrong side of a world revolution.”¹⁰

King prescribed an alliance of secular peoples of conscience with other peoples who could draw upon core essentials of love and justice that he saw uniting “Hindu-Moslem-Christian-Jewish-Buddhist belief.”¹¹ Both King’s diagnosis and his prescriptions have gone unheeded through to the current year, a time spanning more than fifty years and ten U.S. presidents’ administrations (Johnson through Trump). The call for resistance to U.S. imperial policies of our corporate-warrior elite is long overdue. How we undertake this counterimperial task will depend, in part, on how we relate “Christian nationalism” to the entrenched U.S. imperial formations still at hand.

Christian Nationalism—What Is It?

It is important to say what precisely what we mean by Christian nationalism and how we understand its functioning. To repeat, we best name it and fight it when we understand how it relates to the “U.S. imperial” and its fusion of corporatist and war-making policies.

8. Abu-Jamal, “Interview with the *Revolutionary Worker*.” On Abu-Jamal’s extensive corpus, see Fernández, ed., *Writing on the Wall*.

9. See especially the third volume of the trilogy: Johnson, *Nemesis*, 10–11, 73, 242. The other two books of the trilogy by Johnson are *Blowback* and *Sorrows of Empire*.

10. King, “Time to Break Silence,” 240.

11. *Ibid.* 242.

I take nationalism to be distinctive from patriotism, in that nationalism, as Anatol Lieven has noted, issues in more tumultuous outcomes. Nationalism often adds to “patriotism,” which is the critical or uncritical “love of country,” an aggressive programmatic edge. Lieven writes that nationalism has a “certain revolutionary edge” even a “messianic vision.”¹² As I noted in a 2005 work during the rise of nationalism after the attacks of 2001 on the World Trade Center and Pentagon in the U.S., nationalist programs with their messianic dreams for the nation often concentrate power. They deploy force: They apply economic force in the form of expropriated labor and regressive taxation. Further, they apply social force by implementing brutal, blatant, and pervasive white racist practices; by curtailing citizen liberty; by instituting forms of martial law; and by promoting police and paramilitary violence, torture, and war.¹³

Nationalism can be “Christian” in at least two closely related forms. First, nationalist projects harness beliefs and sensibilities about God’s providence, and this often leads Christians to rationalize and legitimize nationalist projects. Many U.S. Christian youth are homeschooled in this theocratic nationalism, and it circulates among Christians often in the highest corridors of U.S. national power.¹⁴ There is of course a long history in the U.S. of such theocratic impulses. It undergirds a Christian American exceptionalism. An early and still fine treatment of this history can be found in *Martin Marty’s Righteous Empire*.¹⁵ Christian missionizing impulses have often been grafted onto American nationalism, interpreting the command of Christ to “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations,”¹⁶ as religious justification for a “violent evangelism” that long has been endemic to U.S. and European colonizing enterprises.¹⁷ In its second form, this Christian nationalism can also become “christocratic.” Indeed, most calls for theocracy in the U.S. are calls also for *christocracy*.¹⁸ Both

12. Lieven, *America Right or Wrong*, 6, and see 223n6.

13. Taylor, *Religion*, 44–45.

14. Balsiger, dir., *George W. Bush*.

15. Marty, *Righteous Empire*; see especially ch. 4, “Charter for Empire” (35–45) and ch. 8, “Command of Christ, Interpreted” (78–88).

16. Matt 28:13 (NASB).

17. Rivera Pagan, *Violent Evangelism*. Indeed, missionaries have occasionally also issued challenges and their own resistance to colonialism. See Memmi, *Colonizer and the Colonized*, 72–73.

18. See Alexander, *Christocracy*. On megachurch christocratic pastor, Rod Parsley, see Posner, “With God on His Side.”

are dangerous, perhaps the latter more so since it involves raising U.S. Christianity to special status over other religions within the nation as well as abroad. That nearly 80 percent of U.S. white evangelicals¹⁹ voted for “America first” Donald Trump (enough to make up 65 percent of his more than 95-percent-white voting bloc) shows how strongly the nationalist enterprise draws upon christocratic reflexes of American religion.

Christian nationalism, then, is a religiously sanctioned vision that affirms ruling elites’ nationalist projects. Religion’s legitimizing function is so powerful that even secular-leaning political thinkers can call for it in the name of effective state rule. Political philosopher Leo Strauss, for example, one of the revered thinkers of neoconservative politicians, prescribed strong doses of religion to cement the unity of the polis with a religiously sanctioned and aggressive nationalism.²⁰ Christian nationalism is a religious-political ideology that lubricates the U.S. imperium. The parts of the U.S. imperium’s engine are rendered more smoothly operable by this ideology.

Let us not think that Christian nationalist ideology is the sole cause of American nationalism. One must also study widespread desires for greed and unlimited accumulation, the hubris behind the desire for global sovereignty, and white-supremacist structures. None of these can be reduced to Christian nationalism. Drive for “American greatness” is also fueled by other sources. Christian theologians, though, have the special task of developing methodologies and beliefs to deconstruct entrenched ideologies of Christian nationalism. In the next section I identify four tasks that may aid theologians in deconstructing Christian nationalism.

Challenging the U.S. Imperium— Four Christian Theological Tasks

Four theological tasks can challenge the U.S. imperium. Each of the tasks identified here is distinctive, though not separate from one another. They not only overlap conceptually and practically, but the operations involved in each task reinforce the operations in the others.

19. Smith, “Among White Evangelicals.”

20. Taylor, *Religion*, 67, 85–95. See also Drury, *Leo Strauss*, 148–49.

1. Acknowledge the Complicity of Christian Belief

Theologians need to continually expose the complicity of Christian beliefs as a centuries-long problem. Christian thought and practice have a long heritage of being at work in European colonialism and empire-building as well as in US imperial and neocolonial systems. Again, Trump’s blatant and brutal language, however problematic, should not cause us to forget that this nationalism has often been displayed throughout U.S. history and by nearly all groups of its ruling elites. I don’t need to belabor this well-established point here. In addition to Martin Marty’s book *Righteous Empire*, there is Bruce Lincoln’s *Religion, Empire, and Torture*, and David Chidester’s *Empire of Religion*.²¹ For those wanting a more theoretical explication of how colonialism and empire have for centuries built on European-led “Christianization,” especially in the Americas, see Walter Mignolo’s corpus of writings.²² The point here should be a banal one: theologians cannot now afford to go silent on the long-standing as well as present-day complicity of Christian belief systems in supporting U.S. imperial policy of economic exploitation and military domination. Theologically, this is a site for acknowledgement, confession, and prophetic critique and resistance.

2. Disrupting the Rhetoric of the “Christian Nation”

Theologians need to break any sense of identity between Christian communities and ideals, on the one hand, and the U.S. nation’s political and social forms, on the other. Relationships of similarity and analogy here may pertain, but not those of identity. Certain practices of the nation may approximate the love and justice of the kingdom of God (*basileia tou theou*), for example, but those practices can never be identical to it. The *basileia* ideal here especially needs to be conceptualized and practiced in ways that stress its counterimperial meanings for Christian faith. Such a faith means opposing and countering those nation-state agendas with imperial intentions and pursuits of global sovereignty. For example, the U.S. government’s promotion, under the Pentagon of Bill Clinton’s presidency, of a global practice of “full spectrum dominance” for the U.S. could be rendered as betrayal of the gospel and of the kingdom of God. Such dominance lifts up one nation to the status of ultimacy, as having “full spectrum dominance.”

21. Lincoln, *Religion*; Chidester, *Empire of Religion*.

22. Especially Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs*.

The hubris here is evident even in the name the Pentagon gave to its missile attacks on Afghanistan and on a pharmaceutical plant in the Sudan in August 1998: "Operation Infinite Reach." The point here, theologically, is to maintain a critical distance between functioning Christian beliefs and Christians' loyalty to nation, to resist sacralizing the nation. This may seem a banal point, especially to Reformed theologians informed by Karl Barth's talk, following Søren Kierkegaard, advocating an "infinite qualitative distinction"²³ between God and the world. Alas, even though their national leadership may have decried wars by the U.S. in Afghanistan and Iraq,²⁴ many Reformed churches lost the needed critical distance between loyalty to nation and loyalty to God. Nationalism was left unchallenged even as U.S. wars violated international law.²⁵

3. Turning to "Empire-Critical Studies"

In order to break the identity of Christian social units with U.S. imperial formations, it is necessary that theology construe the core sacred narratives, biblical theologies and central Christian symbols with the aid of what has been called "empire-critical theory." Davina Lopez, a scholar of New Testament and early Christianity, foregrounds "empire-critical" theory in her work on the apostle Paul in Roman contexts. This "scholarship echoes a non-idealist agenda by its commitment to renewed and reconfigured historical analysis, recognition of the need to pay attention to imperialism ancient and modern, and a concern for transformation of social conditions."²⁶ Like Brigitte Kahl,²⁷ Lopez offers brilliant counterimperial readings of Paul that challenge the largely depoliticized and spiritualistic readings of Paul offered up by U.S.-American churches, readings largely unchallenged by an often "depoliticized" biblical scholarship. Richard Horsley too has pointed out the problem of biblical and theological "depoliticization" of biblical texts and has himself led the way in calling for a measured and nonreductionist if also urgently propounded "repoliticization" of biblical and theological scholarship.²⁸

23. Barth, *Epistle to the Romans*, 10.

24. Religion News Service, "Religious Groups Issue Statements."

25. Williams, "Dangerous Precedent"; Holmes, "Legacy of Fallujah."

26. Lopez, *Apostle to the Conquered*, 9.

27. Kahl, *Galatians Re-Imagined*, 209–44.

28. Horsley, *Jesus and Empire*. See especially the opening chapter, "American Identity

But still, too many Bible training centers, and in the highest echelons of theological education, continue to service a depoliticized Christian religion. This masks the gospel's counterimperial meanings, and thus Christianity is easily co-opted by the forces of U.S. imperial power—even if those very same scholars complain about Donald Trump's politics. A critical repoliticization of biblical scholarship can take place, and without the much-feared "reduction to political ideology." We await additional scholarship to take on the task, and even more we require Christian communities to live into a counterimperial politics of the gospel.

Christians claim to follow the figure of Jesus, who died on a Roman imperial cross, and who demands such a counterimperial faith. New Testament scholar Paula Fredricksen has argued that Jesus' crucifixion may be the one historical fact we can confirm about him. To follow a crucified figure, Jesus, is to find oneself thrown into a political struggle alongside those whom Ignacio Ellacuría termed "crucified peoples" of our current period.²⁹ That solidarity cannot help but be political. We also know historically that the cross was a particularly "miserable and shameful death" that the empire reserved for the threatening poor, the slave, the rebel—the politically inconvenient souls who transgressed political proprietors and leaders and their religious supporters.³⁰ Theologians who do not get political to resist empire's political and economic domination are hardly consonant with the gospel of a crucified Jesus. I say this in critique of not only conservative, "Christian Right" interpreters but also of respectable liberals who see themselves (ourselves perhaps) with a more urbane, sophisticated, probably "multicultural" affirmation of diversity against Trumpian ways.

4. Prayers and Practicing "Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions" (BDS) toward Israel

Allow me to close with two examples of counterimperial faith needed in our time and especially in U.S. communities. Both examples come from two long-standing personal concerns I have carried since the time of the Vietnam War; these concerns extend to today's U.S. wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, and Syria—and also to the U.S.-backed wars and covert war and a Depoliticized Jesus," 1–14.

29. Ellacuría, "Crucified People."

30. See Cook, *Crucifixion in the Mediterranean World*, a major study, especially 358–79 and 418–30.

operations on nearly every continent.³¹ My two proposals here are ways to give public voice to a Christian liberation politics of counterimperial faith.

First, I suggest that Christians in their churches *pray by name* for the peoples and groups that the U.S. has deemed enemies to the nation. During especially the U.S. assaults on Iraq in 1991 under George H. W. Bush and then again in 2003 under George W. Bush, I visited many a church seeking to hear a faith language in prayer or sermon that named the peoples on the receiving end of U.S. firepower, of U.S. “shock and awe” tactics. Usually I looked in vain. Like the major U.S. generals, who rarely count enemy dead, much less name them, U.S. Christians at best tend to abhor violence “on all sides” while lifting up prayers for “our soldiers” but rarely, if ever, pray for civilians and soldiers on the other side, and again rarely by name.

Prayer is a staple of religious piety, especially among U.S. Christians. Yet, an American captivity of prayer too often persists, confined to rhetorical observance of national boundaries. Many times I have penned a statement or essay critical of U.S. leaders and presidents because of the destruction they have meted out to other peoples, only to hear from a pious Christian: “Well, don’t forget to pray for the president.” Sure, okay, as a human being and creature sullied but still somehow made in the image of God, a U.S. president might deserve such a prayer. But you’re not going to ask me to pray for the largely innocent civilian-victims on the other side, or for those among enemy soldiers caught up, as our soldiers are, in the brutal vicissitudes of military conscription and war?

If and when I go to pray as a Christian, am I not to be challenged to name the greatest scores of the slain simply because they are not U.S. dead? Yes, in most cases English speakers may have to work to pronounce the names of hosts of Asian, African, and Arabic persons on compiled lists.³² To name these deaths at the heart of the pious practice of prayer might be one small way to start world peace against the U.S. imperialism’s addiction to war.

Second, I call for a necessary and concrete practice. Grasping its import requires our recalling that the militarily enforced “peace” of U.S. empire, Pax Americana, involves a number of crucial alliances. One such alliance is prominently underwritten by sacred narratives and particularly

31. Vine, “U.S. Probably Has More Foreign Military Bases”; also Lucas, “U.S. Has Killed.”

32. For a list of Iraqi civilians killed by U.S. military operations, see Sloboda, “100 Names of Civilians Killed.”

by Jewish and Christian biblical narratives. I refer especially to the U.S. alliance with Israel, constituting what comparative literature scholar and Palestinian activist Edward Said termed, a *pax Americana-Israelica*.³³ The problem with this alliance is not simply that by it the U.S. legitimizes and supports Israel’s illegal occupation of Palestine³⁴ with nearly unparalleled military aid to Israel, in spite of a well-documented reality of Israeli-sponsored “ethnic cleansing of Palestine.”³⁵ The problem is also that this alliance with Israel becomes a pillar of U.S. policies in the Middle East, pulling in other partners in alliance, such as Saudi Arabia and the Gulf oil states, so that these together then unleash destabilizing forces and war. One of the outcomes of all this is the flight of refugees from war-torn areas of Syria and Iraq into Europe and the U.S.³⁶

I suggest that the time is long past due for the guilds of the American Academy of Religion (AAR) of the Society of Biblical Literature (SBL) as well as for U.S. Christian churches to collectively work toward endorsement of the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement. The best arguments for that endorsement, I believe, are provided in a book by Omar Barghouti, *Boycott, Sanctions, and Divestment*, and at the website on the BDS movement’s progress.³⁷ This is a boycott that is no mere product of “outside agitators” or well-meaning liberals. It has its origins in over one hundred grassroots organizations in Palestine itself. The Association of Asian American Studies was the first academic guild to endorse BDS, in 2013. The American Studies Association endorsed it later, also in 2013. Critical theorist Judith Butler has laid out additional helpful arguments for the BDS initiative in 2013.³⁸

I suggest that U.S. Christians and churches, as well as scholars of the AAR and SBL where we are gathered for this occasion now, have a special obligation to weigh in on this imperial alliance, the *pax Americana-Israelica*. This is because of the ways sacred narratives are so regularly deployed to fuel the conflict and legitimize Israel’s illegal occupation. Political theorist Achille Mbembe has made two important points pertinent to the

33. See, for example, Said, *Covering Islam*, xxxv.

34. For a meticulous analysis, see Finkelstein, “Is the Occupation Legal?”

35. See historian Ilan Pappé, especially Pappé, *Ethnic Cleansing*, 1–9.

36. On the relation between these various entities and “pillars” of U.S. policy in the Middle East, see Prashad, *Arab Spring / Libyan Winter*, 45–64.

37. Barghouti, *BDS*. For the BDS website, see <https://bdsmovement.net/what-is-bds/>.

38. Butler, “Judith Butler’s Remarks to Brooklyn College.”

Israeli-Palestine crisis. First, he has argued in his influential essay, "Necropolitics," that the organized occupation of Palestine by Israel with U.S. backing is "the quintessential example" of "late-modern colonial occupation." At such a site, where the most minimal standards for occupying forces are routinely violated, theologians should advocate for the dispossessed and brutalized peoples. Mbembe underscores his first point with a second one, noting that it is "sacral narratives of national identity that underwrite the state strategies of division and fragmentation" and that sustain late-modern colonialism.³⁹ Christians need to join with their Jewish and Muslim colleagues, and also with peoples of all faiths (and those of no formal religion) to deconstruct the way such "sacral narratives" dispossess and destroy the peoples of Palestine.

Unfortunately, in the U. S. strong Christian Zionist currents not only underwrite Jewish rights to life and peace (to be sure these must be guarded) but also justify Israel's usurpation of Palestinian lands and rule over Palestinian peoples. That the occupation is illegal in the eyes of international law and lays waste to nearly any semblance of life for Palestinian peoples rarely is a concern for these U.S. Christians. Liberal Christians, who often demonize the "Christian Right" for being "conservative" and staunch supporters of Israel, still often lose their voices when it comes to advocating specifically for Palestinians. They go PEP—progressive except for Palestine—as many activists say. This lack of advocacy points to widespread failure by U.S. churches. The churches often forgo advocacy for Palestine because they fear charges of anti-Semitism when criticizing Israeli policies. A church with truly counterimperial faith and courage will maintain a voice to criticize every form of anti-Semitism *even while* roundly condemning Israel's illegal occupation and destruction of Palestinians and their land. As I write, U.S. and Israeli leaders continue their denunciation of the BDS movement as straight-out anti-Semitic. In the United States efforts continue (even by many vociferously opposed to Trump) to pass laws against those of us in support of BDS.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, theologians of counterimperial faith in the age of Trump should take a stand in solidarity with Palestinians' own call for a policy of boycotting, divestment, and sanctions.

39. Mbembe, "Necropolitics," 11–40 (see 14).

40. *Electronic Intifada*, "Anti-BDS Laws."

CONCLUSION

The four theological tasks of the previous section are not the only ones necessary in this political moment. Nevertheless, begin with these four, and theology will not only be taking on Christian nationalism. It will also be challenging the U.S. imperium's corporate-warrior elite. We will not effectively deal with the threat of Christian nationalism without confronting the imperial interests of this U.S. corporate-warrior elite. This elite—not only its conservatives and neoconservatives but also its liberal hawks and urbane liberal academics—is what often creates and sustains the conditions for the possibility of Christian nationalism. The resistance must dare to challenge this elite.