News



Bishop Michael F. Burbidge of Arlington, Va., chairman of the U.S. Catholic bishops' Committee on Pro-Life Activities, carries the monstrance during Eucharistic adoration Jan. 19, 2023, at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington after concelebrating the opening Mass of the National Prayer Vigil for Life. Bishop Burbidge addressed the "confusion" of Christian nationalism on his podcast April 15, 2024, and why the ideology is opposed to Catholic teaching on proper love of the church and love of country. (OSV News/Bob Roller)

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The concept of Christian nationalism is not compatible with Catholic teaching, Bishop Michael F. Burbidge of Arlington, Virginia, said on a recent episode of his 'Walk Humbly' podcast.

The term "Christian nationalism" has been the subject of recent controversy, as some understand the term to mean an ideology that the United States should be a specifically Christian nation enforced by the power of the federal government, while others contend the term is used loosely by those who wish to keep Christians out of

the public square.

During a question and answer segment on the podcast, Burbidge was asked, "Can you comment on the oxymoron of Christian nationalism? Is it consistent with our faith?"

Although some conflate the terms, "nationalism" and "patriotism" are separate and distinct concepts, said Burbidge, who also chairs the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on Pro-Life Activities.

"I think it's good to distinguish between patriotism and nationalism," he said. "Of course, a good Catholic should also be a good citizen, a faithful citizen. We always say that, 'A faithful citizen,' and that means to be patriotic of course. We should have a proper, healthy love for our nation because it is ours and we live in a nation that, through the sacrifices of so many people, gives us the gift of freedom, the gift of religious liberty, and we should be thankful for that."

Citing Pope Francis, who has said, "A good Catholic meddles in politics offering the best of himself so that those who govern can govern," Burbidge said, "that doesn't mean we approve of everything our government does, and it doesn't mean that we think our nation is without fail."

"It means that we work for the common good in our nation and for it to be a force for good," he said. "However, a patriotic person doesn't need his nation to be greater than others in order to love it."

Burbidge said "nationalism, on the other hand, is a view of one's nation only in competition with others."

"It tends to emphasize devotion to the nation, to the exclusion of other devotions, including one's faith," he said.

"So above all, we are Catholic. We are a follower of Christ, we are Christian. That's where it all begins, and it is that that we live in the situation that God has placed us," he said.

“Christian nationalism,” he continued, "is a confusing term because it can confuse two things that should be distinct: devotion to the nation and devotion to the church."

"A Christian ... never identifies oneself entirely with a particular nation," Burbidge said. "A Christian loves his nation, but within the broader and larger love for God and neighbor. See, that's that distinction we're trying to make."

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The Diocese of Arlington, which is celebrating its 50th anniversary, Burbidge noted, has St. Thomas More as its patron said, who became a martyr when he was executed in 1535 for refusing to accept King Henry VIII as head of the Church of England.

Burbidge called their patron "such a great example."

"He was a devoted British subject and servant, but he was a Catholic first," he said. "In a time of persecution, he chose his faith over his ruler. As he famously put it, he was 'the King's good servant, but God's first,' and that's who we should be."

A recent study by the Pew Research Center published in March found a slight majority of Americans are unfamiliar with the term “Christian nationalism”; but most respondents who had heard the term expressed an unfavorable view. There was no religious group in the study in which more people had a favorable rather than unfavorable view of Christian nationalism. Pew found Americans were narrowly split on whether the Bible should have at least some influence on U.S. laws.

Another recent survey by the Public Religion Research Institute published in February found that two-thirds of Americans qualify as skeptics (37%) or rejecters (30%) of that ideology, while the remaining share qualified as adherents (10%) or sympathizers (20%). PRRI's survey of 22,000 adults found that states with the highest levels of support for Christian nationalism "form a horseshoe shape, starting in the upper Midwest, dipping down into the deep South, and then moving up again

through the Appalachian Mountains."