Preface

"BORDERS ARE LIES WE TELL ON MAPS AND DEFEND WITH BOMBS."

~ Morgenstein Fuerst and Megan Goodwin

"Quiero recordarle al gringo: Yo no crucé la frontera; la frontera me cruzó. América nació libre; el hombre la dividió."

~ Los Tigres del Norte, "Somos Más Americanos"

What makes religious nationalism religious and nationalism? For us, it is the central preoccupation with the mythic structures and frameworks of society. These myth-histories become totalizing and vital. The myths often matter more than the facts or the history. It is myths that help to weave a nation together and drape the coffin in the flag. The myths must be valorized and treated as sacred, along with the icons associated with them. To desecrate the myth and/or the icons is to desecrate the nation. An example of the mythic nation-state is the contemporary borders of our nation – borders that are not inherent to the natural world:

> *BORDERS ARE LIES WE TELL ON MAPS AND DEFEND WITH BOMBS. Because here's the thing, readers: maps are political. All maps are political. #YesAllMaps. How we choose to represent data is political—that is to say, it has stakes, it makes an argument. Maps represent choices made by interpreters of data. That data*

> *was collected and transmitted by folks who had their own reasons for collecting it, folks who wanted us to see the world in a very particular way.*[1]

We begin the introduction to this special issue with this epigraph because it highlights the mythic and ideological frameworks that underlie the classification of "religious nationalism." Maps make moral claims, and they are mythic documents. In what direction, and how, does one orient the map? Is the map pointing magnetic north or east as the sun rises? Who is your compass rose? What is in a name? Is it the Gulf of Mexico, the Gulf of America, or *Chalchiuhtlicueyecatl*?[2] How is the space named? As Patricia Seed demonstrates, Portuguese and Dutch claims to land relied on astronomy, navigation, mapping, and scientific knowledge. Measuring the stars and producing maps became acts of possession, transforming scientific authority into political and moral authority.[3] The names of so many stars and constellations follow the nomenclature and style of settler-colonial navigators. What would happen if the stars and constellations were called by the Indigenous names they are given when they appear over a local spot? The knowledge of the Indigenous peoples who were in relationship with particular constellations (pun intended) of the macrocosm and microcosm of the cosmos holds invaluable wisdom. For example, *Lakota Star Knowledge* returns and grounds one in the sacred geography of the space and time of that landscape, reanimating the reciprocal relationship to Mother Earth.[4]

In international law and policy, a sacrosanct principle is the territorial integrity of the state.[5] The lines on the map matter; however, in practice, things get more mercurial on the ground. How does one draw or enforce the boundary? The Original Free Nations and peoples of Turtle Island/Abya Yala were born free, lived under lasting and binding agreements recorded in oral memories and stories, and oftentimes in woven forms, such as wampum belts. As Executive Director of the American Indian Law Alliance, Betty Hill (née Lyons) (Onondaga Nation, Snipe Clan) says about Haudenosaunee memories, "our memories are historic." Indigenous peoples maintain and preserve the wisdom, teachings, and practices of forms of nationhood and sovereignty that existed before colonization, exist today, and will continue to exist in the future as well. These national boundaries and relationships reflect the teaching that one cannot own one's mother, the Earth. As an ancestor and founder of the American Indian Law Alliance, Tonya Gonnella Frichner (Onondaga Nation, Snipe Clan) would say that Mother Earth is our relative, not a resource.

---

1. Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst, *Religion Is Not Done with You: Or, the Hidden Power of Religion on Race, Maps, Bodies, and Law*, 1st ed, with Megan Goodwin (Beacon Press, 2024), 55.
2. Adam DJ Brett and Betty Hill, "Examining the Doctrine of Discovery in Religion and Indigenous Studies," *Religion Compass* 20, no. 1 (2026): e70039, https://doi.org/10.1111/rec3.70039.
3. Patricia Seed, *Ceremonies of Possession in Europe's Conquest of the New World, 1492-1640* (Cambridge University Press, 1995), 100–169.
4. Ronald Goodman and Alan Seeger with Lak'ot'a Star Knowledge contributors, *Lak'ot'a Star Knowledge: Studies in Lak'ot'a Stellar Theory*, 3rd ed. (SGU Publishing, 2017).
5. Richard W. Maass, "Enforcing Territorial Integrity," *The United States and International Law: Paradoxes of Support Across Contemporary Issues*: *Paradoxes of Support across Contemporary Issues*, ed. David L. Sloss and Michael J. Ramsey (Cambridge University Press, 2022), 37; Jure Vidmar, "Territorial Integrity and the Law of Statehood," *George Washington International Law Review*, no. 44 (2012): 697; Stuart Elden, "Contingent Sovereignty, Territorial Integrity and the Sanctity of Borders," *SAIS Review of International Affairs* 26, no. 1 (2006): 11–24; Stuart Elden, "Territorial Integrity and the War on Terror," *Environment and Planning A* 37, no. 12 (2005): 2083–104; Mark W. Zacher, "The Territorial Integrity Norm: International Boundaries and the Use of Force," *International Organization* 55, no. 2 (2001): 215–50.

We cannot and should not own Mother Earth.[6] Before the colonization of Abya Yala/Turtle Island, Indigenous nations lived in relationships with one another. They shared in the care and responsibility of being in relationship with the natural world.[7] Wampum belt treaties, like the Haudenosaunee and Anishinabek One Dish One Spoon, provide examples of this type of eternal treaty and relationship. This wampum belt teaches that we are living together and eating from the same dish with one spoon.[8] (Jemison et al., 2022) (see Figure 1). Onondaga Lake deserves restoration – not just for the Haudenosaunee, but for all peoples, all living beings, and for the future of the Earth itself.

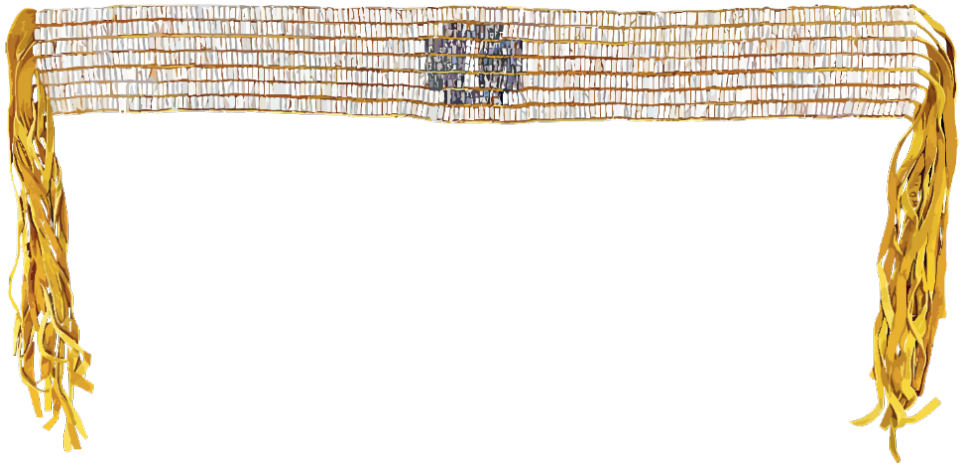

Figure 1. Reproduction of the One Dish One Spoon Wampum Belt by Richard David Hamell. True wampum from 1650s (Seneca) surface collection, leather, vegetable fibers, 8.3 × 72.4 cm. Image used with permission.[9]

Touching, feeling, and listening to treaties like the One Dish One Spoon Wampum reminds us of a time before modern nation-states and borders, in the sense of the term as used in the Treaty of Westphalia. Indigenous and Chican@ activists have been saying for decades a phrase immortalized in Los Tigres del Norte's "Somos Más Americanos": "we didn't cross the border, the border crossed us." This continent was born free; it was the colonizers who divided it. The imposition of borders exists to literally divide kith and kin from one another to create a nationalist mythos and preserve a binary opposition of insider/outsider. Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands* provides a border epistemology in which identity is hybrid and contested, destabilizing nationalist purity and underscoring the liminality and trauma of imposed borders. Finally, the critical and postcolonial materials widen the conceptual terrain in which religious nationalism is negotiated

6. Adam DJ Brett and Betty Hill (Lyons), "Healing the Sacred: The Fight to Restore Onondaga Lake and Honor Indigenous Land," *International Journal on Responsibility* 9, no. 1 (2026): Article 2, https://doi.org/10.62365/2576-0955.1133.

7. Of course, things were not perfect, but neither was it "savage" or barbaric as settler-colonists fantasized. If one can read, present, and understand a nuanced history of Europe so too can one do the same for Indigenous nations and peoples.

8. Peter Jemison et al., "Wampum: A Living Tradition," *Gradhiva : Revue d'anthropologie et d'histoire des arts*, no. 33 (2022): 118–31.

9. Richard Hamell, *Dish with One Spoon (Reproduction)*, 2020, Wampum, 8.3 × 72.4 cm, https://wampumbear.com/w_dish%20with%20one%20spoon%20belt.

or resisted. Anzaldúa's borderlands writing frames identity as lived at the edges of nation and culture, where religion marks boundaries rather than private belief.[10]

Starting with some banal examples: The U.S.-Canadian border runs through the Haskell Free Library and Opera House. Is the building half Canadian or half U.S.-ian? When you are in the building, where are you? What does it mean to cross this arbitrary boundary? Why can Canada and the U.S. share a library and an opera house, but the United States and Mexico share a seesaw inserted through the wall?[11] To put an even finer point on it, the territoriality of the United States-imposed southern border with Mexico matters far more than its imposed northern border with Canada. The United States benefits from the porosity of one and the rigidity of the other. As Tupac Enrique Acosta (Izkaloteka Mexica Azteca) reminds us, settler-colonial-imposed borders do not ask Indigenous peoples about the border or the plants or the animals. Who cares for the territorial integrity of Mother Earth?[12] Before his passing, Enrique Acosta, along with his friends and collaborators at Tonaiterra, organized with:

> The call of the Izcalli Abya Yala of 2020 was to vision, to organize and exercise the Right of Self Determination as Original Nations of Indigenous Peoples acting in Continental Alliance and Confederation in defense of the Territorial Integrity of Mother Earth. Since 2020, the processes of uprising and emergence, evaluation, and organizing from local-regional, continental-global scales of incidence by the Indigenous Nations of Abya Yala continue to develop and mature.[13]

It is the Indigenous nations of Turtle Island/Abya Yala who rise and organize to advocate with Mother Earth for her territorial integrity and protection over and against the Doctrine of Christian Discovery and ideological framework of enslavement, exploitation, and extraction, as Shawnee/Lenape scholar Steven T. Newcomb so elegantly puts it in *Pagans in the Promised Land*.[14] Nationalism, in general, and religious nationalism in particular, tend to be painted as inevitable, a natural step as common as water and as natural as breathing, when in fact they are neither. Instead, they require particular socio-cultural conditions and legacies to be in place.

Nationalism: A History of Violence

There are numerous etiologies of nationalism, and its history is complex. Each of these myth-histories has a different and important socio-cultural function. As Bruce Lincoln has reiterated regarding comparison, all knowledge "derives from consideration of data whose differences become instructive and revealing when set against the similarities that render them comparable."[15] Any attempt to arrive at a comparative understanding of religious nationalism, therefore, encounters at least two significant challenges. The first, familiar in virtually all scholarly discussions of "religion," particularly in the North American context, is the persistent difficulty of defining religion itself, along with the critique of

10. Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands = La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, Fifth edition (Aunt Lute Books, 2022).
11. "Seesaws Built on U.S. Border Wall Win Prestigious Design Prize," *NPR,* January 19, 2021, https://www.npr.org/2021/01/19/958339302/see-saws-built-on-u-s-border-wall-win-prestigious-design-prize.
12. Tupac-Enrique Acosta, "Superseding the Doctrine of Discovery: World Water One," *Doctrine of Discovery* (blog), March 29, 2023, https://doctrineofdiscovery.org/blog/1CEMANAHUAC/.
13. Acosta, "Superseding the Doctrine of Discovery."
14. Steven T. Newcomb, *Pagans in the Promised Land: Decoding the Doctrine of Christian Discovery* (Fulcrum Publishing, 2008).
15. Bruce Lincoln, *Apples and Oranges: Explorations in, on, and with Comparison* (The University of Chicago Press, 2018), 25.

comparative religion as a project that has historically disciplined diverse socio-cultural formations into the modern Western category of "religion," often functioning as a cryptic means of reshaping the world according to Western patterns.[16] However, the concept of nationalism is also not immune to critique when it is applied, through any single definition, across diverse global contexts. This difficulty is not limited to debates among competing models of the nation-state (such as the Wilsonian model of self-determination or ethnic conceptions of the nation). Still, it extends more broadly to the analytical portability of nationalism as a category of comparison. In this special issue, we consider the categories of religion, nationalism, and religious nationalism as mythic pathfinders that orient one towards varying types and styles of religious nationalism that find their orientational landmarks in epistemes like the Doctrine of Christian Discovery, the Age of Colonialism and Conquest, the Treaty of Westphalia, modernity, Wilsonian models, etc. None of these landmarks is presumed to be the normative starting point for the study of religious nationalism, but rather the point at which this article picks up. Think of these landmarks as the voice-over equivalent of "Previously on *Law & Order: Religious Nationalism Unit*…"

In the continuing aftermath of postcolonial struggles that continue to shape contemporary political life, the desirability of centering the nation-state as the primary locus of civic belonging cannot, in all cases, be readily dismissed. Although the nation-state has been declared in crisis for decades – whether due to economic inadequacies,[17] the emergence of transnational networks of information, capital, and communication,[18] or its failure to generate durable and legitimate political structures[19] – current global realities nonetheless underscore its enduring significance. The experiences of Palestinian, Rohingya, Sudanese, and other communities displaced from, or rendered invisible within, their indigenous lands by the operations of nation-states starkly demonstrate this paradox. Ironically, it is precisely through such exclusions that the nation-state reveals why both the most fundamental existential claims of humanity and its most mundane material needs remain profoundly tethered to it.

To borrow Judith Butler's account of displacement and statelessness, such practices of marginalizing a people in the process of nation-state formation expunge them from the cultural and historical worlds to which they belong, casting them instead into a condition of metaphysical abandonment in which they lack agency as members of a political community, yet remain subject to the power of the state. It is at this point that a bitter irony emerges: the production of superfluous populations severed from any nation-state in an era dominated by the nation-state recalls Hannah Arendt's analysis of the failure of the twentieth-century project of the Rights of Man. That project's attempt to ground human dignity in abstraction from political belonging ultimately vindicated, however troublingly, Edmund Burke's defense of the "rights of Englishmen" over the universal "rights of man" as not merely more practical, but as the only politically viable option in an age structured by nation-states.[20]

But even if the pursuit of a universally applicable framework for the comparative study of religious nationalism is constrained by variations in the meanings and functions of both religion and nationalism across contexts, it remains essential to examine their interactions using provisional yet analytically

16. See Daniel Dubuisson, *The Western Construction of Religion: Myths, Knowledge, and Ideology* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003); Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions, or, How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism* (University of Chicago Press, 2005).
17. Ken'ichi Ohmae, *The End of the Nation State: The Rise of Regional Economies*, 1st free press paperback ed. (Free Press Paperbacks, 1996).
18. Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society*, 2nd ed., with a new preface (Wiley-Blackwell, 2010).
19. Hamid Dabashi, *The Emperor Is Naked: On the Inevitable Demise of the Nation-State* (Zed Books, 2020).
20. Judith Butler and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Who Sings the Nation-State? Language, Politics, Belonging* (Seagull Books, 2007), 7–9.

productive definitions. The recent resurgence of right-wing political mobilizations that draw upon constellations of religion and nationalism – from Myanmar and India to Türkiye and the United States – once again underscores that religion, and religiously inflected socio-political formations, encompass far more than what a phenomenology of religion, with its focus on the sacred or the holy, has traditionally foregrounded. A study published in January 2025 by the Pew Research Center illustrates the complex ways in which religious nationalism is shaping the political landscape in thirty-five countries. The study's working definition of religious nationalism is structured around four criteria: 1) the importance attributed to adherence to the historically dominant religion as a marker of national belonging; 2) the expectation that political leaders share that religious identity; 3) the degree to which sacred texts should influence the formulation of laws; and 4) whether, in cases of conflict, popular will or sacred texts ought to take precedence. Based on these criteria, the study operationalizes the category of "religious nationalists" as "people who identify with the historically predominant religion (also often the majority religion) and take a strongly religious position on all four of these questions."[21]

As the study demonstrates, religious nationalism can function as an indicator of broader social, political, and economic tensions. Across countries with different historically dominant religions, the factor most directly correlated with the prevalence of religious nationalism is not religious affiliation itself, but income level. In none of the high-income countries does the proportion of religious nationalists reach double digits. Moreover, the two high-income cases that approach this threshold – Greece and Israel,[22] each at 9 percent – further reinforce the argument that religious nationalism is not primarily driven by religious discourse or practice as such, as public perceptions of religion might suggest. Instead, it appears more closely tied to struggles over material resources (particularly land) and collective identities grounded in historical distinction.

Like other social phenomena, religious nationalism cannot be understood solely in terms of its numerical prevalence within a given society. Its force derives instead from the forms of representation it commands and from the degree of administrative authority and visibility in the public sphere that it attains. The case of Christian nationalism in the United States is instructive in this regard. Although the same Pew study estimates its adherents at approximately six percent of the population, observers of American society since 2016 can readily attest to its pervasive presence and disproportionate political impact. In this context, a recent article by Reed van Schenck is particularly relevant. Van Schenck argues that white Christian nationalism has moved beyond the conventional use of media as mere instruments of communication. Instead, it has constructed a self-contained media ecosystem that subverts the public sphere by transforming mediated representations of the world into the total social reality of its adherents. It is from within this parallel symbolic universe that a relatively small minority of Americans identified as Christian nationalists generate a sense of urgency for sweeping policy changes – most notably articulated in initiatives such as Project 2025 – and subsequently seek to implement these changes by leveraging their current access to political and administrative power.[23]

---

21. "Comparing Levels of Religious Nationalism Around the World," Pew Research Center, January 28, 2025, https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2025/01/28/comparing-levels-of-religious-nationalism-around-the-world/.
22. The case of Israel-Palestine as a scene of leveraging religion in a battle over such stakes is, unfortunately, too well-known to need examples or reminders. For the case of Greece, where building the first-ever mosque in the capital demanded a whole state project, see J. Christopher Soper and Joel S. Fetzer, *Religion and Nationalism in Global Perspective* (Cambridge University Press, 2018), 110–32.
23. Reed Van Schenck, "Christian Nationalism as Media," *International Journal of Communication* 19 (September 2025): 336–57, https://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/view/22645.

This reading of religious nationalism, in our view, makes this problem too critical, and, let's emphasize again, too urgent to dismiss: knowing religious nationalism in its various formations is not only another implementation of how human communities are constructed through socio-cultural networks of imagination in the Andersonian sense. It is tantamount to mapping the worlds in which high-impact forms of human agency are shaped inside what Neil van Leeuwen calls a "two map" worldview, where the factual scene that the religious mind perceives (in our case, as many as factual data that historians, economists, sociologists, political scientists, etc. can provide about the nation-state) is only completed, rectified, and complicated with a second map of credences[24] whose primary function is to entrench and solidify group identities.[25]

Religious Nationalism

To play with Augustine, what do I study when I study religious nationalism? Patricia Seed's *Ceremonies of Possession* provides a partial answer. Forms of religious nationalism that find their etiologies in European ideas of the nation-state from Christendom forward participate unconsciously in a theological and jurisprudential domination that reaches its nadir in the Doctrine of Christian Discovery.[26] Seed demonstrates that European powers did not merely conquer territory through force, but through culturally and religiously meaningful rituals – speeches, crosses, maps, measurements of the stars, fences, and legal formulas – that transformed land into Christian and national property. Rituals like the *Requerimiento*[27]were meant to be read aloud to provide preemptive absolution for the abuses and atrocities the conquistadors were about to commit. It was a ritual steeped in preemptive victim blaming and dehumanization, designed to render the domination and cruelty that would be demanded and expected theologically sanctified and legally justified. Seed's analysis of the *Requerimiento* in chapter 3 further illuminates this point by highlighting how the document demands submission to the Spanish Crown and the Roman Catholic Church, which performs two tasks: first, the aforementioned preemptive grant of absolution, and second, providing the conquistadors with a grim reminder of what happens to those who step out of line.[28]

The *Requerimiento* serves as an older example of the pattern of theological and legal justifications of domination in its ritual form. It makes visible how Christian theology became a legal procedure, the divine grant of land, and an authority flowing from God to the Pope, to the sovereign, to the president. This grant, which lives on today in U.S. law as "plenary power," has been invoked by the current U.S. executive

24. Neil Van Leeuwen, *Religion as Make-Believe: A Theory of Belief, Imagination, and Group Identity* (Harvard University Press, 2023), 61–67.
25. Van Leeuwen, *Religion as Make-Believe: A Theory of Belief, Imagination, and Group Identity* (Harvard University Press, 2015), 153–174.
26. Newcomb, *Pagans in the Promised Land*; Robert J. Miller et al., *Discovering Indigenous Lands: The Doctrine of Discovery in the English Colonies* (Oxford University Press, 2010); Philip P. Arnold et al., "Introduction to the 200 Years of *Johnson v. M'Intosh*: Law, Religion, and Native American Lands Series," Canopy Forum on the Interactions of Law and Religion, 2023, https://canopyforum.org/2023/03/10/introduction-to-the-200-years-of-johnson-v-mintosh-law-religion-and-native-american-lands-series/; Philip P. Arnold et al., "From Indigenous Religions to Indigenous Values," *Journal of the Council for Research on Religion (JCREOR)* 5, no. 2 (2024), https://creor-ejournal.library.mcgill.ca/issue/view/12; Philip P. Arnold et al., "200 Years of Johnson v. M'Intosh (JVM): Indigenous Responses to the Religious Foundations of Racism," *CrossCurrents* 74, no. 4 (2024): 391–399.
27. Charles I of Spain "Requerimiento" (1513), Indigenous Values Initiative, Doctrine of Discovery Project, https://doctrineofdiscovery.org/requerimiento/.
28. Seed, *Ceremonies of Possession*, 69–99.

branch.[29] Plenary power also serves as an example of the religious hierarchy seen in the *Requerimiento*, perhaps even in an unexpected way. Plenary power, like the invisible hand of the market, is a preservation of Christian theology within the ideological frameworks of government. Who moves these invisible hands of God? The head of state.[30] Likewise, in these elements, we see the preservation of sacred speech as law: speaking the terms that invoke certain elements, like the invisible hand of the market or plenary power, leads to acquiescence from the elected classes, who abdicate their authority and far too often fail to act in the face of such sacred utterances.

While religious nationalism as a category is solely the creation of scholars, it nevertheless allows us to index and collect a constellation of impacts, including material and lived harms. Thus, religious nationalism and elements like the Doctrine of Christian Discovery are not abstract theories, but lived, spoken, and performed religious and legal rituals. The act of reading the *Requerimiento* functions as a political liturgy, transforming violence into a righteous defense of Christian and national order.

Following Seed, when examining religious nationalisms that emerge from the *eurochristian* socio-cultural milieu, it is essential to highlight how modern religious nationalisms in formerly colonized countries can take on the tenor and timbre of *eurochristian* nationalism: the ideology may change, but the style remains the same – a lesson which we also see in R. Scott Appleby and Martin Marty's work on fundamentalisms (strong religions).[31]

The lacuna between justice and law created by these rituals of possession continues to grow. Seed's book, while not part of the traditional canon on religious nationalism, nevertheless demonstrates how

---

29. Sophie Rosenthal, "Stephen Miller's Comments on Presidential Powers Spark Search Interest in 'Plenary Authority,'" *WUSA9*, October 8, 2025, https://www.wusa9.com/article/news/verify/what-is-plenary-authority-stephen-miller-donald-trump-cnn/65-050f2773-f146-46f7-8bb1-abcca0881859#; Steven T. Newcomb and Peter d'Errico, "Supreme Court Justices Attack 'Plenary Power' over Native Peoples," *The Domination Chronicles Podcast*, November 18, 2025, https://dominationchronicles.com/episodes/e006-plenary-power/; Fay Alexandra, "Johnson v. M'Intosh, Plenary Power, and Our Colonial Constitution" (peer reviewed), *Canopy Forum*, March 29, 2023, https://canopyforum.org/2023/03/29/johnson-v-mintosh-plenary-power-and-our-colonial-constitution/; Susan Bibler Coutin et al., *Routine Exceptionality: The Plenary Power Doctrine, Immigrants, and the Indigenous Under U.S. Law*, UC Irvine School of Law Research Paper Series, no. 2012–79 (UC Irvine School of Law, 2012), https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2181071; Steven T. Newcomb, "The Evidence of Christian Nationalism in Federal Indian Law: The Doctrine of Discovery, Johnson v. McIntosh, and Plenary Power," *New York University Review of Law & Social Change* 20, no. 2 (1992): 303–341.

30. Philip P. Arnold and Sandra L. Bigtree, "Ten Religious Themes of the Doctrine of Christian Discovery (DoCD) That Contrast with Indigenous Values," *Doctrine of Discovery Project*, September 26, 2022, https://doctrineofdiscovery.org/10-religous-dimensions/; Adam DJ Brett and Betty Hill (Lyons), "Documenting Domination: From the Doctrine of Christian Discovery to Dominion Theology," *Religions* 15, no. 12 (2024), https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15121493; Brett and Hill, "Examining the Doctrine of Discovery in Religion and Indigenous Studies."

31. Gabriel A. Almond et al., *Strong Religion: The Rise of Fundamentalisms around the World* (University of Chicago Press, 2006); Nancy T. Ammerman, "The Dynamics of Christian Fundamentalism: An Introduction," in *Fundamentalisms Observed*, ed. Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby (University of Chicago Press, 2004); Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby, *Fundamentalisms Comprehended* (University of Chicago Press, 2004); Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby, *Accounting for Fundamentalisms: The Dynamic Character of Movements* (The University of Chicago Press, 2004); Marty and Appleby, *Fundamentalisms Comprehended*; Martin E. Marty, *Fundamentalisms Observed* (University of Chicago Press, 1994); R. Scott Appleby and Martin E. Marty, "Introduction: The Fundamentalism Project: A User's Guide," in *Fundamentalisms Observed*, ed. Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby (University of Chicago Press, 2004); Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby, *Religion, Ethnicity, and Self-Identity: Nations in Turmoil* (University Press of New England, 1997); Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby, *Fundamentalisms and Society: Reclaiming the Sciences, the Family, and Education* (University of Chicago Press, 1997); Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby, *Fundamentalisms and the State: Remaking Polities, Economies, and Militance* (University of Chicago Press, 1996).

political sovereignty in the Atlantic world emerged through an explicitly Christian-charged idiom in which ceremonies fused faith, law, and nationhood into claims of rightful possession. Thus, when speaking of religious nationalism and the formation and rise of racism, authors Adam DJ Brett and Betty Hill (née Lyons) (Onondaga Nation, Snipe Clan) follow professor Tink Tinker (wazhazhe, Osage Nation) and speak of *eurochristianity.*[32]

Key Features of Religious Nationalism

In agreement with and building on the work of Seed, here are some of the key features of *eurochristian* style religious nationalism: Religious Sovereignty as Legal Authority. We see this when monarchs or nation-state leaders lay claim to land in the name of religious kings, crowns, or God. Whenever religion uses a justification and a putatively moral foundation of political rule, that is a sign that what is at play is religious nationalism. In the United States, examples include the Doctrine of Christian Discovery, Manifest Destiny, the *Federal Anti-Indian Law* (FAIL), and taxes.[33]

Another essential element is Sacred Speech and Ritual. Here, we have formal declarations, notarized speeches, and ritualized performances that functioned as quasi-sacraments, transforming space into sovereign territory. Again using the United States as an example the rhetoric around being a city on a hill, Manifest Destiny, and the terraforming of the landscape through renaming the landscape after biblical and Greco-Roman place names Abilene, Antioch, Athens, Babylon, Bethany, Bethel, Bethlehem, Beulah, Canaan, Corinth, Damascus, Ebenezer, Egypt, Emmaus, Gilead, Goshen, Hebron, Jericho, Jerusalem, Lebanon, Mars Hill, Memphis, Salem, Zion, etc.[34]

A third feature is the nation as a moral actor and agent, whereby power is imagined through a gendered nation-state granted agency to act. This nation-state is seen as the motherland or fatherland. It is granted perpetual exceptions to international law and policy. Its denizens go along with the continued evocation of what Giorgio Agamben would call "states of exception" until their rights are totally diminished. This strategy remains effective so long as the denizens of the nation-state see themselves as

---

32. George E. Tinker and Roger Green, "Eurochristian, or What Are We Going To Do With White People – Revisited, Part 1," *New Polis* (blog), February 16, 2023, https://thenewpolis.com/2023/02/16/eurochristian-or-what-are-we-going-to-do-with-white-people-revisited-tink-tinker-and-roger-green-part-1/; George E. Tinker and Roger Green, "Eurochristian, or What Are We Going To Do With White People – Revisited Part 2," *New Polis* (blog) March 1, 2023, https://thenewpolis.com/2023/03/01/eurochristian-or-what-are-we-going-to-do-with-white-people-revisited-tink-tinker-and-roger-green-part-2/; George E. Tinker and Roger Green, "Eurochristian, or What Are We Going To Do With White People – Revisited Part 3," *New Polis* (blog), March 17, 2023, https://thenewpolis.com/2023/03/17/eurochristian-or-what-are-we-going-to-do-with-white-people-revisited-tink-tinker-and-roger-green-part-3/; George E. Tinker and Roger Green, "Eurochristian, or What Are We Going To Do With White People – Revisited Part 4," *New Polis* (blog), April 9, 2023, https://thenewpolis.com/2023/04/09/eurochristian-or-what-are-we-going-to-do-with-white-people-revisited-tink-tinker-and-roger-green-part-4/; Roger K. Green, "Neoliberalism and Eurochristianity," *Religions* 12, no. 9 (2021), https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12090688.

33. Robert J. Miller, *Native America, Discovered and Conquered: Thomas Jefferson, Lewis & Clark, and Manifest Destiny* (University of Nebraska Press, 2008); Robert Michael Ruehl, "Manifest Destiny," *Doctrine of Discovery Project* (blog), March 23, 2023, https://doctrineofdiscovery.org/blog/manifest-destiny/; Peter P. d'Errico, *Federal Anti-Indian Law: The Legal Entrapment of Indigneous Peoples*, 1st ed. (Bloomsbury, 2024).

34. Adam DJ Brett and Betty Hill, "Documenting Domination: From the Doctrine of Christian Discovery to Dominion Theology," *Religions* 15, no. 12 (2024): 1493, https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15121493.

righteous and legitimate while dismissing others as invalid and heretical, so long as people believe these are divine blessings, the states of exception, and the rise of authoritarian populism persists.[35]

Fourthly, theological justifications and legitimation of domination and land theft through concepts like discovery and *terra nullius*. These concepts operate as theological and jurisprudential concepts, using the rhetoric of missiology and the assumption of a technological and civilizational master as "proof" of divine favor and, therefore, the presumptive right to domination and political ownership. In short, the overly theologized version of might equals right.

Fifthly, conversion, coercion, and manufactured consent are the tools of domination and humiliation within this system. Indigenous nations and peoples of Africa and Turtle Island/Abya Yala must submit to these rituals of humiliation and dehumanization. Indigenous submission or participation was framed as moral or spiritual validation of imperial authority. One must either convert or and/or die. For example, during the Age of Colonization, this was justified through perennialist theological assumptions of bringing Indigenous peoples back to the faith, as we see in *Inter Cetera*.[36] The presumption is that "all Saracens [*sic*] and pagans whatsoever, and other enemies of Christ" are heretics who walked away from the one true faith during some bygone era. Thus, they must be punished for their heresy and subjected to perpetual enslavement and/or reversion to the true faith. However, no matter how hard they might try, they can never reach equality within the dominator, under this system of theological and legal domination.[37]

Religious Nationalism and Indigenous Rights

As Newcomb illustrates in settler-colonial law, the law is never secular or neutral; in its very essence, it serves as a form of political theology and domination. Law is a moral and religious framework that, far too often, even in settler-colonial countries that have shaken off their colonial governments, is a *eurochristian* ideological formulation of domination, hierarchy, and a divine mandate into modern legal language and national identity. Overcoming religious nationalism means taking a Foucauldian approach to undoing the systems of domination and oppression that have become hardwired into modern systems and forms of governance. Throughout his career, Newcomb has highlighted evidence of Christian Nationalism and hegemony through law, especially in *Federal Anti-Indian Law* (FAIL), highlighting this decades-long presentation of proof of domination. He recently published his highly anticipated Domination Translator Series with the Doctrine of Discovery Project.[38] In Newcomb's analysis of recent FAIL cases, he highlights many of the elements we have already discussed as key themes of religious nationalism across U.S. law. What emerges from a careful reading of this series and his emphasis on domination and its theological and jurisprudential weight within the U.S. legal system is a political theology of the Doctrine of Christian Discovery. He demonstrates how the papal bulls, colonial charters, and other religious decrees were gradually transformed into legal doctrines within European empires and later embedded in U.S.

35. Giorgio Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (Stanford University Press, 2017).
36. Indigenous Values Initiative, "'Inter Caetera' Translated by Sebastian Modrow and Melissa Smith," Doctrine of Discovery, June 13, 2022, https://doctrineofdiscovery.org/inter-caetera/.
37. Indigenous Values Initiative, "Dum Diversas," Doctrine of Discovery, July 23, 2018, https://doctrineofdiscovery.org/dum-diversas/.
38. Newcomb, "The Evidence of Christian Nationalism in Federal Indian Law"; Steven T. Newcomb, "The Domination Translator Series: An Extended Essay on Various U.S. Supreme Court Rulings and Other Topics - Part 1," *Doctrine of Discovery Project* (blog), January 1, 2026, https://doctrineofdiscovery.org/blog/domination/domination-translator-series-introduction/.

Supreme Court decisions, most notably *Johnson v. M'Intosh* (1823).[39] As Newcomb's *oeuvre* demonstrates, breaking the link between divine mandate and national destiny is undoubtedly challenging. Once Christian authorization becomes the foundation for national expansion and territorial sovereignty, it becomes easier to change the religion of the authorization than the entire system of domination. What this type of legal political theology does is naturalize religious claims as putatively "neutral" legal principles governing property and political authority.

By continuing to ground law and the very idea of a nation-state in domination and discovery, the legal system continues to deny the original, free, and prior existence of Indigenous nations, their systems of governance, and their understandings of sovereignty, all of which exist outside and beyond *eurochristian*, Enlightenment, and Wilsonian notions of sovereignty. By grounding U.S. law in Discovery, the legal system continues to deny Indigenous Nations full sovereignty and territorial rights, positioning them as dependent or subordinate rather than as equal political entities. We turn to Newcomb here because it helps to emphasize the role of language and metaphors in thinking through religious nationalisms. Newcomb emphasizes how metaphors and legal terminology structure political reality. Words such as "guardian," "ward," "trust," and "domestic dependent nations" encode a paternalistic moral hierarchy that casts the state as a benevolent authority and Indigenous Nations as morally and politically inferior. The state mirrors the role of a divine father or shepherd, guiding and disciplining subordinate peoples, and banal language and metaphors mask the insidious nature of this type of domination. Through Newcomb's analysis, we see how U.S. history, education, and civic culture omit or sanitize the religious foundations of domination. By presenting American law and nationhood as secular, democratic, and rights-based, the ongoing theological roots of colonial power are concealed.

What Newcomb is highlighting here is the mythic power of language and story. Religious nationalism allows for the nation to frame itself as the moral exemplar and defender of freedom and the faith, allowing it to strip away freedoms and rights in the name of protecting the myth. Selective historical memory and a love of mythic stories serve as a de facto civil religion that affirms national virtue through obscurity and affect. The myth feels good. The reality of history feels heavy. In a similar vein, Halvor Moxnes, in *Jesus and the Rise of Nationalism*, situates nationalism within the reception and political uses of Jesus, suggesting that religious nationalism arises when sacred narratives authorize national identity and political order.[40] As Agha Shahid Ali so poetically writes about the trauma of living and loving Kashmir, the mythic memories get in the way of history.[41]

Finally, we rely on Newcomb as one of our core theoretical framers because his work demonstrates how international law is often a tool for the further reification of religious nationalism, enabling settler-colonial nations to consistently get away with being bad faith actors who are rarely held to account. Additionally, Indigenous peoples are consistently erased, and their treaty obligations and internationally recognized rights, such as the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), are denied. Why was UNDRIP needed? Why was the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), which serves as the basis for the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on

---

39. See: Steven T. Newcomb, "The Domination Translator Series Steven Newcomb"; "The Challenges of Revoking the Papal Bulls: A View-from-the-Shore Analysis of Recent Statements by Christian Churches," *Cross Currents* 74, no. 4 (2024): 431–457; "*Johnson v. M'Intosh* and the Missing Cover of the Jigsaw Puzzle" (peer reviewed), *Canopy Forum*, March 10, 2023, https://canopyforum.org/2023/04/13/johnson-v-mintosh-and-the-missing-cover-of-the-jigsaw-puzzle/; "The Evidence of Christian Nationalism in Federal Indian Law."

40. Halvor Moxnes, *Jesus and the Rise of Nationalism: A New Quest for the Nineteenth Century Historical Jesus*, New paperback edition (I.B. Tauris, 2018).

41. Shahid Ali Agha, *The Country without a Post Office* (Penguin Books, 2013).

Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, not sufficient to secure the recognition and rights of Indigenous peoples and ensure they were treated as fully human? As Charmain White Face notes, UNDRIP is not legally binding, and the final article undermines the work of all previous articles.

Religious Nationalism as an Extension of *The White Possessive*

Aileen Moreton-Robinson's work *The White Possessive* further illustrates how *eurochristian* theological and legal justifications of conquest impact sovereignty, moral virtue, and sacred national identity, supporting settler-state claims to land, law, and belonging. Moreton-Robinson's analysis consistently reveals how political authority and legal power operate through secularized forms of religious legitimacy.[42] As her title points out, nationalism is not only religious but also racialized, and in her primary case studies, it is most often weaponized white supremacist capital. The "white possessive" is the normalization of domination, enslavement, and exploitation through political and media narratives about state ownership of land and resources while portraying Indigenous rights as excessive or disruptive.

For example, she examines Captain James Cook's decision to ignore treaty-making instructions and instead declare the land terra nullius (land belonging to no one). This act becomes foundational to white possession in Australia, transforming Indigenous peoples into propertyless subjects and placing land under the authority of the Crown. Cook's analysis of Australia and the application of *terra nullius* provides another example that parallels that of the United States, but with a slight twist: the myth of secularizing Christian authority into British legal sovereignty. The Crown functions as a moral and quasi-sacred agent whose will overrides Indigenous law, spirituality, and political order. This pairing helps students see how Christian theology mutates into modern legal doctrine while preserving its moral claims to land. A vital part of *The White Possessive* framework is the language and rhetoric of national security, borders, and social cohesion. Indigenous advocacy is frequently portrayed as a destabilizing force that threatens unity, economic growth, or public order. The nation's territory is treated as a moral space that must be defended against internal and external threats. Again, we return to maps, borders, and the extension of borders into the air and sea. Nowhere is safe from the nation-state boundaries. Security discourse is used to justify the suspension of Indigenous sovereignty, portraying land defense, protest, and legal action as risks to the common good rather than as expressions of internationally recognized rights. We say this with #NODAPL and continue to see this with *Chích'il Bił Dagoteel,* with #BlackLivesMatter protests, and in cities wherever there are authoritarian crackdowns in the name of border security.

Overview of Key Titles in Religious Nationalism

The most foundational anchor for this section is Atalia Omer and Jason A. Springs' *Religious Nationalism: A Reference Handbook*, which provides the field's most precise conceptual map and vocabulary. Their work defines religious nationalism as a modern political project that fuses sacred identity with national destiny, and traces how it operates through institutions, public memory, and state power. It is the most useful starting point because it integrates comparative cases, methodological cautions, and definitional clarity in a single frame, making it the best guide for situating every other source that follows.[43]

---

42. Aileen Moreton-Robinson, *The White Possessive: Property, Power, and Indigenous Sovereignty*, Indigenous Americas (University of Minnesota Press, 2015).

43. Atalia Omer and Jason A. Springs, *Religious Nationalism: A Reference Handbook*, Contemporary World Issues (ABC-CLIO, 2013), https://doi.org/10.5040/9798216007364. Atalia Omer and Jason A. Springs, "Religion and

Omer and her frequent collaborators have distinguished themselves as leaders in the study of religious nationalism; their careful and detailed approach to the material serves as a blueprint for others.

Building outward from Omer and Springs, the monograph literature supplies depth and variation. Kinnvall's *Globalization and Religious Nationalism in India* reads religious nationalism as an ontological security project amid global uncertainty.[44] Gregory J. Goalwin's *Borders of Belief* shows how Catholic and Islamic institutions anchor nationalist boundaries in Ireland and Turkey. At the same time, Ruben F. Trinidad's *A Monument to Religious Nationalism* demonstrates how denominational history and polity become part of the national story in the Philippines.[45] These texts reveal how religious nationalism can be psychological, institutional, and historical all at once, and they make visible the different levels at which nation and religion are mutually constructed.

Lest anyone think that we are letting secular or "postsecular" nation-states off the hook, we want to remind readers of this special issue that Eric Bugyis critiques "postsecular" discourse as self-colonizing.[46] Ryan Carr demonstrates Indigenous secularism as a contested tradition, and Kur's inculturation study links liberation and decolonization to religious identity formation. Together, these works show that religious nationalism is not only about explicit national ideology, but also about the deeper infrastructures of border-making, secular power, and colonial memory that make nationalist religion thinkable in the first place.[47]

Special Issue Overview

The final essays for this *JCREOR* special issue demonstrate an impressive range of methodological and geographic innovation, and the authors deserve special recognition for expanding the boundaries of religious-nationalism scholarship. Muhammad Afdillah's critical study of print culture offers a rare, text-centered account of "scriptural nationalism" as a genre-based project of civic formation. At the same time, Mohammad Meerzaei's analysis of Henry Corbin's "Iranian Islam" reframes nationalist knowledge production as a Eurocentric mirror that both valorizes and appropriates the religious "other." Together, these pieces show that religious nationalism is not only a political ideology but also a textual and epistemic practice that is produced through interpretive labor and scholarly canon-making.

The special issue is equally strong in its attention to religious nationalism as a transnational political force. Roger Bauman's essay on African American Christian Zionist tours of Israel reveals how biblical narratives of enemies and annihilation are mobilized across racial and national boundaries to sustain a global religious-political project. Patricia Tillman's study of Christendom College and the Spanish Civil War demonstrates how conservative Catholic institutions manufacture historical memory to sacralize political identity, while Lawrence Claiborne's Project 2025 critique foregrounds public theology as a critical

---

Nationalism," in *The Wiley Companion to Religion, Politics, and Nations*, ed. Jocelyn Cesari (Wiley-Blackwell, 2025), 27–46.

44. Catarina Kinnvall, *Globalization and Religious Nationalism in India: The Search for Ontological Security* (Routledge, 2006).

45. Gregory J. Goalwin, *Borders of Belief: Religious Nationalism and the Formation of Identity in Ireland and Turkey* (Rutgers University Press, 2022); Ruben F. Trinidad, *A Monument to Religious Nationalism: History and Polity of the IEMELIF Church* (Evangelical Methodist Church in the Philippines, 1999).

46. Eric Bugyis, "Postsecularism as Colonialism by Other Means," *Critical Research on Religion* 3, no. 1 (2015): 25–40, https://doi.org/10.1177/2050303215573117.

47. Ryan Carr, "Indigenous Secularism and the Secular-Colonial," *Critical Research on Religion* 10, no. 1 (2022): 24–40, https://doi.org/10.1177/20503032221075384.

method for diagnosing how policy agendas weaponize religious nationalism. These contributions are distinctive in that they connect religious nationalism to concrete institutional practices – education, pilgrimage, and policy – rather than treating it as an abstract ideology. Adam DJ Brett and Betty Hill's (née Lyons) essay on the Doctrine of Christian Discovery shows how domination is codified through theological and legal language, revealing the infrastructural depth of Christian hegemony in modern nation-states. The study of Christian nationalism's "intentional ambiguities" in mid-twentieth-century America offers a sharp historical intervention, arguing that vagueness is not a weakness but a strategic feature of nationalist religion. These authors collectively provide not only new case material but new analytic leverage: they identify how religious nationalism is authored, circulated, normalized, and strategically obscured. Together these essays demonstrate that dominionism is the force that gives (religious) nationalism meaning.

The book reviews collectively map key currents in the scholarship on religious nationalism through three distinct but complementary lenses. M. Dougherty's *Lost Tribes Found* is read as a crucial historical intervention into settler-colonial mythmaking, showing how "Israelite Indian" narratives sanctified expansion and framed Indigenous peoples within a biblical national story. Brian Kaylor and Beau Underwood's *Baptizing America* is summarized as a theological and political critique that repositions mainline Protestantism as a co-architect of Christian nationalism, challenging the tendency to externalize the phenomenon onto evangelicals alone. Pamela Cooper-White's *The Psychology of Christian Nationalism* is highlighted for its clinical and pastoral sensitivity, foregrounding the affective dynamics – fear, belonging, identity – that draw people into nationalist religiosity while resisting a dehumanizing polemic. Taken together, these reviews emphasize that religious nationalism is sustained by historical myth, institutional complicity, and psychological attachment, and they model multiple disciplinary approaches for diagnosing and resisting its power.

Conclusion

Taken as a whole, this literature positions religious nationalism as a multi-layered phenomenon that is simultaneously ideological, institutional, ritual, and narrative. It is shaped by colonial histories, enacted through law and policy, and sustained by the production of memory, genre, and theology. The field, therefore, demands comparative scholarship that is equally attentive to texts, institutions, and lived practices – and the works gathered here, especially the *JCREOR* special issue contributions, provide exactly that: a rigorous, innovative, and urgently relevant roadmap for future research. We extend our gratitude once again to Gerbern Oegema, editor-in-chief, for welcoming us back for another issue, and our most profound appreciation to managing editors Amanda Rosini and Elyse MacLeod, who shepherded and managed this issue from start to finish. Thank you.

– Adam DJ Brett[48]

48. Adam DJ Brett is an International Research Associate with the American Indian Law Alliance and Visiting Professor of Digital Humanities and Indigenous Studies at United Lutheran Seminary. He earned his PhD in religion from Syracuse University in 2022. In his free time he enjoys programming, the #indieweb, and playing Dungeons and Dragons with his friends.