

Ep 37: Christian nationalism and the US election

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Hello and welcome to Episode 37 of the National Secular Society (NSS) podcast. I'm Alastair Lichten (AL), Head

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of Education at the NSS. Your regular host, Emma Parks, should be back next episode.

0:00:17.120,0:00:21.760

This week I spoke with Andrew Seidel (AS), an attorney at the Freedom from Religion Foundation (FFRF).

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You may remember that Andrew joined us for Episode 25 to discuss America and American

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style religious exceptionalism in the response to the Covid19 pandemic. In this episode we

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talked about the role that secularist issues were playing in the ongoing US presidential election,

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the extent to which US parties and voters are sorting along religious lines or polarising on

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secularist issues, and the challenges these pose to non-partisan organisations like the FFRF.

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Andrew had a lot of really interesting stuff to say that we had to cut down a little bit

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for time or just to keep on topic if you're interested in having stuff like that available

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as maybe bonus content for members then please let us know. Also let us know if you're interested

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in these international episodes. Do you want to know more about secularist issues in particular

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in other countries? Would you like to see that more compared and contrast the situation in the UK?

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Feedback is always welcome where there's more information at the end of the episode.

0:01:17.440,0:01:25.840

So with no further delay here's my discussion with Andrew Seidel.

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(AL): Andrew, welcome back to the NSS podcast. (AS): Thank you so much for having me. It is a pleasure to join

0:01:32.800,0:01:39.680

you as always. (AL): If we could start with a bit of an overview for our audience, to what extent are

0:01:39.680,0:01:46.720
separation of Church and State issues
important in
this upcoming election? (AS): I think they're
absolutely

0:01:46.720,0:01:51.840
crucial. And you know one of the things that
we are
fighting here in the United States is Christian

0:01:51.840,0:01:57.840
nationalism - the idea that the United States
is
a Christian nation, that we've strayed from
those

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Christian foundations and they
use the language of return to justify

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a lot of public policy right now, so some
downright evil public policy. I mean Christian

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nationalism seized power in 2016. it was one
of if not the best predictor of a Trump voter,

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thinking that the United States was founded
as
a Christian nation and so you know a lot of the

0:02:20.800,0:02:29.040
policies that the Trump administration has
adopted,
things like the Muslim ban, are just perfectly

0:02:29.040,0:02:34.560
blatant Christian nationalism. Many of these
things are explicitly Christian nationalist but

0:02:35.680,0:02:45.040
for a lot of voters they still don't understand
that link. So while we talk about other issues

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they aren't necessarily tied for many people in
the United States to Christian nationalism
itself

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or tied to the religious issues. So people will
be
against the Muslim ban and certainly against
the

0:02:56.000,0:03:02.800
child separation policy but not realise the
extent
to which Christian nationalism has influenced

0:03:03.600,0:03:10.160
that particular issue. (AL): I'm curious that
given how
polarising these issues have become,
particularly

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along party lines, does this create problems
for
you as a non-partisan organisation? it does, it

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does. So one of the rules in the United States
is that to maintain your tax-exempt status

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you can't engage in electoral politics so you
can't endorse or oppose or appear to endorse

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or oppose a candidate for public office. so
we've had to work very very carefully

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to toe that line and you know the rule allows
you to engage on issues so you can engage on
the

0:03:45.680,0:03:51.040
Muslim ban and on the child separation
policy. You

just can't be seen to be endorsing or opposing
a

0:03:51.040,0:03:56.240
candidate for public office. But because as
you've said this State/Church separation

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generally and Christian nationalism more
broadly
has really broken across party lines. That's
become

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increasingly difficult. It's something that
we value and we think is a great rule so

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we really do go out of our way to be above
reproach but it has certainly become harder,

0:04:14.480,0:04:21.200
especially the closer we get to the election.
(AL): One
of the striking aspects of the Trump
presidency

0:04:21.200,0:04:27.600
appears to be its embracing of white
nationalism
and Christian nationalism and it seems that
the

0:04:27.600,0:04:35.120
polling shows that this has driven particularly
white liberals further to for want of a better

0:04:35.120,0:04:43.760
word the 'Left' on racial justice issues and that
this mirrors other historical polarisation
trends

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but on the Christian nationalism issue, there
doesn't appear to be the same

0:04:49.760,0:04:52.960
backlash so liberals don't

necessarily appear to become

0:04:52.960,0:05:00.160
stronger advocates of Church/State
separation in
response. Is that accurate and why might that
be?

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(AS): I think it is accurate to a certain extent.
But I;;
add to that by saying I don't

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think there has been no backlash. I think
the backlash that you're seeing has been

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less explicit and more on I guess more on
the demographic side of things I would say.

0:05:20.000,0:05:26.560
So there has been an exodus away from
churches
in America. The younger generation in
particular

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is fleeing the Church and that exodus was
accelerated under the Trump administration
and

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i think in large partly because they were using
and
abusing religion as a political tool, as a cudgel

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to beat people over the head and say this
is why we need to do this. And logically it

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didn't make a lot of sense for people and it
was
again being used to justify this hateful and evil

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public policy - things like separating children from their families at the border, things like opposing

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equal marriage for LGBTQ Americans. I mean we are now poised, as you and I are recording this, the

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Senate is likely going to vote in a Supreme Court Justice, a new Justice who is going to

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take away, she's likely, Amy Coney Baird is likely going to write the opinion

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that overturns Roe versus Wade and takes away a woman's right to reproductive choice. She's likely

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going to be the turning point vote, the flip, when it comes to equal marriage if there is a challenge

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to that in the future. I could see the court overruling the Obergefell decision which

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allowed and finally said - yes we do have equal marriage in this country,

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and I think a lot of the backlash that we're seeing is, rather than people opposing

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religion and politics and favouring the separation of State and Church,

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just leaving religion altogether and saying - I don't want that. (AL): Is there a danger in that

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demographic, the underlying assumption there that as people leave religion they necessarily

0:07:09.920,0:07:15.760
become what we would call secularists you know as you might say Church/State separation activists.

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There's no reason for example you know if we look at President Trump as a perfect example. By most

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credible accounts he's an atheist, he doesn't appear to be in any way personally religious.

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Although of course many supporters sincerely are. Is it that this Christian nationalism might be

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more about identity and less about belief? I mean I think that Christian nationalism is very much

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about an identity. And it is this incestuous marriage between religion and politics. And

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I was speaking about this with a couple of other professors, sociologists who teach about

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Christian nationalism here in the United States,

Andrew whitehead and Sam Perry and one of the

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ideas that we were sort of exploring is whether or not American religions are actually reorganising

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along political lines. So the identifier of a particular Christian sect is becoming far less

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important to most American Christians than the fact that they are Christians and then either

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conservative or liberal. And it appears to be that religion is reorganising along political lines.

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Is Trump uh Christian or not? Let me just address. I mean he identifies as Christian. I think you're

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right, like he clearly doesn't know a lot about Christianity. I mean this to me is just one

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of the most haunting moments in in the last four years but I mean and it seems like

0:08:44.880,0:08:52.160

almost a decade ago but this was just on June 1st - Trump had peaceful protesters gassed, beaten,

0:08:52.160,0:08:57.760

brutalised with rubber bullets so that he could walk to a church and pose with a bible.

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So it was this haunting despicable scene

that encapsulated so much of what was wrong

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and un-American with the sinister and exclusionary movement that is Christian nationalism.

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And I think that is also a good encapsulation of where that version of American Christianity

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is going. It is a - for lack of a better word - 'shallow' version of Christianity. But that has

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often been the case throughout American history.

I mean this has never been something that was,

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that was deeply personal to them. It was more

'I consider myself to be a Christian because

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that is what it means to be a good person in American society'. And THAT is the demographic

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shift that we are really seeing. And I think soon

the default position is going to be 'No, I'm not

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religious'. 'No I'm not a Christian' and instead of that meaning people are admitting that

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they're quote unquote 'a bad person' it just means

that they don't adhere to this relatively

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volatile and virulent strain of Christianity. And

you're certainly right to identify that
0:10:17.280,0:10:22.880
being non-religious doesn't necessarily mean
that
someone is an advocate for a secular
government.
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But I think there's a lot less support
for Christian nationalism in a country where
0:10:28.000,0:10:32.320
most of the people are not religious. (AL): I
think we've referred to that in the past as
0:10:33.120,0:10:38.720
'a secular deficit'
because we would argue you know even if
0:10:38.720,0:10:41.920
100% of people were different religions
that secular government would still be
0:10:42.640,0:10:47.760
a necessary guarantee for freedom. (AS):
Absolutely. I
mean the best argument for that is that
0:10:47.760,0:10:51.760
there's no such thing as the freedom OF
religion
without a government that is free FROM
religion
0:10:51.760,0:10:57.200
so even if every American was devoutly
religious
to me that would be a stronger argument for
0:10:57.200,0:11:02.240
the separation of State and Church. But again
in terms of real politic that that's just not
0:11:02.240,0:11:07.840
not the case. (AL): When you were last on the
show we

were discussing concerns that you were
raising
0:11:07.840,0:11:13.680
about state funding for religious services and
this is something we're also seeing in the UK
0:11:13.680,0:11:19.680
in response to the pandemic. Given the
stricter legal separation of the Church and the
State you have compared to
0:11:19.680,0:11:25.680
what we do in the UK, where do you think
this is going? (AS): Well I'm deeply concerned
0:11:25.680,0:11:32.720
about where we are in the United States with
that right now. I mean the Trump
administration
0:11:33.280,0:11:39.920
funneled millions, billions to churches under
something called the Paycheck Protection
Program
0:11:39.920,0:11:48.880
(PPP) and they actively tried to favour
churches and
religious organisations. They had these, the
White
0:11:48.880,0:11:56.480
House, had these secret calls with churches
that support Trump and his administration
and
0:11:56.480,0:12:05.200
his policy goals advising them on how to get
at
this money more easily. They expanded, they
0:12:05.200,0:12:10.400
added all kinds of exemptions into the rules
for
distributing this money that made it easier for
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churches and religious organisations, not only to get the money but often to double or even triple

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or quadruple-dip into the funding. So it was, it was deeply alarming and in the interim we saw the

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Supreme Court decide this case called 'the Espinoza case' which essentially said that Christian parents

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have a right to access taxpayer funds to pay for religious schooling for their children. And that is

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just fundamentally un-American. I mean one of the founding values of this country is that it

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is a tenet of every citizen's religious freedom. I, as an atheist, have a religious freedom right

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not to be taxed and then have the government turn around and give that money to a religious

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organisation. And the Supreme Court, a couple months ago, flipped that on its head and said

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instead parents who are religious have a right to access those taxpayer funds. And this is part of a

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broader trend from the federal courts and the Supreme Court in particular that we are seeing.

0:13:18.880,0:13:26.000
(AL): So to make sure I understand: is this a transferring of rights from individuals to

0:13:26.800,0:13:33.120
institutions? (AS): Well I wouldn't necessarily phrase it like that right now because the

0:13:33.120,0:13:37.760
decision just came down. So it's hard to know how broad it's going to be in that respect. I think

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the better way to say it is that the Supreme Court flipped the right so it used to be that

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every citizen had a right not to be taxed by their government

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in a way that violated their religious liberties: that would then go and support a religion that's

0:13:51.920,0:13:57.280
not their own. That was the right every single citizen had it. And now the Supreme Court has said

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these Christian parents want to send their kids to a private religious school and they have

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a right to access the public purse to do that. And it's essentially they said it's a right based

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in non-discrimination which hopefully doesn't really make sense to your listeners.

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It's not because I'm doing a bad job describing, it's because it doesn't make a whole lot of sense.

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So they ignored the religious freedom right that was important to our founders and instead

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just focused on the fact that these Christians weren't able to do this particular thing they

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weren't able to take advantage of sending their kids to private religious school

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and therefore that was discrimination so they only focused in on the Christian parents who were

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claiming persecution in the case and not everybody else. So by narrowing their

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field of view just to those particular parents and only looking at that right they miss

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the forest for the trees. (AL): I was recently giving evidence before the Welsh parliament in this

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country about the future of religious education in schools and they kind of split it into two

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evidence sessions - the religious representatives in the morning and then later on the quote-unquote

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non-religious representatives. And it was interesting that we in the non-religious session

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were talking about the rights of children not to be proselytised too and in the morning session the

0:15:24.640,0:15:28.880

religious representatives were talking about the right of religious schools to proselytise.

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Rather than - but you're saying that rests with the institution or with the parents?

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Is it an individual right of the parents according to this argument? (AS): I mean I think according to this

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argument essentially what the Supreme Court did was create a hierarchy of rights. And religious

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freedom is a higher right but they narrowed it down to Christian religious freedom. So

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I mean I would really encourage everybody who's listening, I wrote the brief to the Supreme

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Court for FFRF and a bunch of other secular groups, I co-authored it. It's a short brief,

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it's 18 pages you know but that includes a bunch of introductory materials. The case is 'Espinoza

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versus Montana Department of Revenue' and I wrote it so that anybody could understand that not just

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the judges. I mean you know religious liberty was in was definitely imperiled, endangered in that

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case but the case was not about discrimination. It was about government compelled support of

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religion. If you want to subsidise a religion, fine. But those donations have to be voluntary and the

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court abandoned that principle so we reached this disastrous moment in American history -

0:16:38.320,0:16:43.680
the era of government compelled tithing. (AL): Turning to the other side of the equation as it were:

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is there a sense that the Democratic presidential ticket the Biden/Harris ticket have a competing

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vision of the separation of Church and State and how that should work? (AS): Yes so this is one

0:16:56.000,0:17:01.680
of the areas where given our tax exemption I have to be careful but there is

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I think a distinct difference between the views of State/Church separation in

0:17:09.680,0:17:16.720
the two tickets right now. I think that is pretty clear to anybody who's watching.

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That being said I mean religion has been used by both parties extensively to show that they are

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worthy of holding elected public office in the United States. I would like to see

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far far less religion being involved both in our politics and in our government you know. So both

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in the political campaigning side of things and in our government um and I think we are nearing the

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point again speaking demographically where that is going to happen. After the 2018 election I wrote

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an article looking at the share of the electorate that was non-religious and how it has just

0:17:58.960,0:18:04.480
increased massively in the past decade and I expect in this

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two years since I wrote that article to
the election that we're about to have

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that that's going to increase even more. So I
think
we are going to near the point where
pandering on

0:18:16.240,0:18:24.720
religious issues for voters is going to be less
and less fruitful for politicians. (AL): Politicians

0:18:24.720,0:18:32.320
in the UK have long looked to harness the
power
of the faith sectors and faith communities in

0:18:32.880,0:18:39.520
delivering public services. I see the historical
parallels in the United States. So you had
under

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George W Bush I believe the introduction of
the
office of faith-based initiatives which were

0:18:45.360,0:18:52.720
not rolled back but expanded under the
Obama/
Biden presidency, albeit with protections
against

0:18:52.720,0:19:02.080
proselytisation and discrimination. Would a
Biden/
Harris presidency roll back or alter the
delivery

0:19:02.080,0:19:09.040
of such faith-based public service provision?
(AS): Yeah
that's a great question. One of the things that

0:19:09.680,0:19:15.760

the Freedom from Religion Foundation
advocated
for here in the States prior to the Trump

0:19:15.760,0:19:21.760
administration taking office was for shutting
that part of the White House down entirely

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because we thought it would be used to
reward
this Christian Nationalist coalition that put

0:19:31.280,0:19:38.960
Trump in the White House and that is
absolutely
what we have seen happen. I mean this is I
think

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probably and this is a hard thing to
say with any certainty. Hopefully there will

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be some sort of accounting in the future. But
one
of certainly, one of the most corrupt pockets

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in the Trump administration and I mean -
Paula White
who's this evangelical mega preacher here
based

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in Florida who's been intimately tied to the
the Trump political campaign and now has a
job

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in the White House in this office um this is
part of the groups that were on the phone
calls

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hosting the phone calls with churches so that
they could get access to that paycheck
protection

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program funding - I think it is a corrupt part of this administration and that was really how it was

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started in the W Bush White House and that was part of its purpose. There's been

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some great reporting and even some books that have been written on this subject. I mean so I

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would like to see that shut down entirely and that's something that the Freedom from Religion

0:20:45.840,0:20:52.240
Foundation will certainly be advocating for in the future. (AL): Advocates of secular

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government could take a stricter or more looser more accommodationist stance on issues

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such as these so some people might just say that you shouldn't allow faith-based providers to bid

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for any public service contracts whereas others would say there needs to be strong protections

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against prostelysation and they need to be bound by anti-discrimination policies. If either of those

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restrictions were put in place for example - get rid of the office of faith-based initiatives and say

0:21:27.920,0:21:33.440
Option One: you can't have faith-based providers bid for these contracts and Option Two:

0:21:33.440,0:21:38.320
they need to be bound by non-proselytisation anti-discrimination clauses.

0:21:39.120,0:21:45.120
Would those restrictions pass constitutional muster given the changes in true experience

0:21:45.120,0:21:50.320
you've been talking about? (AS): I mean that's a fantastic question. I think already I would say...

0:21:50.880,0:21:56.080
Well first let's say that whether or not they're constitutional ought to be separated from

0:21:56.080,0:22:03.280
whether or not they would survive a challenge in the court system as it currently exists.

0:22:04.080,0:22:09.120
The federal judiciary has already been packed with Christian nationalist judges.

0:22:10.560,0:22:18.320
The Supreme Court has been taken over essentially so there's already a great

0:22:18.320,0:22:23.840
deal of hostility for State/Church separation in the federal judiciary.

0:22:23.840,0:22:29.680
That's NOT reflected in America's founding documents or founding values that really did

0:22:29.680,0:22:34.000
in a way that I write about in 'The Founding Myth' invent the separation of State and Church .

0:22:34.640,0:22:41.680
So there's sort of the REAL politic question you know: would a challenge survive?

0:22:41.680,0:22:49.360
or would those restrictions survive a challenge in the courts? And what would the

0:22:49.360,0:22:57.440
constitution or our jurisprudence say about those restrictions under a less partisan, less captured

0:22:58.080,0:23:04.560
court system? And I think it's pretty clear that we've actually already seen

0:23:05.120,0:23:11.840
and will see this term, the supreme Court say not only that churches and religious organisations

0:23:11.840,0:23:18.160
have a right to to access public funds to provide these services. There's a case right now out of

0:23:18.160,0:23:23.440
Philadelphia 'The Fulton versus Philadelphia case' where we're seeing this and I think this the

0:23:23.440,0:23:29.440
Supreme Court's going to answer your question um in a way that I'm not going to like. That's

0:23:29.440,0:23:36.320
certainly the prediction that I would have. However it is perfectly within reason for

0:23:36.320,0:23:42.000
the government to attach any type of string to government funding. 'Yes you can have this money

0:23:42.560,0:23:47.200
only if you provide your services in a non-discriminatory fashion and you don't

0:23:47.760,0:23:52.160
force people to listen to a prayer, to read the bible before they access your services'. That's

0:23:52.160,0:24:00.000
perfectly acceptable and historically there 'd be no problem with that. It's just that in under

0:24:00.720,0:24:06.000
this judiciary they would see that as, they would claim that that is hostile to religion

0:24:06.720,0:24:10.560
and I think they're going to do that. The Philadelphia case involves

0:24:11.680,0:24:18.160
a Catholic charities organisation that was - the city was contracting with - and the

0:24:18.160,0:24:24.720
the Catholic charities said 'Well we're not going to place children with LGBTQ

0:24:24.720,0:24:30.160
families'. And the city said 'Well OK, so we are not going to contract with you because that

0:24:30.160,0:24:34.800
violates our non-discrimination policies and so the Catholic charity sued and said 'not only

0:24:35.600,0:24:42.400
do we have a right to discriminate, we have a right to have this city contract with you'.

0:24:42.400,0:24:46.880
And the court is likely going to uphold that which is just, it's mind-blowing to me.

0:24:47.440,0:24:52.800

(AL): Interesting enough we often find ourselves pointing out to those who want a greater

0:24:52.800,0:24:58.720

faith-based public service service revision that many such providers have said they are happy to

0:24:58.720,0:25:04.960

have anti-proselytisation and anti-discrimination policies, though not all obviously.

0:25:06.320,0:25:13.280

Keeping on jurisprudence.. I remember studying A level 'Comparative Politics' and for you

0:25:13.280,0:25:21.120

you know this would be equivalent of last year of high school. And the textbook case of illustrating

0:25:21.120,0:25:28.400

America's approach would be the 'Lemon versus Kurtzman' Supreme Court case which led to the

0:25:28.400,0:25:34.080

'Lemon test' and it was such a textbook example that when we were writing our own educational resources

0:25:34.080,0:25:40.800

we used it as an example of from around the world of approaches to Church/State separation in fact.

0:25:40.800,0:25:48.640

Maybe you could sum up the 'Lemon test' idea of how

to judge Church/State separation, what that paradigm was

0:25:48.640,0:25:55.920

and then can you sum up what the new paradigm appears to be? (AS): Sure, so I mean 'the Lemon test' comes

0:25:55.920,0:26:03.280

from the 'Lemon versus Kurtzman case' which was 1971 and the Supreme Court ruled essentially that

0:26:03.280,0:26:09.040

there was a Pennsylvania law that said tax funds taxpayer funds going to religious

0:26:09.040,0:26:14.240

schools, that violates the first amendment. Which is, if people have been listening to

0:26:14.240,0:26:19.280

the previous part of this podcast, they're probably thinking well how can you square that with

0:26:19.280,0:26:25.040

the Espinoza case that Andrew has been talking about. You can't. But 'the Lemon test' itself ..

0:26:25.040,0:26:31.040

it basically has three questions that you ask: the purpose, the effect and the entanglement. Does

0:26:31.040,0:26:38.880

the statute law, regulation, government action does it have a secular or religious purpose?

0:26:39.440,0:26:44.080

That's the first question, what's the purpose of

it? Then the second one is the effect, so what's

0:26:44.080,0:26:50.560
the effect of the rule or the government
action?
Does it advance religion or does it

0:26:50.560,0:26:56.320
inhibit religion? Because in either way it could
be
unconstitutional. And then there's the
entanglement

0:26:56.320,0:27:04.640
prong. Does the government action
excessively entangle the government with
religion?

0:27:05.440,0:27:11.120
And that can take a couple different
formulations. So for instance if the
government

0:27:11.120,0:27:16.960
would have to have a lot of really careful
oversight of a religious organisation as a
result?

0:27:16.960,0:27:23.840
That could be entangling the government with
religion. So purpose, effect and entanglement.
And

0:27:23.840,0:27:32.240
it's important to note that that case 'the
Lemon
case' was summing up three decades really of

0:27:32.240,0:27:37.440
previous cases that had addressed this
separation
of State and Church. So it wasn't just
inventing

0:27:37.440,0:27:43.920
this test out of thin air. It was looking at all of
the previous cases the Supreme Court had
decided

0:27:43.920,0:27:51.440

on religious freedom and State/Church
separation
and synthesising this test out of those cases.

0:27:52.240,0:27:58.800
So it would, and in my opinion it was, it was
a very good and useful test. It was much
maligned

0:27:59.360,0:28:07.040
because the outcomes that that test would
have
dictated in many instances would have been

0:28:07.920,0:28:14.720
politically unpopular and so in an
effort to avoid making those politically

0:28:14.720,0:28:22.000
unpopular decisions the court began creating
all kinds of exceptions to the Lemon test and

0:28:22.000,0:28:28.400
punching holes in it. One of the most famous
is in the 1983 case 'Marsh vs Chambers'.

0:28:29.360,0:28:39.040
The Supreme Court said: 'yes, it's totally fine
for
legislative bodies to pray before their sessions

0:28:39.040,0:28:43.120
in the United States' So this was about the
Nebraska legislature. They were having a
chaplain

0:28:43.120,0:28:48.720
come in and say a prayer before they would
legislate each day and the court said that's
fine

0:28:50.000,0:28:56.320
because we've got a really long history of
doing
that in the United States and the long history
has

0:28:56.320,0:29:02.800

nothing to do with the 'Lemon test'. It doesn't talk about the purpose or the effect or entanglement so

0:29:03.920,0:29:08.960

the Court just said 'well we're not, this is just basically just an exception to applying the

0:29:08.960,0:29:15.600

'Lemon test'. So the 'Lemon test' is a great test except that it dictated politically unpopular

0:29:15.600,0:29:22.400

outcomes and because our courts are not as blind or as devoted to justice as they ought to be.

0:29:23.760,0:29:31.600

They started punching all these holes in it and pretty much now have abandoned it if not killed it.

0:29:31.600,0:29:35.280

Without officially killing it essentially said we're not we're not going to use it again.

0:29:35.280,0:29:41.840

(AL): So I've got an educational resource. This is comparing countries around the world and their

0:29:41.840,0:29:48.080

approach to Church/State separation. Is there a way to summarise America

0:29:48.080,0:29:55.520

in two sentences? Does that remain to be seen? (AS): Yeah I mean I think we are going to see, I think we're

0:29:55.520,0:29:59.840

going to see a big shake-up. I mean part of this

is there's a big question in the country right now

0:30:00.720,0:30:06.000

about what we're going to do about the federal court system with again as we're speaking

0:30:07.760,0:30:15.520

a Supreme Court justice is being rammed through a very fast and cursory confirmation process.

0:30:16.400,0:30:23.280

In my mind probably not entirely qualified for the job though there would certainly be people on

0:30:23.280,0:30:28.640

my side of the aisle who would disagree with that statement who has said that her religion

0:30:28.640,0:30:36.960

should Trump the law and who is going to be put on the Supreme Court after 60 million people

0:30:36.960,0:30:42.320

have already voted in the election, The courts have been packed already so there has to be a solution

0:30:43.200,0:30:48.480

to that court packing. Something needs to be done. And that is something that we've been discussing

0:30:48.480,0:30:53.920

at the Freedom from Religion Foundation. We are essentially coming to the point where,

0:30:54.720,0:31:00.080

this revelation where, to fight for a secular America means to fight for a massive overhaul

0:31:00.080,0:31:05.280
of the court system first. Because
that is essentially where we are. So

0:31:05.280,0:31:11.120
that being said - all that is prelude to say I
think it depends on whether or not that is
done.

0:31:12.000,0:31:19.360
Which route the courts will take in terms of
interpreting the separation of State and
Church or

0:31:20.080,0:31:24.240
weaponising religious liberty and essentially
having this hierarchy of rights where religious

0:31:24.240,0:31:31.360
freedom quote unquote, this weaponised
version
of religious freedom is a super right, a right

0:31:31.360,0:31:38.080
that is above every other right that exists and
allows, essentially creates this favoured

0:31:39.040,0:31:46.400
privileged class. You know we talked
about that Trump walk to the church to

0:31:47.120,0:31:53.680
have that photo op. The point of that
malignant
farcical stroll was to show that Trump and this

0:31:53.680,0:31:58.800
nation are church-ed, that we are bible-
believing
and bible-beating, that we are a Christian
nation

0:31:58.800,0:32:05.040
and anyone who disagrees should be beaten
and
gassed. The point was to elevate one group

0:32:05.760,0:32:10.720

above all others. The goal was to rewrite and
redefine our constitution so that it creates

0:32:10.720,0:32:16.640
two classes of people: Christians and
everyone
else or actually to be more accurate the right

0:32:16.640,0:32:23.040
kind of conservative Christian and everyone
else,
sort of that realignment that we were

0:32:23.040,0:32:27.840
talking about earlier. So that is and has
been the goal of Christian nationalism - to
codify

0:32:28.640,0:32:34.160
Christian privilege and elevate the right kind
of Christian to this special favoured class

0:32:34.160,0:32:38.480
and everybody else is second-class citizens
and whether or not we are going to be able

0:32:38.480,0:32:44.800
to defeat that in the courts is going to
depend greatly on the makeup of the courts.
(AL):

0:32:46.080,0:32:51.440
Well thanks very much Andrew. Before you go
there's something I would be very curious

0:32:51.440,0:32:56.880
to get your view on and it's a narrative that
i've been reading about a lot recently that is

0:32:57.680,0:33:01.760
not particularly happy and so I don't
necessarily want to go along with it but

0:33:02.480,0:33:09.760
here goes: this narrative goes that the the
20th
century was a high watermark for global
liberal

0:33:09.760,0:33:17.840
democracies and liberal secularism so new
nations
which were liberated from European
colonialism

0:33:17.840,0:33:25.120
at this time looked to the United States as the
model for modernity, the model of what a
liberal

0:33:25.680,0:33:33.600
democracy should be and so liberal secularism
just came along with that. And now that

0:33:33.600,0:33:38.880
time has simply passed, that the rising
powers are no longer liberal democracies but

0:33:39.840,0:33:46.640
illiberal democracies or outright autocracies
and
so it's not surprising that that sort of secular

0:33:46.640,0:33:52.480
form of government is no longer seen as you
know
the in-thing, modernity. What do you think of
that?

0:33:53.440,0:33:58.400
(AS): I mean I'm probably not the best person
to offer
my opinion but that certainly has never
stopped

0:33:58.400,0:34:03.680
me before. You know I mean Stephen Pinker
at
Harvard has written a great deal about this.
His

0:34:03.680,0:34:07.280
last two books really 'Better Angels of our
Nature' and 'Enlightenment Now' I think
touch

0:34:07.280,0:34:13.200
on this at least. And to me the answer is
it's up to us whether or not that is true,

0:34:14.320,0:34:22.480
that we have the ability to fight back
against that trend that's slouching

0:34:22.480,0:34:28.240
towards authoritarianism and that it is up
to us to stop it and I certainly am never

0:34:29.040,0:34:35.760
going to stop fighting against that. One of the
I
think the interesting and probably the only

0:34:35.760,0:34:42.480
silver lining for the last four years at least
for me personally is that this has highlighted

0:34:43.440,0:34:51.440
so many of the deep seated flaws in our
system.
And it's I've been using the term 'radicalized'

0:34:51.440,0:34:57.840
sort of jokingly, 'radicalized' me and
that's not quite right. It has opened

0:34:57.840,0:35:06.080
my eyes to these flaws in a way that I
think I previously would have glossed over.

0:35:06.080,0:35:12.400
So I mean to me that is should be a call
to secular arms, that should be a call to fight.

0:35:13.280,0:35:17.520
I mean I often go, well I used to go around the
country, now I virtually go around the country
and

0:35:17.520,0:35:22.080
talk about these issues and one of the things
I try to explain to the younger generation is

0:35:22.080,0:35:27.120

that whatever issues, whatever progressive issues they care about, limiting the power of religion

0:35:27.120,0:35:32.320
in our government, ending the sense of Christian entitlement in our country is virtually a panacea.

0:35:32.880,0:35:37.120
Right, if you want better education, if you want full funding for public schools instead of

0:35:37.120,0:35:42.160
vouchers for private religious schools, if you want accurate science about evolution and sex taught in

0:35:42.160,0:35:48.240
our classrooms, right, curbing religious power in the government will help there. Do you want full

0:35:48.240,0:35:53.680
civil and political rights for LGBTQ, for women, for minorities, do you want reproductive justice

0:35:53.680,0:35:58.240
and choice to be fully realised, do you want a greener world and a healthier environment,

0:35:58.240,0:36:03.680
do you want America to get serious about the global climate crisis and to shun its deniers,

0:36:03.680,0:36:08.160
do you want access to better and universal health care, do you want scientific research to be guided

0:36:08.160,0:36:14.240
by scientists, right, do you want our response

to the pandemic to be guided by science and not

0:36:14.240,0:36:19.520
wishful thinking? If we end Christian nationalism and religious encroachments into government power

0:36:19.520,0:36:24.480
we'll see progress on every one of these issues so all of that is to say that I

0:36:24.480,0:36:29.040
think the answer to your question is - it's completely up to us and we have to fight.

0:36:36.080,0:36:40.560
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0:36:45.120,0:36:49.600
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