



## American Idolatry: How Christian Nationalism Betrays the Gospel and Threatens the Church

**Andrew L. Whitehead**

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With a mix of scientific and insider perspectives, sociologist Andrew L. Whitehead's *American Idolatry* is a fascinating investigation of politics and racism in American Christian evangelicalism.

Using statistical data and stories from American history, the book reveals white evangelical Christian distrust toward others. Whitehead argues that the real "American idol," worshiped and sought after, is power. His book covers the process by which white Christians tolerate nationalism or become nationalist themselves, showing how fears of the Other are used to scare evangelicals into stances that are the opposite of Jesus's own teachings regarding charity and compassion. Indeed, Whitehead says, some evangelical leaders encourage this alienation, using it to gain power and influence in the public sphere.

Most of the book focuses on big-picture patterns in American evangelical Christianity, among which are included evocative vignettes from Whitehead's small-town youth, as with a memory of a public school teacher engaging in popular culture wars by showing his class a threatening video of a martyr of "some futuristic un-named authoritarian regime" in which the faithful would be pitted against the government. Here and elsewhere, Whitehead's work leaves the frightening impression that secular and evangelical Americans live in different countries, determining differing secular and evangelical reactions to violence, sexism, and racism. However, balancing out these impressions are inspirational stories from contemporary Christians who exemplify a better way, volunteering and working to serve their whole communities, not just those in their own church. Still, because it discusses Christian nationalism and racism on broad levels, the book leaves nationalism's effects on individual Christians somewhat under explored.

Sharing eye-opening data and stories from American history and an evangelical childhood, *American Idolatry* is an informative text that asks Christians to reject xenophobia and love their neighbors instead.

MEREDITH GRAHL COUNTS (July / August 2023)

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