

*The Power Worshipers*  
Katherine Stewart

The following questions are intended to enhance your discussion of Katherine Stewart's *The Power Worshipers*.

### **About This Book**

For readers of *Democracy in Chains* and *Dark Money*, a revelatory investigation of the Religious Right's rise to political power.

For too long the Religious Right has masqueraded as a social movement preoccupied with a number of cultural issues, such as abortion and same-sex marriage. In her deeply reported investigation, Katherine Stewart reveals a disturbing truth: This is a political movement that seeks to gain power and to impose its vision on all of society. America's religious nationalists aren't just fighting a culture war, they are waging a political war on the norms and institutions of American democracy.

Stewart pulls back the curtain on the inner workings and leading personalities of a movement that has turned religion into a tool for domination. She exposes a dense network of think tanks, advocacy groups, and pastoral organizations embedded in a rapidly expanding community of international alliances and united not by any central command but by a shared, antidemocratic vision and a common will to power. She follows the money that fuels this movement, tracing much of it to a cadre of super-wealthy, ultraconservative donors and family foundations. She shows that today's Christian nationalism is the fruit of a longstanding antidemocratic, reactionary strain of American thought that draws on some of the most troubling episodes in America's past. It forms common cause with a globe-spanning movement that seeks to destroy liberal democracy and replace it with nationalist, theocratic, and autocratic forms of government around the world. Religious nationalism is far more organized and better funded than most people realize. It seeks to control all aspects of government and society. Its successes have been stunning, and its influence now extends to every aspect of American life, from the White House to state capitols, from our schools to our hospitals.

*The Power Worshipers* is a brilliantly reported book of warning and a wake-up call. Stewart's probing examination demands that Christian nationalism be taken seriously as a significant threat to the American republic and our democratic freedoms.

### **For discussion**

1. The cover of *The Power Worshipers* depicts an American flag unfurled below a crucifix. What does the cover tell you about the subject of the book? How did the cover make you feel?
2. The title of the book lends itself to multiple meanings. What are some of these meanings? Do you think that the book made good on the title's multiple valences?
3. Katherine Stewart reports from the frontlines of the Christian nationalist movement, engaging in one-on-one conversations with leading figures as well as members of the rank and file, and attending gatherings, strategy meetings, and conferences. How does her intimate reporting affect how you receive the information she gives you?
4. Throughout the book, Stewart punctuates her reporting with narratives about individual characters as well as her own experiences. How do these stories contribute to the points that she wants the book to make?

5. What is your definition of “religious liberty?” How does the Christian nationalist movement define it?
6. Throughout the book, the same names of donors, churches, and institutions keep popping up. What does that tell us about the Christian nationalist movement?
7. The conventional view is that the Religious Right came together as a movement in response to the Supreme Court’s 1973 decision on abortion rights. But Stewart argues that Christian nationalists politicized abortion several years before that decision in order to galvanize their base. In your opinion, what is the relationship between abortion and Christian nationalism?
8. How is big business linked to the Christian nationalist movement? What do you think big businesses stands to gain from an alliance with the Religious Right?
9. What is the role of the courts in the Religious Right’s plans to seize power? Have they been successful?
10. How do activist religious groups like Capitol Ministries, which aims to bring “biblical teachings” directly to government leaders, enable monarchial behavior on the part of political leaders like Trump?
11. In chapter 11, Stewart details ways that seeking care from a Catholic hospital has harmed individuals. How do these stories make you feel? Think about the Hippocratic Oath (“First, do no harm”), the oath that all medical students adhere to. Are the Catholic hospitals denying certain forms of health care from individuals breaking this oath?
12. How does the myth of persecution enable the Christian nationalist movement to hoard more power for themselves and to disenfranchise people who do not adhere to their “approved” versions of religion?
13. Why should we be paying attention to the seemingly symbolic court battles over invocations and prayers at government meetings and crosses on public lands?
14. What is the Christian nationalist movement’s stance on the free market? Big business? Helping the poor? Did any of these beliefs surprise you? Why or why not?
15. Many members of the Christian nationalist movement are staunchly against public education, and yet they use public schools as church venues. Why would Christian nationalists oppose public education? What is it that they expect the government to provide them?
16. Discuss the link between the Christian nationalist movement and the president of Russia, Vladimir Putin. Where did the admiration toward autocratic leaders come from? What does this tell us about the far right’s goal for the future?
17. Is the goal of the Christian nationalist movement democratic? In your community, do you see strains of the Religious Right’s ideology?
18. What are some of the ways that supporters of real democracy can fight back against the rising tide of Christian dominionists? In your community, which groups and individuals are already

engaged in this effort? How can you, as an individual who cares about equality and pluralism, help?