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## Editorial:

# International Journal of Religion Nationalism, Populism and the Struggle for Christian Heritage and Identity

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Populism, like nationalism, can be found on the right as well as on the left-wing of the political spectrum. However, current political debates demonstrate how in recent years, nationalist and populist movements have advanced the preservation of Christian “roots”, positioning themselves against a global cosmopolitanism. In doing so, right-wing populist movements capitalize on a growing sense of insecurity. As tensions arise in an increasingly multipolar world, religion emerges as a political resource that demagogues can use as they claim to be the true voice of the people’s will and the defender of their Christian culture and national identity. Right-wing populism thus tends to present itself as a guardian of Christian culture, and in Europe and the United States, Judeo-Christian culture. However, there is a struggle over the definition and the ownership of this religious heritage. How does identification with the Christian faith relate to belonging to a nation? Does this heritage belong to the church or to the wider society? Or does it belong to both? Accordingly, who is entitled to defend it? As right-wing populist parties around the globe purport to protect Christian heritage and identity, Christian communities have been deeply divided over the question of whether or not it is right to support right-wing populism. Whilst it is certainly possible to identify sources within the Protestant tradition that may legitimise support for right-wing populism, these questions often relate to particular intersections of culture, theology, perspectives on history as well as political thought.

This special issue explores and critiques these intersections, employing theological, historical, and sociological methods. While the main perspective is that of cross-disciplinary reflections on the fraught relationship between Protestantism and right-wing populism, it also examines the evolution of broader connections between Christianity and nationalism through time. And indeed, the relationship between Christian theologies of time and secular expressions thereof in right-wing movements is at the core of the introductory article by Marietta Van der Tol and Matthew Rowley. In this article, they show how understanding the world in grand narratives of “good” and “evil” often emerges from Christian eschatological hope: the hope of the restoration and renewal of the cosmos and the final defeat of evil prophesied in association with the return of Christ. However, this language of good and evil can become detached from the wider corpus of Christian belief and theology. In one of its secular expressions, it attaches the good to an abstract and normative account of “the people”, who are defined in contrast to a range of others, both internal and external to the nation. In

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order to sustain this narrative, right-wing movements emphasise the typological dimension of the people: through a sacralisation of the past and a dramatization of the future. Only through curbing evil in contemporary society, can the integrity of “the people” be saved. This article thus intends to demonstrate that what is important is that this secular expression of eschatological hope brings about a separation of the people and “the people”. It is through a conjunction of this normative account of “the people” and its emphasis on popular sovereignty that right-wing movements are able to sustain a posture of protest.

In tracing back the political thought of high church Anglicans from Hooker to the non-jurors (1580–1720), A . J. Nolte investigates how Anglican political thought was shaped by the need to balance competing principles. For high church Anglicans, the monarchy was seen as the institution best positioned to defend this balance against what they saw as the twin threats of “Puritanism and popery.” However, high churchmen also began to defend a high view of episcopacy even over against the power of the English government, introducing a tension between royal supremacy and high church Anglicanism with implications for both nationalist and integralist conceptions of the state. This culminated in the non-jurors—Anglican clergy and academics removed from their posts for refusing to swear oaths to William and Mary—defending episcopacy against both the new king and defenders of royal supremacy. This study of high church Anglicans thus demonstrates some perils of both nationalist and integralist approaches to politics for many religious forms of traditional conservatism.

Karina Bénazech Wendling continues the conversation with her examination of competing conceptions of Irishness between The Irish Society for Promoting the Education of the Native Irish through the Medium of Their Own Language and The Catholic Defence Association, and later The Catholic Repeal Association of Daniel O’Connell. As the Irish nationalist movement was becoming more and more catholicised, the Irish Society promoted access to the Bible in “the pure Gaelic language and the Irish character” for both the spiritual salvation of “the [poorer] sons of Erin” and “the political repose and moral amelioration of Ireland.” Even if the ‘Second Reformation’ has often been considered as an attempt at anglicising the Irish through conversion, her study provides a reassessment of the reciprocal influences of Protestant missions and Irish nationalism. Relying on a wide range of archival material, it reveals how the discourse of this Protestant society disrupted the status quo of both Irish and British identities. This exploration of the relationship between Christianity and nationalism highlights the complex ties that can be found between several layered identities and disrupts the binaries of the vernacular being promoted by the champions of independence and of native languages being erased by the advocates of imperial rule.

The issue concludes with Matthew Rowley’s article which examines the discourse of prophetic populism from 2011 to 2021—focusing in particular on the three months from the 2020 election to the storming of Capitol Hill to the inauguration of Joe Biden. Indeed, for President Donald Trump’s most committed Christian devotees—those with ears to hear—his rise to power was prophesied, and the 2016 victory was miraculous. Prophets again foretold re-election in 2020. These charismatic Trump supporters tended to come from outside the main denominations, and when the electoral college swung towards Joe Biden, the results were not accepted. In rejecting the election, they became fellow travellers with more overtly militant and conspiratorial groups—sometimes sharing a stage with them. Although Trump repeatedly says “Promises Made, Promises Kept,” these prophetic promises did not materialise—leading some to try to force God’s hand. Through the analysis of the reaction to three consecutive disappointments that took their toll on prophetic populism—the declaration of Joe Biden as president-elect in November 2020, the certification of his victory in early



January 2021 and the inauguration later that month—this article identifies four core beliefs among the prophets who emerge as a relatively new force in US politics.