The power worshippers: inside the dangerous rise of religious nationalism**,** by Katherine Stewart, London, Bloomsbury, 2020, 352pp., £21.71 (hardback), ISBN: 9781635573435

Securing the votes of conservative – mainly white – Christians has been a key issue in US presidential elections since the presidency of Ronald Reagan in the 1980s. Before Donald Trump, however, no president was able to acquire and maintain the support – even adulation – of so many conservative, Christian voters.

What explains their support for, and in some cases adulation of, Donald Trump? What does he offer – politically, culturally, religiously – which led them to vote for him in the presidential election of November 2016? His victory reflected several factors, including tens of millions of Americans' strong disaffection with the status quo – economically, socially, culturally, and politically – and the belief that America's leaders had taken a wrong turn. Some at least believed that this was due to the country moving away from its foundational Christian values.

The author, Katherine Stewart, is an experienced journalist, long interested in what she terms the 'Religious Right', by which she means Christian nationalists. Whilst researching *The Power Worshippers*, she travelled around the USA to encounter, interview, and chat with numerous people from the Religious Right. To a man or woman, they were avid supporters of Donald Trump. Many claimed that this was not because Trump is an exemplary Christian; instead, he was seen as the right man in the right place at the right time to do a difficult but necessary job: reassert the country's Christian values, on which they believe the nation was founded, in order to 'make America great again', to echo his campaign slogan

Stewart analyses the Religious Right as a political movement, one that seeks to gain power in order to impose its Christocentric vision on America. Her book is not a scholarly treatment of the issue and, as a result, it lacks both a theoretical framework and sustained analysis. Instead, she is concerned with leading personalities of the Religious Right. Stewart explains that the Religious Right comprises a network of think tanks, advocacy groups, and pastoral organisations, many of which also engage in interactions with like-minded individuals and groups beyond North America, in Europe, Australia and elsewhere.

The book is divided into 12 chapters, topped and tailed with an introduction and epilogue. Each focuses on both Stewart's encounters with 'ordinary' Christian Americans at various events, such as Trump's political rallies, and on leading figures in the Religious Right. Following the introduction, the next ten chapters cover various issues of concern to the movement including abortion and gender, attempts to rewrite history to project the idea that America was founded as a 'Christian nation', and religious freedom, including state-level attempts to impose 'Christian values' legislatively, in a campaign known as 'Project Blitz' (led by the Congressional Prayer Caucus Foundation in 2017, and renamed 'Freedom for All' the following year). Each topic is a particular concern of the Religious Right at both state and federal levels, which found many willing allies and facilitators in the Trump administration, including Vice President Mike Pence, and Attorney General William Barr. In sum, what leaders and foot soldiers of the Religious Right like about Trump are his 'pro-Christian' policies. For example, he asserted 'Christian values' (e.g. using the Christian festive greeting 'Merry Christmas' rather than the more generic 'Happy Holidays'), railed against Muslim immigration, the political establishment, and the atheistic 'deep state', introduced 'pro-family' measures, and put 'America First' economically. The final chapter looks beyond the USA to focus on the Religious Right's international ambitions.

Stewart traces how the pro-Trump, Religious Right gained strength during Barack Obama's presidency. For the Religious Right, Obama had many faults': too liberal, a supporter of gender and sexual equality, probably not born in the USA and perhaps a Muslim. Stewart explains that from the end of the Cold War in the late 1980s until the Trump presidency nearly 30 years later, American presidents did not consistently pursue policies which the Religious Right wholeheartedly supported. She shows that Trump's accession to power was dependent on his ability to enlist the support of several varieties of American nationalists, found both in the Religious Right and in secular, mainly blue-collar and male, constituencies. Among members of the Religious Right are also Christian nationalists who wish to see the USA both more 'Christian' and more 'nationalist'. They strongly support Trump's policies which seek to undermine, diminish, or even remove 'alien' religions from the USA (especially Islam) and, internationally, strongly to favour the USA by undermining the influence of long-established international organisations such as the United Nations.

In conclusion, Stewart does a good job of examining the nature and characteristics of the Religious Right in the USA during Trump's presidency. She claims that he did not win the presidency only because of the strong support of the Religious Right; there were also other reasons unconnected with religion. But while Trump voters were not all necessarily supportive of him for the same reasons, Stewart is right to claim that most shared a sense that the USA had lost its way, socially, economically, and politically. For the last few decades, the country has endured a seemingly endless culture war, pitting liberals against conservatives, and it is time to bring God back in, they believe, in order to rectify things. Stewart's book provides excellent coverage of these events and is recommended for anyone

seeking to understand what has happened in America over the last few decades, and how the country arrived at where it is today.

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