

Atalia Omer and Joshua Lupo (eds.), *Religion, Populism, and Modernity. Confronting White Christian nationalism and racism*. Notre Dame, Indiana, USA: University of Notre Dame Press, 2023. £29.22 (pbk), vi + 302pp. ISBN 978-0-268-20582-9.

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From the United States to the Middle East and from Asia to Africa, religious nationalism is an important component of political activity and organisation. While the relationship between religion and nationalism is not a new area of research, it has grown in importance in recent years, as more and more examples of the phenomenon have appeared, often with significant political impacts. When the relationship between religion and nationalism is clear and sustained, then a hybrid term is useful: ‘religious nationalism’. Religious nationalism signifies a demonstrably close, even synonymous, relationship between two concepts ‘religion’ and ‘nationalism’, which are not inevitably close ideologically. Religion fits in this context when it is a defining component of what a nation is said to comprise, helping to forge a collective ethos of identity and belonging expressed in a collective culture. Manifestations of religious nationalism depend on their historical, religious, political, and cultural contexts.

The book under review examines ‘the recent rise of White Christian nationalism in Europe and the United States, focusing on how right-wing populist leaders and groups have mobilized racist and xenophobic rhetoric in their bids for political power’ (back cover blurb). As the book explains, Christian nationalism is a politically important form of religious nationalism, drawing on specific Christian values and beliefs. Christian nationalism is a controversial issue, understood in various ways. Some contend that Christian nationalism is merely a healthy form of Christian patriotism, highlighting a love both of God and one’s

country. Others understand Christian nationalism as a malign, ideologically driven, religio-political project to make publicly dominant a singular interpretation of Christianity. In relation to the United States, an important scholarly focus of Christian nationalism both in this book and more generally, Andrew Whitehead and Samuel Perry define Christian nationalism as ‘a collection of myths, traditions, symbols, narratives, and value systems - that idealizes and advocates a fusion of Christianity with American civic life’. Whitehead and Perry argue that in the USA, Christian nationalism, ‘is undergirded by identification with a conservative political orientation (though not necessarily a political party), Bible belief, premillennial visions of moral decay, and divine sanction for conquest’ (Whitehead and Perry 2020).

Because the focus is primarily on the USA and Europe, then *White* is the qualifying adjective placed before Christian nationalism in the book’s title. The implication is that in the USA and Europe, the dominant ‘white’ populations produce Christian nationalists which (inevitably it seems) identify their ‘whiteness’ as an important component of their religious, social and political worldview. This highlights such people’s self-belief in their superiority over other ‘non-white’ peoples; it gives their Christian nationalism a racial ‘flavour’ and ‘colour’.

Chapters in edited books have to seek to maintain a discernible focus. They must enable their authors the space to present their own research findings while at the same time illuminating more general concerns. The editors have done a good job in this respect. Their introductory chapter is a useful overview of the topic which situates individual chapters in an overall theoretical and analytical context. What might be seen as the core of the book comprises Chapters 1-4, by Philip Gorski, Jason A. Springs, R. Scott Appleby, and Richard Amesbury respectively. Each of these chapters looks at different aspects of White Christian Nationalism

(WCN) in the USA. Gorski is interested in connections between WCN and ‘Trumpism’. Springs focuses on the sexual politics of WCN, while Appleby examines links between the US Catholic Church and WCN. Finally, Amesbury traces links between right-wing populism and WCN. All are thoroughly worthwhile chapters which advance our knowledge overall of WCN in the USA.

Chapter 5, by Geneviève Zubrzycki, and Chapter 6, co-authored by Yolande Jansen and Jasmijn Leeuwenkamp, focus respectively on anti/philosemitism and ethnic nationalism in Poland and on the work of the philosopher and anthropologist, the late, Bruno Latour. Jansen and Leeuwenkamp discuss ‘the pull to the right of the right’, to depict the ‘new’ rightwards thrust of politics in Europe.

The final two chapters are by Sindre Bangstad and Ebrahim Moosa respectively. Both focus on the remaining contributions in the book, that is, the introductory chapter plus Chapters 1-6. The aim in Chapters 7 and 8 is to identify what unites and separates the other chapters. Bangstad is interested in how White Christian nationalism in the USA and Europe links to the rise of right-wing populism in Norway. Moosa presents an excoriating account of Jacques Derrida’s analysis of Islam’s involvement in politics, accusing the doyen of deconstructivism of misunderstanding and underestimating its political impact, including in France.

Overall, this is a useful collection of chapters by a group of very accomplished scholars. Each presents an authoritative account of their topic. The overall impression after reading the book is that the phenomenon of White Christian Nationalism, both in the USA and in Europe, is an underestimated political ideology with various emphases and political outcomes depending on where it is exercised.

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## References

Andrew L. Whitehead and Samuel L. Perry (2020). *Taking America Back for God: Christian Nationalism in the United States*. New York: Oxford University Press.