Globethics

Alternatives to populism from a human rights perspective

Alternatives to Populism from a Human Rights Perspective

Elizabeta Kitanović, Patrick Roger Schnabel & Sofia Caseiro (Editors)

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

OPENING NOTE FROM THE EDITORS

Human Rights, including Freedom of Religion or Belief, are fragile. Their protection does not only rest on the rule of law and a state willing and able to guarantee them. It also rests on an open and free society which feels and assumes its own responsibility, in particular towards minorities. This model of society, which is also at the core of the European dream, can also be fragile, though. It is subject to diverse threats, not least from radical political movements. In recent years, so-called populists – from either the right or occasionally also the left margins of the political spectre – have had a strain of successes, both globally and inside Europe. They aim to redefine democracy in such a way that the "will of the people", measured by their proportion of the popular vote, overrides social and political conventions and the voices of minorities. Often they appeal to a sense of history, tradition and culture, of which a particular religion can be a formative part. In such cases, religion can be used, or rather abused, to support the political aims of the populists.

It should, of course, be obvious that any religion can only lose by being lured into a more powerful position by such parties. Religious freedom very much depends on all religions and faiths enjoying it alike, why they should all defend it alike and for everyone. Still, sometimes religious groups fall prey to the promise of a renewed relevance in an otherwise ever more secular environment. The temptation is real.

It is, therefore, important for religions to understand the workings and "mechanics" of populism and build up resilience in order to resist such temptations.

In this book, the Conference of European Churches endeavours to look at the phenomenon "populism" from different angles and perspectives and shine a light on its links to religion and religious actors. It wants to offer its Member Churches and partners information about and arguments against the populist temptation. It also wants to highlight and draw attention to the many ways in which religious communities are already part of a wider alliance to combat the populist threat. The Conference of European Churches stands firmly in sharing and fostering the European dream of freedom and equality, and dignity for all and everyone. It seeks to engage its Member Churches in European discourse and action against illiberal and authoritarian tendencies. It wants to build a strong network of learning among these Members, opening spaces for discussion and the sharing of best practices.

The Conference understands its role as that of a facilitator, and also – through its Thematic Groups and with its partners in the European Institutions and civil society – communicator of the European idea. By giving a voice to church actors, from parish to European levels, who make valuable contributions to the common good and the very fiber of society, it also enables people to understand what Christianity stands for in Europe. Our faith calls us to serve all people, regardless of whether they share it or not. Our churches are diaconical, not only in social work but also in their public mission. To speak out for Human Rights in general and Freedom of Religion or Belief in particular is part of that public mission. By laying before you, our readers, this collection of essays, we do hope to contribute to this common aim of all who share the European ideals, which, for us, are not least based on Christ's love and passion for humanity.

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I

WHAT IS POPULISM AND HOW DOES IT AFFECT DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS AND RULE OF LAW IN EUROPE?

POPULISM, HUMAN RIGHTS, DEMOCRACY AND THE RULE OF LAW; CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR CHRISTIANS IN EUROPE

Jónatas E. M. Machado[*]

Introduction

We are reminded daily by the media and social networks of the spread of populist movements on all continents, in the most diverse political systems, even those that we are used to seeing as bastions of fundamental rights, liberal democracy and the rule of law. At the same time, we are often left with the idea that media and social media have contributed to this spread. The election of Donald Trump, Brexit and Boris Johnson or the governments of Nicolás Maduro, Rodrigo Duterte and Jair Bolsonaro are often described as expressions of this concept. In any case, we find that it is not easy to precisely identify the common denominator of these and other populist governments based on a

[*] Law Professor of Faculty of Law of the University of Coimbra, and of Autonomous University Lisbon, Portugal. Executive Directive of the *Ius Gentium Conimbrigae - Human Rights Center*. Member of the European Consortium on Church and State Research. OSCE Conciliator. © Globethics Publications, 2023 | DOI: 10.58863/20.500.12424/4291172 | CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 International.

conceptually rigorous and generally accepted definition of political science.[1]

In the absence of a rigorous definition, the political and constitutional discomfort that many of us feel when we are faced with this phenomenon leads us to a visceral feeling of dismay and disgust that impels us to recognise it by saying *I Know it when I see it*, as the Judge American Potter Stuart famously replied when faced with the question of how to define obscenity.[2] For many of us, populism appears a kind of political and legal obscenity, insofar as, in the name of an alleged adherence to the spirit of the people (*Volksgeist*), it leads to the trampling of essential dimensions of human rights, democracy and the rule of law. This does not mean, of course, that one should not seek to understand political leaders normally described as populists or neglect the concerns and aspirations of their supporters.

For Christians, whether Catholics, Orthodox, Protestants or Evangelicals, this issue poses an important challenge, as facing populism raises important questions and endless discussions on the relationship between religion and politics, church and state, as well as about the active experience of *citizenship of faith* within a secular society. The purpose of this article is not to provide complete and ready answers to all these questions. Less ambitiously, it intends only to identify and reflect on some of them, in the hope that the topic can be taken up in other forums for theological, political, legal and sociological reflection.

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[1] Müller, Jan-Werner, *What is Populism?*, Penguin Books, 2017, 2 saying that: "We simply do not have anything like a theory of populism, and we seem to lack coherent criteria for deciding when political actors turn to populist in some meaningful sense".

[2] Gewirtzt, Paul, On "I Know it when I see it"", in: *Yale Law Journal* 105, 1996, 1023f.

Characterisation of Populism

In recent years, mainly in the wake of the global effects of the US subprime financial crisis, the ensuing sovereign debt crisis and fiscal austerity, and the influx of immigrants to Europe and North America, we have been witnessing, in the West, two ways of doing politics based on the return to ethnic-cultural tribalism and political economic and social nationalism. Incoming foreigners are perceived as a threat, even though many of them are trying to escape economic, social and cultural conditions and inequalities established and maintained by colonial and neo-colonial relations and structures. This resulted in both the positive and negative aspects of globalisation that we know today, namely in the field of migration.

The populist way of doing politics, characterised by resentful hostility, has been relatively common in Latin America, Africa and some parts of Asia, in which the memory of colonialism and the threat of neo-colonialism was felt with significant intensity. In the European and North American West, it is especially intriguing and disturbing to see the advance of political movements that present themselves with a message of repudiation towards the establishment, big government, millionaires, and the media. Even more surprising is that some millionaires and media outlets (e.g. tabloid press and in talk radio) are actively involved in promoting populism.[3] It is also disturbing to observe the growth of anti-Islamic and anti-immigrant identity politics in the context of a broader anti-globalist perspective. A good example of this can be found in the words of Donald Trump in Cincinnati, 2016, when he said: 'There is no global anthem, no global currency, no certificate of global citizenship, we pledge allegiance to one flag and

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[3] Krämer, Benjamin, "Media Populism: A Conceptual Clarification and Some Theses on its Effects", in: *Communication Theory* 24 (1), 2014, 42f.

that flag is the American Flag!'.[4] Notably, this phenomenon gained momentum in those two parts of the world which contributed most, in the past and in recent history, to the advance of globalisation in the political, economic, social, cultural and technological spheres. Populist discourse builds on a *pathos* and *ethos* of fear, lost pride, resentment, anxiety, indignation, suspicion, and hatred, promising common sense, identity, purpose, order, certainty, and security.[5]

It has been pointed out that populism does not correspond to a comprehensive and coherent worldview. We can identify populist traits on the political right and on the left or of religious and secular persuasion. It is a broad concept, which often develops an alarmed and alarming discourse around real or imagined threats to which some fundamental immaterial goods are subjected, such as the Judeo-Christian values, the liberal way of life, modernity, secularism, public order, and national security. Ultimately, populism claims to be on the side of the middle class, the common people of the authentic nation, and is suspicious of the educated, globalised and disengaged elite.

Populism manifests itself in a simplistic and Manichean discourse,[6] which clearly distinguishes between we and them, friend and foe, native and immigrant, people and elite, main street and wall street. It is a discourse that rejects public institutions and prefers direct dialogue

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[4] Quoted and commented at length by Barrow, Elizabeth, "No Global Citizenship? Re-envisioning Global Citizenship Education in Times of Growing Nationalism", *The High School Journal* 100 (3), 2017, 163-165.

[5] Obshonka, Martin; Stuetzer, Michael; Rentfrow, Peter J. (et. alia) "Fear, Populism, and the Geopolitical Landscape: The "Sleeper Effect" of Neurotic Personality Traits on Regional Voting Behavior in the 2016 Brexit and Trump Elections", *Social Psychological and Personality Science* 9 (3), 2018, 285f.

[6] Hawkins, Kirk A. "Is Chavez Populist?: Measuring Populist Discourse in Comparative Perspective", in: *Comparative Political Studies* 42 (8), 2009, 1042, saying 'The fourth definition, and the focus of this article, is the discursive one. It sees populism as a Manichaean discourse that identifies Good with a unified will of the people and Evil with a conspiring elite.'

between a charismatic leader and the people. Once again, Donald Trump's rhetoric is clear 'The only antidote to decades of ruinous rule by a small handful of elites is a bold infusion of popular will. On every major issue affecting this country, the people are right and the governing elite are wrong on taxes, on the size of government, on trade, on immigration, on foreign policy.'[7]

The Presence of Populism in Europe

In Europe, populist and nationalist politics have been particularly active in recent years.[8] In Holland, it emerged through the hand of Geert Wilders, of the Freedom Party, with the main slogan to protect Western values in the face of the advance of Islam. In France, we find a similar emphasis, in the National Front party, linked to the Le Pen family, often accompanied by an anti-European discourse, in terms that suggest a kind of secularised Gallicanism. In Poland, the Law and Justice party stresses the importance of national values, which are primarily related to national Catholic tradition, in the face of what it perceives to be European and global threats, both secular and religious.[9] In Germany, the populism of the Alternative for Germany (AfD) party is suspicious of immigrants and the process of European integration, both seen as threats to the political, legal, social and cultural identity of the Germanic people. In Hungary, the Fidesz party led by Viktor Orban, stresses the need to protect national and European identity based on Judeo-Christian values, considered under attack by successive waves of immigrants mainly from

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[7] Quoted by, Green, John C., Coffery, Daniel J., Cohen, David B. (eds.): *The State of the Parties 2018: The Changing Role of Contemporary American Political Parties*, Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2018, 70.

[8] Rooduijn, Matthijs, "The Rise of the Populist Radical Right in Western Europe", in: *European View* 14 (1), 2015, 3f.

[9] Wróbel, Szymon "Mourning Populism. The Case of Poland", in: *Polish Sociological Review* 176, 2011, 437f.

Islamic countries.[10] In Greece, the Syriza and Golden Dawn parties, respectively on the left and right, present themselves as populist alternatives of resistance against the country's economic and financial subordination and the risk of economic, social and cultural collapse caused by the uncontrolled influx of immigrants coming mainly from Syria through Turkey[11].

In Spain, Podemos, Ciudadanos and Vox political parties offer left, right and extreme right forms of populism, seeking to respond to the global financial crisis, austerity, internal political crisis of regional autonomies and the influx of immigrants mainly from North Africa. In Italy, the Five Star Movement and the Northern League promise a policy of resistance against the political, economic, and financial elite of Rome that they consider too centralist and conniving with European Union German-dominated economic policy. Curiously, some of these movements have been expressing a more favourable attitude towards the European Union, provided it closes its borders to immigration, protects European cultural identity, invests in greater social cohesion and develops an economic and financial policy to resist American, Russian, Chinese, Turkish and Indian populisms.

Interestingly, the UK was hit hard by populist politics, spearheaded by men like Nigel Farage, Boris Johnson, Jacob Rees-Mogg, Michael Gove and Dominic Raab, through the UKIP, Brexit Party and Tory Party, probably deluded by supposed British exceptionalism, imperial and colonial nostalgia, the proclaimed (by the British) special relationship with the United States and the persistent residues of anti-German discourse, still much indebted to the mentality and traumas of

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[10] Blokker, Paul, "Populist Counter-Constitutionalism, Conservatism, and Legal Fundamentalism", in: European Constitutional Law Review 15, 2019, 519f, discussing the cases of Hungary and Poland.

[11] Shehaj, Albana, Shin, Adrian J., Inglehart, Ronald, "Immigration and right-wing populism: An origin story", in: *Party Politics*, 2019, https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1354068819849888

the Second World War. This British discourse, revealing great disorientation in the face of the alternatives of localism and globalism, led to the Brexit 2016 vote that left British society highly divided internally, and exposed to the risk of being easy prey to external (e.g. United States, Russia, China and India) and domestic (e.g. Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland) populism. In the Balkans, we see populism in action in the strongman tactics of Alexandar Vučić in Serbia, and Milo Dukanović in Montenegro, with the support of Russia and China.

This is, of course, a brief, simplistic and incomplete presentation of European populism and its root causes. In the space and timeframe we have, it is impossible to do justice to the complexity of the problem. However, we believe that we have presented the general features of this theme in terms that allow and stimulate further reflection and discussion around this phenomenon. For Christians in general, this is a challenging reality, as populists often proclaim the need to protect the European Judeo-Christian identity. In some cases, it goes further and warns of the need to safeguard the religious identity of the majority population against Islamic or secularised values considered, in their own way, to be disruptive to the dominant political, social, and cultural order.

Constitutional Impact of Populism

Populism is a deleterious mutation in the genome of the body politic, able to generate all kinds of constitutional diseases. It has arguably important consequences in various political, economic, social, and cultural domains, at national, supranational and international levels. Neil Walker refers to this problem by pointing to the *constitutional tensions* generated by populist politics.[12] Gábor Tóth speaks of the emergence of

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[12] Walker, Neil, "Populism and constitutional tension", in: *International Journal of Constitutional Law* 17 (2), 2019, 515f.

a populist pseudo-constitutionalism.[13] It is clear that it is a complex phenomenon, full of nuances, gradations and tonalities, relapsed to simplistic readings. In any case, it has been possible to draw some important conclusions. In the following lines, we will try to highlight some of the negative consequences populism produces in the domain of constitutional values and principles.

Human Rights

Populism has a significant impact on human rights in general. Populist movements, in emphasising the political identity of the political community, tend to neglect the rights of minority groups, such as freedom of religion and expression and respect for the principle of equality in the exercise of various fundamental rights, namely of a social nature. Foreigners and members of ethnic minorities are targets of abuse, discrimination, and harassment, directly or indirectly.[14] A hostile environment is generated intentionally. Xenophobic and racist discourse is explicitly or implicitly encouraged, as well as the appeal to hatred and violence. Human rights, historically conceived and promoted as instruments for the protection of dissidents, marginalised, excluded, oppressed and vulnerable, are openly devalued and scorned with increasing frequency, some going so far as to affirm the transition to a post-human rights paradigm. Individuals are assessed based on their greater or lesser ethnic, political, cultural, or religious identification with the values of the globally considered community. Their rights are placed in a situation of functional dependence on the interests defended by the majority of the population, formulated by the charismatic leader who claims to be its legitimate representative.

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[13] Tóth, Gábor Attila, "Breaking the Equilibrium: From Distrust of Representative Government to an Authoritarian Executive", in: *Washington International Law Journal* 28, 2019, 317-323.

[14] Ibid., 331f.

The problem becomes especially serious, in the specific scope of the right to religious freedom, when populist nationalism establishes an alliance with the dominant religious community. Just as has happened in states like Russia and Turkey. Even in countries like the United States, people of Islamic faith or African religions complain of the increase in hate speech, incitement to violence, discrimination, and persecution. In such cases, the creation of a climate of social hostility towards religious minorities can have serious consequences on the concrete possibility of exercising individual and collective religious freedom. The problem is aggravated when, in the name of nationalist populism, certain religious confessions are seen as a surreptitious form of meddling by foreign political interests. In China, Christianity is often seen as an intrusion into the Western lifestyle. In Russia, the advancement of Evangelicals is seen as a crowbar or a wedge, serving American political and economic interests. In the United States, Islamists are often viewed with suspicion for supporting the causes of militant international jihadism. When populist politicians directly and deliberately stimulate this distrust to pursue their political goals, the consequences for ensuring equal religious freedom will soon be felt, unless there is effective judicial protection.

Democracy and Governance

Democracy, as defined by Abraham Lincoln, is supposed to be the government of the people, by the people and for the people. Representative democracy presupposes the existence of a democratically-elected Parliament, where different parties, ideologies, political views and interests are represented, establishing a public argumentative and critical process for presenting alternatives, discussion, negotiation, deliberation and compromise.[15] In order for this

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[15] Kersten, Jens,"Parlamentarismus und Populismus", in: Juristische Schulung 582018, 929f.

process to have any legitimacy, democracy should not just include the will of the majority, since the people is the sum of the majority and the minorities. For this reason, the democratic principle must ensure that the will of the majority is limited, and that minority rights and interests are respected. That is why there is an intimate relationship between the democratic principle and that of the separation and reciprocal control of different institutional bodies and social powers.[16] Democracy presupposes the possibility for individuals to be part of the majority or the political minority, to be able to change their vote from one to the other and thus contribute to the minority becoming a majority and the minority becoming a majority. Hence, there is also an internal connection between democracy and fundamental rights.

Populist movements tend to favour the political majority, often defined in ethnic-cultural terms, and to despise and devalue the rights of minorities.[17] At the same time, they ignore the necessary balance between constitutional sovereign bodies and tend to stress the merits of the *Führerprinzip* by privileging a strong and uncritical adherence to the vision of a charismatic leader. The civic virtues that are normally expected from a typical politician in a liberal democratic society are often replaced by an ill-tempered and bad-mannered politician that "tells it like it is" and lashes out at political correctness. In this context, politics can become highly polarised and anti-pluralistic, culminating in extreme positions and radicalisation.[18]

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[16] Voßkuhle, Andreas, "Demokratie und Populismus", in: *Der Staat* 57, 2018, 119f, 122.f, exploring fine anti-democratic elements of populism: a) a know-it-all mentality; b) homogeneity instead of pluralism; c) identity instead of representation; d) diffuse assignment instead of free mandate; e) alignment instead of effective opposition.

[17] Urbinati, Nadia, *Me The People, How Populism Transforms Democracy*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2019, 3f.

[18] A good exploration of this topic can be found in, Kyle, Jordan/ Mounk, Yasha (2018), "The Populist Harm to Democracy, an Empirical Assessment", Tony

Even when this is not enough to annihilate the democratic rule of law, it is enough to cause great political and institutional trepidation and serious threats to human rights and democratic values.[19] Democracy is generally understood as a process of ceaseless critical discussion and deliberation. There is no such thing as instantaneous democracy.[20] However, when populism dominates, dissonant voices - whether from members of parliament, journalists, scientists, or economists - are ignored, harassed, and silenced, dubbed "enemies of the people". Around the leader, there is an elite which is often technically incompetent, eager for promotion and whose performance and evaluation criteria are judged solely by their loyalty to the leader.[21]

Democracy requires periodic refreshment of political legitimacy and demands that civil society preserve its freedom and autonomy so that citizens can vote freely. Hence the importance of the existence of free elections held periodically and the constitutional limitation of executive mandates. What happens instead is that some populist leaders seek to change the rules in the middle of the game to guarantee their perpetuation in power. Evo Morales and Vladimir Putin are examples. Even Donald Trump hit the headlines when he mused about serving more than the legal limit of two terms as US president during an exchange with reporters outside the White House, even hinting at the

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Blair Institute for Global Change, https://institute.global/sites/default/files/articles/The-Populist-Harm-to-Democracy-An-Empirical-Assessment.pdf (accessed 20 May 2020).

[19] Tsai, Jung Hsiang, "Populism and democratic crisis in semi-presidential countries" in: *Journal of Democratization* 26(8), 2019, 1458f.

[20] Kuo, Ming-Sung, "Against instantaneous democracy", in: International Journal of Constitutional Law 17(2), 2019.

[21] Izzadeen, Ameen, "In this era of demagogues, democracy on death row". Daily Mirror (Sri Lanka) (August 23, 2019 Friday). https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:5WWB-HNS1-F12F-F0BT-00000-00&context=1516831 (accessed 21 May 2020).

possibility of perpetuating himself in power, making it unclear whether he was serious, playing, or testing the terrain. They try to convey the message that only they have the necessary vision, qualities, and skills to lead the country.

Separation of Powers

Although the remote origin (*causa remota*) of the principle of separation of powers can be traced back to the old, endless and repetitive discussions on the virtues and defective forms of monarchical, aristocratic and democratic government, its close origin (*causa proxima*) was mainly due to the thinking of John Locke, Montesquieu and James Madison, in the 17th and 18th centuries. This principle rests on a fundamental attitude of mistrust, quite understandable in the light of the Judeo-Christian worldview regarding what can realistically be expected of the character traits of human beings.[22] Modern constitutionalism rejects any claim to unlimited human moral reliability. It assumes that absolute power, whatever its nature, cannot be entrusted to a single person, because men are not angels, they are not governed by angels and even angels have fallen.[23] The principle of separation of powers provides the system of government with the necessary mechanism of checks and balances, while separating and rationalising the political, legislative, administrative and judicial functions, preventing any of them from acting outside the scope of any external inspection and control. In a

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[22] Tóth, op. cit., 341f.

[23] We have in mind the famous words of James Madison, in The Federalist Papers No. 51: "If men were angels, no government would be necessary. If angels were to govern men, neither external nor internal controls on government would be necessary. In framing a government which is to be administered by men over men, the great difficulty lies in this: you must first enable the government to control the governed; and in the next place oblige it to control itself. A dependence on the people is, no doubt, the primary control on the government; but experience has taught mankind the necessity of auxiliary precautions."

world of morally imperfect and fallible human beings, the ambition of some must stifle the ambition of others.

This principle is now one of the most important political-constitutional developments in modernity.[24] It developed in Europe against the pretensions of concentration of the absolute power in the Monarch, having flourished within American constitutionalism. Later, it would be reborn in constitutional law after the end of the Second World War as a conscious reaction against the various totalitarian experiences of concentration of power in the executive branch, supported by a single, national-socialist, fascist, or communist party. This is a principle considered to be inherent in democratic rule of law. As an antidote against the tyranny of a politician, a minority or a majority, the principle of separation of powers offers a balanced scheme that includes several political, legislative, administrative, and judicial institutions, all of which together represent state sovereignty, where they interact based on principles of institutional dialogue and reciprocal control, thereby building the relevant political will. This scheme is intended to ensure that the State is not held hostage, exclusively, by an individual, a political elite, economic interest groups, or culturally homogeneous popular majorities. The political will that really counts, within the framework of democratic rule of law, is not necessarily that which directly expresses the wishes, desires or cravings of an individual, a political majority, an influential minority or an effective private interest group, but the will that legitimately results from the constitutionally balanced, dialogical and loyal exercise of power by the various existing sovereign institutions.

Populism does not particularly like the principle of separation of powers. On the contrary, Neil Walker stresses that populism "entails a

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[24] Garry, Patrick M., "Liberty Through Limits: The Bill of Rights as Limited Government Provisions", in: *SMU Law Review* 62, 2019, 1745- 1754.

strong preference for the rule of men over the rule of law."[25] Populist constitutionalism thrives on the weakening of institutional checks and the supremacy of the executive power.[26] The populist politician likes to speak directly and instantaneously to the people and with the people. Populist leaders often seek to blame their own failure on Parliament, the Supreme Court, the Constitutional Court, the Court of Auditors, the Central Bank, the federal states (where they exist), the prosecutor or the police. The spectacle of seeing Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro participating in demonstrations in Brasília calling for the closure of the Brazilian Congress and the Supreme Federal Court is an eloquent example of this.

Rule of Law

The rule of law is one of the fundamental principles of modern constitutionalism. It is based on the ideal, strongly rooted in the Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian tradition, of establishing a form of government based on law, justice and the common good, in which governors and governed are in a position of legal equality. It is, fundamentally, a matter of creating a government of laws and not of men, in which arbitrariness, caprice and voluntarism cannot decide anyone's destiny. Currently, the rule of law affirms the primacy of democratic law, the guarantee of legal security and the protection of trust, the publicity of laws, administrative acts and judicial judgments, the regularity and proportionality of state action, the subordination of administration and courts to the law and the guarantee of effective judicial protection to all citizens in independent and impartial courts. Public administration must function in a formalised, predictable, hierarchical, and bureaucratic way, treating all individuals equally, impersonally, impartially and transparently. Populism is a threat to the

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[25] Walker, op. cit.

[26] Tóth, op. cit., 327f.

rule of law, as populist rulers often seek to dominate the administration and put it at the service of their own political agenda.[27] One example is the printing of the name "Trump" on American families' and businesses' relief cheques during COVID-19.[28] Likewise, populism is often tempted to control the judiciary at its various levels, undermining its necessary independence and impartiality. This has been the source of permanent tension between the European Union and the authorities in Poland, dominated by the populist party "Law and Justice". In Poland, we have witnessed the increasing politicisation of the Constitutional Court, the attempt to control the Supreme Court, political control over the Prosecutor General and over judges.[29] The guarantee of publicity over court decisions is not properly guaranteed. These are examples of how populist politics constitutes a serious and intolerable threat to the rule of law.

Sphere of Public Discourse

A democratic society based on human rights presupposes the existence of a sphere of public discourse where all political, economic, and social issues can be the subject of open and critical discussion. All policies and all politicians must be subject to rigorous and permanent scrutiny, from different points of view and perspectives. In this sense, the robust guarantee of a wide range of communicative freedoms (e.g. expression, press, media, social networks) and the political and economic independence of the journalism profession are essential and indispensable factors. All of this must be ensured by a solid legislative

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[27] A serious warning can be found in, Huq, Aziz/ Ginsburg, Tom, "How to Lose a Constitutional Democracy", in: UCLA Law Review 65, 2019, 65f, 86f.

[28] BBC News, "Trump's name to appear on US relief cheques", 16 April 2020 https://www.bbc.com/news/world-52293910 (accessed 21 May 2020)

[29] Koncewicz, Tomasz T, "Understanding the Politics of Resentment: of the Principles, Institutions, Counter-Strategies, Normative Change, and the Habits of Heart", In: *Indiana Journal of Global Legal Studies* 26, 2019, 501f.

and regulatory framework, with administrative and jurisdictional control and enforcement mechanisms.

Freedom of expression in the broad sense, understood as the totality of the various communicative freedoms, performs several functions of the greatest importance in a democratic society. It is at the service of freedom of conscience and individual thought, it contributes to the search for truth and knowledge in all areas of life, it allows for the existence of competition between different ideas in a context of openness and decentralisation of authority, it enables the democratic self-government of the population, and it allows for the control and denunciation of the pathologies of political power, with special emphasis on its decisive role in the fight against corruption. At the same time, it facilitates the gradual evolution of society, enabling it to adapt to new realities. It also fosters mutual understanding between communities with different political, ideological, and religious conceptions, enabling their peaceful coexistence.

Populism, subordinated to an ideal of promoting homogeneous and organic collective thinking, has a very characteristic and predictable approach to freedom of expression and press and media regulation. The aim is to create the idea that we live in a post-human rights world, that we can do nothing to change it as it is an irreversible fact that we must conform to. In this context, there is often an attempt to control or end the public television outlet.[30] Independent and impartial information is seen by populists as a threat. Remember the war waged by Boris Johnson against the BBC. At the same time, it seeks to ensure that private media, although formally independent from a political and economic point of view, is effectively controlled by national or foreign magnates who are friends of power. Look at the reality experienced in the United Kingdom, Turkey, or Russia. If that is not enough, attempts are made to characterise journalists and the media as hostile and enemies of the

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[30] Tóth, op. cit., 331f.

people. Donald Trump is a typical case in this context, although not the only one. Strengthening laws against defamation, slander and the spread of fake news is also a frequent tactic in some populist media, with a view to silence journalists. Turkey and Russia are good examples. The development of hidden schemes by circles close to power to spread false news is also frequent in some populist media, such as Russia or Brazil. Disturbingly, against the backdrop of populist nationalism, violent attacks against journalists have also been increasing worldwide.

COVID-19 as a Test Case for Populist Governance

COVID-19, a virus that allegedly spread from Wuhan, China, turned out to be a case study for the governance of nationalist populism. This does not mean, however, that there is a linear and clear relationship between populism and success in the fight against the virus. The UK, Poland, Serbia, and Turkey are good examples of populist relative success in the fight against the virus.[31] The virus has gone through different stages of dissemination and different states have had better and worse moments over time. We cannot try to find simplistic correlations, let alone ignore the facts.

However, it has been observed that populists have tended to refer to it in war-like terms. In the UK and the United States, the problem was viewed by Boris Johnson and Donald Trump with negligent pride. Boris Johnson's governing team revealed a cabinet structured around nationalist and exceptionally slogans, devoid of any substance, totally unprepared to take timely preventive measures and to ensure the provision of personal protective equipment for health professionals, thereby leading to thousands of entirely preventable deaths. Ironically, the health of Boris Johnson, affected by COVID-19, was largely saved

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[31] Balkan Insight, "Pandemic Boosts Support for Europe's Autocrats!", May 6, 2020, https://balkaninsight.com/2020/05/06/pandemic-boosts-support-for-europes-autocrats/ (accessed 20 May 2020)

thanks to two immigrant nurses from Portugal and New Zealand.[32] The UK's relative success in the field of vaccination was, to a large extent, the result of nationalist populism applied to vaccination.

Donald Trump showed the consequences of a health policy centred on electoral polls and personal megalomania. While asserting his full presidential authority to fight COVID-19, he decided to blame China, the World Health Organization, the State Governors, the mayors, the journalists and the media for its dissemination and suggested the injection disinfectant to citizens and the use of UV treatment, hydroxychloroquine and *chloroquine*. The team of specialist doctors from the Donald Trump government sought at all cost to engage in damage control. The wearing of a protective face mask was seen as a sign of weakness, with geopolitical symbolism, to be avoided in any respect. The slogan "America First" resulted in America leading the world in the number of deaths form COVID-19. In the United States, populism manifested itself in uncritical and unscientific COVID-19 denial, fuelled by conspiracy theories, in some cases of a religious, dispensationalist and apocalyptic nature.

The situation did not spiral further, in both contexts, thanks to the existence of a strong civil society and liberal and democratic culture in the United Kingdom and a solid system of separation and reciprocal control of powers, both horizontally and vertically, in the United States.

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32 See, in general, Shahane, Girish, "COVID-19: Populism's moment of reckoning", 20 May 2020, https://www.livemint.com/mint-lounge/features/COVID-19-populism-s-moment-of-reckoning-11589962979252.html (accessed 21 May 2020); Linsker, Daniel, "COVID-19 And The Challenge Of Populism", Forbes, April 2, 2020, https://www.forbes.com/sites/riskmap/2020/04/02/COVID-19-and-the-failure-of-populism/#2ffcb2434f99 (accessed 21 May 2020); Lassa, Jonatan A/ Booth, Miranda, "Are populist leaders a liability during COVID-19?" April 8, 2020, https://theconversation.com/are-populist-leaders-a-liability-during-COVID-19-135431 (accessed 21 May 2020).

In any case, the dramatic vision of dozens of coffins being deposited in mass graves in New York City was a sobering warning that, in the United States, serious social and economic problems remain, demanding a reformist action by political institutions and civil society as a whole. The same is true for the "pandemic of the unvaccinated" that has spread across the country.

In Hungary, Victor Orban, who in the past decade had been weakening the institutional mechanisms of separation and control of powers, directing the electoral system, and placing the media under the control of his circle of friends, took advantage of the COVID-19 crisis to have a "coronavirus law" passed in Parliament bestowing him with almost unlimited powers, on the pretext of responding to an emergency situation. In Brazil, Jair Bolsonaro at first devalued COVID-19 as if it were a mere flu. The virus spread rapidly across the country, and it was soon realised that economic and social inequality and insufficient public health infrastructure would have disastrous social and health consequences. In the midst of the crisis, Bolsonaro seemed more concerned with defending his power (and the interests of his children), than protecting the population. His first concern was to ensure control over police and jurisdictional institutions. He even said, "I am the Constitution". It was not more successful in its attempts simply because the Brazilian democratic and jurisdictional institutions, already tested by previous political crises, managed to put the brakes on their authoritarian bias. In Russia, Vladimir Putin, who had long established a theological-political coalition with the Russian Orthodox Church, has sought to adopt the appropriate political, constitutional, and legal measures necessary to centralise power and perpetuate its ownership and exercise. In Russia, COVID-19 served to justify the ban on all demonstrations from any one person. In China, the fight against COVID-19 was used to increase people's surveillance, which was already very significant in the practice of the social credit system. In various contexts, populists used

confinement rules to also confine elements of the opposition and used the ban on spreading false news to silence the most critical journalists or the most troubling questions. In India, the lockdown put into place by the Narendra Modi government was perceived by many, not as the rational quest for adequate, necessary and proportional measures needed to fight COVID-19, but as a new opportunity to crack down on Muslims, Christians and other minorities.[33]

Despite the evident political, ideological and economic divergences and disagreements that exist between populists like Trump, Putin, Jinping, Modi, Erdogan, Bolsonaro or Duterte, the truth is that a secret and tacit link sometimes seems to be detected between them, based on a common feeling of contentment and satisfaction for having restored and brought back to the world a deliberate and unashamedly patriarchal, tribal, sexist and belligerent politics. However, some more attentive journalists noted that most women executive leaders – such as, Taiwan's president Tsai Ing-wen, New Zealand's prime minister Jacinda Ardern, the German chancellor Angela Merkel, Denmark's prime minister Mette Frederiksen, and Sanna Marin, the Finnish prime minister, managed to approach the COVID-19 crisis in a more rational, sensible, sensitive, humane and effective way than those advocated by would-be Alpha-male populist leaders.[34]

COVID-19, along with other crises such as Australia's forest fires or the Amazon rain forest crisis, shows that in our day and age, populist nationalism is wholly misguided. One cannot solve global sanitary or environmental problems by leaving multilateral forums, by disregarding

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[33] Jaffrelot C/ Martelli, J T, "Current crisis consolidates populist rapport between a leader and a fictional representation of people", Updated: April 29, 2020, https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/india-COVID-19-coronavirus -lockdown-narendra-modi-6383721/ (accessed 21 May 2020)

[34] Taub, Amanda, "Why Are Women-Led Nations Doing Better With COVID-19?", The New York Times, May 18, 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/ 15/world/coronavirus-women-leaders.html (accessed 21 May 2020)

the evidence and shouting America First, Britain First, Australia First or Brazil First. A nationalist, isolationist and independentist concept of sovereignty is utterly outdated and useless, and even dangerous. We live in a time in which sovereignty must be shared, pooled, articulated, networked, cooperative and interdependent. What's more, it must be based on human rights, democracy, freedom of circulation of people, companies, goods, services, and capital, as well as on free trade, fair competition, environment and consumer protection, peaceful resolution of disputes and the rule of law. The church, with its personalist, communitarian, and universalist message of the primacy truth, justice and of spiritual values over profit and private interest, can and should provide important moral and ethical guidelines in this regard.

Challenges Facing Christians in Europe

The relationship between the church and political power has come to occupy a central place in Christian theological reflection since Lactantius, the Christian theologian who became an adviser to the first Christian Emperor, Constantine I. Shortly thereafter, Athanasius, Ambrose of Milan, and Augustine of Hippo laid the groundwork for a discussion of the correct relationship that Christians should maintain with established powers.[35] If it is true that these powers cannot escape

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[35] Opderbeck, David W., *Law and Theology, Classic Questions and Contemporary Perspectives*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 2019, 79f, 83f.; this tension between church and state can be seen in the words spoken by Ambrose of Milan when, following the Massacre of Thessalonica, he prevents Emperor Theodosius from entering the Church: 'You do not reflect, it seems, O Emperor, on the guilt you have incurred by that great massacre; but now that your fury is appeased, do you not perceive the enormity of your crime? You must not be dazzled by the splendour of the purple you wear, and be led to forget the weakness of the body which it clothes. Your subjects, O Emperor, are of the same nature as yourself, and not only so, but are likewise your fellow servants; for there is one Lord and Ruler of all, and He is the maker of all creatures,

the designs of God's providence, it is also true that Christians must maintain the necessary critical distance from them, since Jesus Christ said: 'My Kingdom is not of this world'.[36] At that time, as it is now, the Christian response to political power was never simple or homogeneous. On the contrary, it has always been and will continue to be complex and full of nuances and subtleties.

Some of the existing populist proposals seem to exert an irrepressible attraction to Christians. Some of them promise, in exchange for political loyalty, the protection of borders from immigrants, the preservation of Judeo-Christian values, the defence of the Christian identity of the people, the preservation of the traditional family, the fight against organised crime and corruption, the guarantee of religious freedom from the majority confession, the direct participation in political decision-making and legislative measures, and proximity to the media and cultural dissemination. The price demanded of Christians is *only* that they show a reasonable tolerance for aggressive, bellicose, overbearing, authoritarian, racist, misogynistic, xenophobic, anti-Semitic, anti-Islamic and homophobic political discourse. They are also asked to disregard demagoguery, economic and social inequality, corruption, environmental destruction, the violation of minority rights and the deliberate spread of alternative facts and fake news. If it is true that Christians tend to react negatively to the populism of Xi Jinping, Recep Tayyip Erdogan or Rodrigo Duterte, which they see as a serious threat to their worldview, the truth is that many Christians have not resisted the populist delusion. For some, Trump, Putin, Orban, Kaczyński and

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whether princes or people. How would you look upon the temple of the one Lord of all? How could you lift up in prayer hands steeped in the blood of so unjust a massacre? Depart then, and do not by a second crime add to the guilt of the first.' Davis, William Stearns (ed.): *Readings in Ancient History: Illustrative Extracts from the Sources. Vol. II: Rome and the West*, Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1912-13, 298-300.

[36] John 18:36.

Bolsonaro, to mention some examples, are divinely established leaders, anointed by the power of God, to fulfil a preordained mission, to engage in spiritual warfare and to win.[37]

Christians should consider the fact that the type of populist politician is not entirely absent in its own scripture. We find it in Absalom, son of King David, a man of carnal appetites, who built a monumental tower named after himself. Taking advantage of his exuberant, seductive appearance and charismatic personality, Absalom sought to dispute the political protagonism, competing with his own father and conspiring for his political destruction. He resorted to murder, violence and espionage if and when necessary to achieve his goals, characterising his father David as an incompetent King, distant from the people and oblivious to their problems. To portray a viable alternative, Absalom developed a calculated populist strategy, distributing handshakes and kisses to a naive and enthusiastic population, making easy and generous promises of greater effectiveness in political governance and in the administration of justice.[38] In the process, sex and sexism were also weapons. His misogyny and lack of character were evident when Absalom, after having abused and shamed his own sister, decided to publicly, on an outdoor terrace, copulate with his father's ten concubines, to dishonour him in front of all the people. We can at least speculate, with plausibility, that had Absalom's populism triumphed at that time, the course of Israel's spiritual, political and social history would certainly have been very different and for the worse.

About 1000 years later, we find traces of populism in Pontius Pilate, the man who, presiding over the most important trial in universal

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[37] Opderbeck, op. cit., 201f.

38 Russell, Stephen C. *The King and the Land: A Geography of Royal Power in the Biblical World, Oxford*: Oxford University Press, 2017, 68f, discussing the case of Absalom and remarking that 'This is the symbolic import of Absalom's promise to restore justice at the city gates. His revolt was a populist movement, and David was anything but a populist.'

history, decided to hand Jesus over to be crucified, despite seeing no harm in him.[39] In doing so, Pilate placed, above all else, his political instinct that led him to try to capture the essence of the people's spirit and to follow his most primitive and irrational impulses. Pilate was likely convinced that, in his capacity as governor, he was responding to popular desire and should attend to the general will, regardless of the merits of his moral content. Pleasing the uncontrolled crowd and preserving his position in political power, regardless of the cost, were more important than the demands of truth and justice. In those moments, he viewed truth with cynicism and suspicion. When faced with the imperatives of justice, he simply chose to wash his hands, as though cleaning his troubled conscience. Fortunately, divine providence would not fail to make this heinous decision contribute to the good of those who love God and who are called by Him.

In fact, throughout the biblical narrative, from Genesis to Revelation, Satan is the first, the last and the quintessential populist. He approaches human beings and, with sophistic intent and manipulative speech, in an apparently comprehensive and compassionate tone, seeks to identify their needs and desires, proposing to satisfy them. In the process, he appeals to the most basic drives, instincts, and fears of the human being. Satan promises knowledge, security, wealth, prestige, and power. In reality, he is nothing more than a liar and a murderer from the start. Nothing he offers is free or altruistic. For Satan, there is always a more interesting and appealing alternative than following the commandment

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[39] Rimmer, Chad, "What is Truth? A reflection on populism through the lens of John 18:28-38", in: Sinn, Simone/ Harasta, Eva (eds.), *Resisting Exclusion Global Theological Responses to Populism*, Geneva: LWF Studies, 2019, 246-247, remarking that 'The religious leaders had a strong desire to appease the populist movements of the day, collectively referred to as Zealots' and that 'populist leaders will often narrow the definition of "the people" in order to appease those who belong to the dominant culture and exclude the legitimate concerns of "others" from being addressed'.

to love God with all your heart and your neighbour as yourself. There is always an easier way. There is a price to pay: to worship him, serve him, give one's soul to him and renounce the cross. That was the price he demanded from Man and Jesus Christ himself, and it is the same price he demands from the church. In any case, the church must be very careful with hasty, abusive, and politicised use of apocalyptic, eschatological language, which sees in all things, even the most normal and banal, indisputable manifestations of a spiritual battle between good and evil, thus contributing to political and social polarisation and becoming part of the problem and not of the solution.[40]

Israel was called on to be a light to the nations. Moses created a legal system that would reflect the essential dignity of all human beings and show concern for some categories of people in particularly vulnerable situations, such as orphans, widows, and foreigners. Israel's legal system, freed from slavery, should be a benchmark of justice and mercy for all peoples. Only then would Israel's vocation be credible. The church was and is called to be salt and light in the world. True religion, says the scripture, consists of helping orphans and widows in their tribulations and guarding against the corruption of the world.[41] These are, in fact, central ideas of the modern concept of democratic and Social State, which translate into the notion of social rights and the anti-corruption principle.[42] We know today that it is impossible to preserve the rights of the most vulnerable without a real commitment to fact-based, transparent, responsive, responsible and active engagement in the fight against corruption. Christians, whether Catholics, Orthodox, Protestants or Evangelicals, cannot be carried away by the promises of

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[40] One must remember that Jesus himself was a victim of the abusive use of religious language when he was accused of working with Beelzebub. Matthew 12:22f. and Luke 11:14f.

[41] James 1:27.

[42] Teachout, Zephyr, "The Anti-Corruption Principle", in: *Cornell Law Review* 94, 2009, 341f.

those who offer prestige, power, money, asking only for a compromise on lies, demagoguery, inequality and injustice. Christians cannot side with those who, promising easy, cheap, and simple solutions to the complex political, economic and social problems facing the world, those who favour the concentration of political and economic power in an elite of oligarchs, and who express hostility towards any form of opposition or control. Throughout the scripture, the clear and unmistakable missive pervades that the proclamation of the message of salvation is only likely to be credible and effective if it is based on a serious and consistent commitment to truth, justice, and mercy towards the weakest and most vulnerable. This decisive and essential commitment must positively shape the relationship of the church everywhere, within the structures of political, legal, and economic power.

The Christian church, in its different manifestations, does not have an indissoluble commitment to a particular ethnicity or national set of values. It has a mission addressed to all people in all nations, to whom it recognises equal dignity, and to which it addresses its message of reconciliation with God, and above all, to uphold universal values of peace, truth, rationality, reasonableness, kindness, equity and justice, and strive for forms of global, regional, national and local governance based on these values. The legitimacy of national government systems will depend, to a large extent, on their conformity with these values and their ability to interpret and implement them in a manner adapted and appropriate to local circumstances. Christians, in all nations, should resist those who sow demagoguery, manipulation, lies, division, oppression and corruption, and commit themselves to an intellectual and spiritual renewal that will allow them to positively influence the community and seek peace, prosperity and justice in the environment in which they live.[43]

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[43] Rimmer, op. cit., 248, stressing that, 'Where dominant powers that seek to disintegrate, disappear or disenfranchise bodies as a means to exclude them,

Today's Christians must stand for human rights, democracy, the rule of law, in the good tradition of primitive *Ecclesia*, an assembly in which everyone participated from the same faith in a spirit of brotherhood to help each other confront difficulties shared by all. This does not mean, of course, that Christians are expected to agree with all competing ideologies or accept them all with an attitude of relativism and indifferentism. The church must endeavour to establish a constructive relationship with all government authorities in all contexts, as well as with civil society, while maintaining the necessary critical distance that allows it to perform its prophetic function.[44] The words of American theologian R. W. Frank are still relevant today, when he stressed that 'Dogma and doctrine will not be venerated because of their antiquity or origin in sacred literatures of the past. They will deserve the respect of people only as they are instrumental to more harmonious and richer forms of human association'.[45]

On the other hand, the church must be humble and acknowledge that it often offers its flanks to criticisms directed at it, when it places itself on the side of the oppressors. If Denis Diderot is said to have urged the people to "*strangle the last* king with the entrails of the *last priest"*, this is explained by the position taken by the French institutional church in the Ancient Regime. If Karl Marx said that "religion is the opium of the people", this can be explained by the church's indifference and *paralysis*

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faith motivates us to re-draw the circle to include their being and their voice to embody the fullness of truth. In the face of exclusionary populism, such as the political agency of a community of faith.'

[44] Spencer, Nick, "The rise of Christian populism", Bible Society, 2017: Oct. 16, https://www.biblesociety.org.uk/latest/news/the-rise-of-christian-populism/, (accessed 20 May 2020), stressing that 'the best defense against superficial, content-lite, Christian identity politics, is theologically informed, content-heavy, Christian belief politics.'

[45] Frank, R. W., "Democracy and the church", in: *The Journal of Religion* 1 (5), 1921, 528 -534.

by theological analysis (or lack of it) in the face of material conditions of economic production and social oppression. This radically anti-clerical attitude was also due to the propensity of the church to seek to resolve spiritual problems using temporal power and law. However, Christians can hardly expect positive national, supranational, or international law to be fully in line with the value ideals taught by the church.[46] Positive law will always be a realistic and prudent compromise between universal ideals and the (im)possibilities of their realisation in a morally flawed and corrupted world. The approximation of positive law to the divine and natural law will be greater the greater the spiritual renewal of society. And this renewal will be all the more likely and plausible the greater the church's commitment to the weakest, most vulnerable and excluded in society. Ernst-Wolfgang Böckenförde, the renowned German jurist and constitutionalist, claimed that the liberal secular state lives on assumptions that he himself cannot guarante.[47] That being true, it is important that the church is able to provide the ethical and moral guarantee that human rights, democracy, and the rule of law need in order to survive.

Conclusion

In this text, we presented a brief description of the populist style of doing politics, identified its manifestations in Europe, and called attention to its impact on the main pillars of modern constitutionalism, such as human rights, democracy and the rule of law. We have drawn attention to the way in which the church has been betrayed over the centuries, and it still can be today, due to spurious pretensions of

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[46] Opderbeck, op. cit., 115f.

[47] Bockenförde, Ernst-Wolfgang, *Staat, Gesellschaft, Freiheit*. 1976, 60, stating: 'Der freiheitliche, säkularisierte Staat lebt von Voraussetzungen, die er selbst nicht garantieren kann`.

prestige, wealth and power that have nothing to do with its original and essential mission, rather they are obstacles to compliance. As Nick Spencer warns us, 'When populist politics hijacks Christianity, ejecting theology and replacing content in the process, Christians cannot remain silent. Secularists may seize on this trend and use it to further their cause of removing religion from the public square.'[48] This is the real danger of the temptation of populism facing the church today. As Nick Baines, Bishop of Leeds, puts it, Christians "are called to resist those who seek to polarise and to reduce complexity to simple slogans".[49]

For Christians, whether Catholics, Orthodox, Protestants or Evangelicals, the challenge remains to maintain their faithfulness to the fundamental biblical values of peace, goodness, mercy, truth, justice, and solidarity, aware that the great commission which Jesus Christ gave to the church is for all individuals in all nations, and must be fulfilled not by force or violence, but by the Spirit of the Lord. This was the core of John Locke's admonition when he wrote: "If, like the Captain of our salvation, they sincerely desired the good of souls, they would tread in the steps and follow the perfect example of that Prince of Peace, who sent out His soldiers to the subduing of nations, and gathering them into His Church, not armed with the sword, or other instruments of force, but prepared with the Gospel of peace and with the exemplary holiness of their conversation. This was His method".[50]

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[48] Spencer, op. cit.

[49] Baines, Nick, "Going back a different way: being Christian in a populist world", January 6, 2019, https://nickbaines.wordpress.com/2019/01/06/going-back-a-different-way-being-christian-in-a-populist-world/ (accessed 20 May 2020).

[50] Locke, John /Montuori, Mario *A Letter Concerning Toleration. Latin and English Texts Revised and Edited With Variants and an Introduction*, The Hague: Springer, 1963, 13.

RELIGION AND POPULISM, NATIONALIST AND ULTRANATIONALIST IDEOLOGIES

ROOT CAUSES OF CURRENT MALAISE

Ganoune Diop ∗

In the context of framing our topic, and for the sake of clarity, I will successively address the issue of religion and its intersection with contemporary populism, nationalist, and ultranationalist ideologies. The primary focus will be on populism, while articulating principles that may be relevant to challenging nationalist and ultranationalist ideologies.

It is well documented that, throughout history, religions, along with philosophical and political ideologies, have been instrumentalised with devastating consequences for the human family. Wars and revolutions testify to this fact.

The particular lens through which I will be reading the undergirding issues, and their effects and damaging consequences on societal relationships, is the predicament of violence. More specifically, how violence is instrumentalised by means of discriminations rooted in

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phobia and the criminalisation of others as a last step towards legitimating the infliction of pain, murder and ultimately genocide.

On Religion

Among the most plausible of the hypotheses on the etymology of 'religion' is that it originates from the Latin word *religare*, meaning 'the binding of people around beliefs, values and worldview'. The same root is shared with the word 'ligament'.[1]

At their core, religions bring people together, binding them with bonds of solidarity, esteem, care and, ultimately, love.

From the onset, let me affirm that religious actors are mandated to bring people together, bonding around values of our common humanity and several intersections of values. This is our current noble privilege.

At its core, religion is about the promotion of life and sustaining life in the best way possible. It is about celebrating the dignity and mystery of the life of every person.

What could best illustrate the vital and most noble human solidarity than to affirm life, to respect the infinite value of every person, and to protect life?

This fundamental moral imperative leads us to resist and refuse a culture of death, violence, and the violation of people's integrity, whether physical, mental, emotional or spiritual. Religions betray their intrinsic vocation when they embrace the path of violence and death.

The core calling of religions - their common vocation - is expressed in concepts such as the protection of others, upholding the integrity of their personhood, and safeguarding their dignity.

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[1] See Eberle, Gary: *Dangerous Words: Talking about God in an Age of Fundamentalism,* Boston & London: Trumpeter, 2007, 111.

All religious actors can, and therefore must, partner to work together in the prevention of violence against human beings, societies, and minorities.

This partnership need not mean that people believe the same in all things. The dignity of difference is at the heart of peaceful coexistence. Obviously, it helps to have a consensus on what is considered as wrong. Unequivocally, inflicting pain on people, harming, hurting, torturing, and killing is wrong.

When human rights were delineated in a language cognisant of the traumas inherent to the post world wars and post holocaust era, they were meant to state the only legitimate foundation on which to relate to other human beings: human dignity. Human dignity, along with the inseparable freedom of conscience, were also meant to state the evident, that the future of peaceful coexistence is inseparable from pluralism. The sharing of the space of civil society necessarily includes difference. But these differences need not generate antagonism, hostility, and feuding. Further still, it stated that:

> "A universal regime of human rights protection ought to be compatible with moral pluralism. That is, it should be possible to maintain regimes of human rights protection in a wide variety of civilizations, cultures, and religions, each of which happens to disagree with the other as to what a good human life should be. Another way of putting the same thought is that people from different culture may continue to disagree about what is good, but nevertheless agree about what is insufferably, arguably wrong."[2]

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[2] Ignatieff, Michael, "Human Rights as Politics II. Human Rights as Idolatry.", https://tannerlectures.utah.edu/_resources/documents/a-to-z/i/Ignatieff_01.pdf (accessed on 15 March 2022)

All can agree with the fact that violence against human beings, murder, and genocides based on the refusal of other peoples' right to be different, are terribly wrong.

On Populism, Nationalism and Ultra Nationalism

The first hurdle to grasping the meaning of populism and exclusivist ideologies resides in the understanding of these phenomena. Experts call populism one of the most used and abused terms inside and outside of academia.[3]

It has been stated that

"Developing a plausible and useful definition of populism is anything but simple. To confront this problem, more than forty years ago a group of well-known scholars participated in a conference held in London under the title 'To Define Populism.' As the report of this conference (Berlin, Hofstadter, MacRae et al. 1968) and the famous edited volume resulting from it (Ionescu and Gellner 1969) reveal the participants used the term populism for such a perplexing variety of phenomena that the organizers seem to have made little effort to establish a minimum definitional agreement. More than forty years later the number of scholars of populism has increased manifold and we are probably even further from a definitional consensus within the scholarly community."[4]

A detailed account of the various theories of populism will not be provided here. These include approaches that cast populism as a political

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[3] See Mudde, Cas/ Kaltwasser, Cristobal R. "Populism and [liberal] Democracy: A Framework for Analysis] in Mudde, Cas/ Kaltwasser, Cristobal (eds.), *Populism in Europe and in the Americas.*" In *Populism in Europe and the Americas*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012, 1.

[4] Ibid., 4.

movement, fostering multi-class alliances, or populism as a political style characterised by the promotion of a link between political leaders and the electorate, loose enough to conflate phenomena like demagogy or opportunism with populism. Another approach to populism is to consider it as a particular political logic "characterized by confrontation of the existing hegemony by means of a discursive construction capable of dividing the social into two camps, namely 'the power bloc' versus the people."[5]

Obviously, the word populist is polysemic. Its various usages in different contexts make it imperative to carefully delineate the semantic fields in which it intersects with many other concepts and certain philosophical content and perspectives.

What is of interest, in our context, is the instrumentalization of grievances and the mobilisation of deadly impulses that have characterised our world in recent decades. These have been a weapon of choice for opportunistic, unscrupulous individuals in political gain.

In his recent book entitled *Economics for the Common Good*, Jean Tirole wrote:

"Throughout the world, populist parties on both the right and left are gaining ground. 'Populism' is hard to define because it takes many forms, but one common thread is the exacerbated eagerness to exploit the ignorance and prejudice of voters. Fanning widespread hostility to immigrants, distrust of free trade, and xenophobia plays on people's fears. Rising populism clearly has specific causes in different countries, but anxieties about technological change and employment, the financial crisis, the

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[5] Ibid., 6.

slowdown in economic growth, rising debt, and increasing inequality seem to be universal factors."[6]

Broadly defined, "Populism is a political philosophy supporting the rights and power of the people in their struggle against a privileged elite… Political parties and politicians often use the term 'populist' and 'populism' as pejoratives against their opponents."[7]

From another perspective, populism claims, on the one hand, justice and restoration of privileges, but on the other hand in recent years, as a tool for mass manipulation, thus eroding the very foundation of the notion of rights. It deliberately chooses particularism over universality of rights.

It is critical to understand this later aspect. Nationalist ideologies refuse globalisation for a reason. They prefer the particular over the universal. No wonder they resist the regime of human rights, precisely because these rights are intrinsically universal. They question the relevance or necessity of organisations such as the United Nations because of their unapologetic promotion and protection of universal values, universal rights, universal inherent dignity, universal justice, and universal peace.

What was originally politically destined to restore justice in the distribution of rights becomes construed on a defective mode of identity, an identity based on visceral antagonism against demonised supposed enemies who are perceived as perpetual threats to the survival or even well-being of a group.

On another level, from the perspective of group psychology, populism has become a way of coping with tribal trauma generated by memories of past wounds. It can also be an attempt at stifling difficult memories.

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[6] Tirole, Jean, *Economics for the Common Good*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017, 28.

[7] Ibid.

The repertoire of populism expends through many forms. The so-called Curse of Ham on black people has been one of its declinations throughout slavery, and the subjugation of women and the still difficult acceptance and embrace of gender equality are lingering stigma in the humanisation of our world.

Populism as diverted from its core project of restauration of justice, is antithetical to the dignity of every human being. It goes with the concepts of exceptionalism, and it manifests a destiny to the detriment of others. It contradicts the idea of a common good and a common destiny, and therefore undermines solidarity in a shared human identity.

What started as a call to justice turned into a weapon of division. Populism is now based on a philosophy of exclusion, feeding into an instability fuelled by distrust and often resorting to violence, checked only by the deliberate deterrent of violence, which is part of the mandate of the state. There are other factors to consider.

After describing the symptoms of the democracy crisis and the recent gains of authoritarian ideologies in many parts of the world, Yascha Mounk, the Harvard lecturer on government at the Center of European Studies, concludes the following:

> "There can no longer be any doubt that we are going through a populist moment. The question now is whether this populist moment will turn into a populist age—and cast the very survival of liberal democracy in doubt."[8]

The reference to a populist age certainly seems to indicate a widespread phenomenon that connects various sectors of human experience, from politics, social psychology, economics, geopolitical sciences, religion, and philosophies of life.

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[8] See Mounk, Yascha. *The People Vs. Democracy: Why Our Freedom is in Danger and How to Save It*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018, 2.

Once again, how should we define populism when a consensus on its content and scope has been hard to find?

Populism in its legitimate form is a movement of resistance that disqualifies the use of people as a means to an end—the end being benefits and privileges for a few.

Populism has lost its vocation and turned against its initial legitimate struggle. It has turned against the people, be they minorities, migrants, asylum seekers, foreigners, or sojourners. It has become violent.

Another insidious twist is that the resort to violence to deprive most of the world's population of the means to live in dignity has surely been a trigger to episodic mass revolt, rebellion, or insurrections.

A new and widespread consequence of populism is the hijacking of people's grievances by members of the elite who benefit most from the world's resources. Currently, in many parts of the world, privileged elites have mastered the pretence that they are the solution to reversing the plight and predicaments of the people.

A socio-political reading of our current challenges in national and international arenas may lead to the temptation to reduce the issues of populism through the lens of the survival or demise of liberal democracies or democracy itself. However, our basic postulate is that there are other dimensions to take into consideration. These include economics but also, more fundamentally, philosophical, anthropological and theo-anthropological perspectives. I would like to highlight the human rights perspective, especially the first term 'human'.

The following question is ultimately at stake: what does it really mean to be human?

Populism is a multifaceted phenomenon, revealing the disenchantment of human beings in societal structures that have been unable to bring about justice. Populism manifests symptoms of deeper human frustration: our failure to live up to our vocation of being human

and humane. The solutions it proposes are, paradoxically, to be more inhuman and inhumane.

Problems with Illegitimate Populisms

Today, populist ideology has tended to revert to exclusivist nationalisms. Populism presents itself as a defender of the people's interests but, at the same time, it is a stark negation or reversal of the gains of universalism.

It feeds a need for recognition while demonstrating an addiction to trampling human dignity; it is a claim of rights and simultaneously a chronic dehumanising of supposed enemies of the people. It inherently erodes liberal democracy in favour of what has been termed hierarchical democracy.

Today's populism claims to uphold justice but it saps the very foundations of justice. One of the basic principles of any legitimate judicial system - innocent until proven guilty - is perverted into guilty without an opportunity to prove one's innocence. Fake news, a post-truth milieu and the deliberate blurring of standards of morality are characteristics of a populist age.

One of the fears present in populist movements is the loss of privileges, which they may not even possess but dream of having. These fears are not necessarily implausible or groundless. The history of economic depressions, financial crises, and market crashes - along with subsequent losses and suffering, especially of the people from the middle classes down - make people predict the worst if current privileges are lost. It is at this intersection of past experiences and the fear of future disaster that xenophobia and politicisation of migration crises come to the fore.

Economic and Financial Crises as Fuel for Populist Movements

The discontent and disenchantment of people in many countries has been exacerbated not just by economic inequality, but by crony

capitalism coupled with the increasing wealth of the owners of global corporations, by the exploitation of the financial markets and the lack of economic growth for the masses.

> "American populism dates back to the economic depression that followed Reconstruction, and the failure of the economy to secure the economic and social positions of farmers and urban workers. The new corporations promised to revive industrial prosperity but enriched mostly their owners and bureaucrats."[9]

> The real issue that slows down the economy is:

> "The 'financialization' of American corporations: their accumulation, on an unprecedented scale, of liquid assets that are turned over in the financial markets rather than in real business activity."[10]

After the Great Depression and Reconstruction and after the market crash, populism gains momentum. A paradox appears in the fact that popular sentiment is unscrupulously exploited through demagoguery.

Principal actors of big corporations have learned how to tap into popular frustrations and sense of injustice and utilize these to their own advantage. Thus, in a strange twist of events, the freedom of the forces of the market economy have supplanted the freedom of people.

The elite, formerly accused of being the perpetrators of the plight of the people, now appear to be the only ones who can solve the problems of the people. They do it by the claim to exceptionalism and manifest destiny as leaders of the people and of the world.

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[9] Toporowski, Jan, "Old Populism and the New Ideas of Michal Kalecki.", *American Affairs*II (2), 2018, 49.

[10] Ibid.

Populism and the Return to Tribalism of Identity Politics

Current manifestations of tribalism across the globe ignore and erode the foundation of the universal bond that binds all human beings. Within the American context, Jonah Goldberg argues:

"The great irony of all this is that identity politics wins not by making compelling arguments but by exploiting the inherent decency of the American people, including most ironically, liberal college professors who are terrified of being called racist, even when the accuser is a cynical opportunist, poltroon, or emotionally immature waif."[11]

He adds:

"Populist demagogues promise not only they have the answer to ease the pain of change ("free the silver! Tariffs! Share the wealth! Build a wall!), but that they will punish the culprits responsible. Such promises are a thick miasma of snake oil containing healthy portions of nostalgia, demonization, and scapegoating."[12]

Our age is characterized by disenchantment and distrust towards institutions. But this need not end in a pessimistic cul-de-sac with no way out.

Way Forward: Mobilization of all Sectors of Civil Society

Religions claim to be universal. This is understandable since religions attempt to solve human predicaments. They propose solutions to problems faced by the human family. They may identify these problems differently; nevertheless, they all claim and promise a better

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[11] Goldberg, Jonah, *Suicide of the West: How the Rebirth of Tribalism, Populism, Nationalism, and Identity Politics Is Destroying American Democracy,* New York: Crown Publishing, 2018, 218.

[12] Ibid.

life for humans. In this endeavor, religions are invitations to paths of liberations and, in general, liberation from debilitating circumstances. Many call such circumstances inhibition to human flourishing, others evil and expressions of evils.

Populist irrational demonization of the foreigner, the migrant and asylum seeker is harbored in humans who indulge in hatred and who resist and refuse love of others.

A mindset that indulges hostility towards others because they are different creates a toxic world, which perpetrates its toxicity through suspicions of conspiracy theories. This mentality fosters hostility towards people groups because of past family, tribe, ethnic group, people groups or nations feuds.

The part of populism that is deeply troubling is when people construct narratives of past hurts and build defense mechanisms supposed to protect from those hurts.

There are too many generational feuds resurfacing every so often, based on what ancestors of a people group have done in the past. This only perpetuates evil and helps it spread.

Where should we go from here? How do we envision a common future? What is the path forward for a better tomorrow?

Singling out "whites" because of the conquests of the Americas, depopulation of Africa and slavery, colonization and imperialism would be a sure path toward scapegoating, animosity, vengeful populism and ultimately wars and destruction. The whole human family would lose.

Remembering the traumas Arab Muslims inflicted on Africans through trans-Sahara, and oriental slavery, castrations, and genocides of Black Africans, should not lead to the development of antagonistic attitude towards descendants of those who then considered Africans as inferior and unworthy of dignity.

The future of our common humanity must rest on reconciliation and the embrace of the universality of the human family. The acceptance of

other people's genuine humanity, which is more than tolerance, will secure a better future for all.

It is a core tenet of religions that there is one humanity. The pitfall of populism is the loss of the vision of one human family. There is therefore an urgent need for a genuine and legitimate humanizing mission of bringing the human family together. Populisms tainted with tribalism, nationalism, racism work against this coming together even in the dignity of difference but also in the unity and solidarity of the whole human race. There is one human race.

This solidarity shows in the respect of the physical and emotional integrity of every person. What it means to be human is inseparably connected to relinquishing and renunciation of violence, for violence against human beings saps and negates their dignity.

This respect for others is based on a Theo-anthropocentric vision of human beings whereby humans are created in the image of God and endowed with infinite dignity.

The Vienna Convention's conception of the interdependence, interrelatedness, and indivisibility of all human rights finds a parallel in the incontrovertible connection between freedom of religion or belief and a holistic understanding of human nature.

Faith-based organizations or religions have a destiny with history. If only we remain true to our various scriptures, upholding human dignity above the instrumentalization of other members of the human family, if only we affirm the sacredness of humans above places or objects, if only we deeply respected the inner sanctuary of every person that is one's conscience, humanity will be at a better place.

If we embraced these benevolent dispositions towards every person, the world would become what it is meant to be: a place of freedom, justice, peace, and fellowship for the whole human family in the dignity of difference.

RELIGION AND POPULISM: INSIGHTS FROM AMY BULLER'S *DARKNESS OVER GERMANY*

Edmund Newell[*]

According to Godwin's Law, as an online argument grows longer and more heated, the probability that someone will make a comparison involving Hitler or the Nazis increases to 1, at which point that person loses the argument. The recent surge in populism in many parts of the world has put Godwin's Law to the test. But have those who compare contemporary populism to the rise of fascism in the 1930s lost the argument?[1]

The German experience is regarded as the ultimate warning to future generations of what can happen when a populist movement, in this case, National Socialism, gains widespread support and its leaders acquire political power.

It is for this reason that Rowan Williams recently issued these words of caution:

"Those who forget the past are condemned to repeat it; so the proverb goes. After rather more than half a century of relative peace and the prevalence of liberal democracy in most states, Europe is in danger of forgetting that this political vision did not come from nowhere and did not survive without passionate and costly struggle."[2]

Williams made these comments in reference to Amy Buller, a British observer of the rise of National Socialism and its effect on German society, and her insights into the inter-woven issues of populism, nationalism, racism and extremism in the 1930s. Writing elsewhere on Buller's analysis, Williams comments, "If we want to know – and we ought to want to know just now – what prompts the collapse of law-based democracy, this is a good place to start."[3]

Buller's knowledge of German society accrued over many years. It began before the First World War when, in her early twenties, she spent several years in Germany and became fascinated by the country and its people. After graduating in 1918 with a degree in German from Birkbeck College, London, Buller became the Secretary of Manchester University's branch of the Student Christian Movement (SCM), after which she held a similar post at the University of London.[4]

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[2] Newell, Edmund/ Thompson, Rob (eds.) "Moral and Spiritual Dilemmas in Challenging Times: a Study Guide to *Darkness over Germany: A warning from history* by E. Amy Buller", Cumberland Lodge and the Council for Christians and Jews, 2018, 7.

[3] *New Statesman*, 20 November 2017.

[4] There is an unpublished biography of Amy Buller: James, Walter, "A short account of Amy Buller and the founding of Cumberland Lodge", 1979. Biographical information can also be found in the foreword by Kurt Barling to

During her time with the SCM, Buller brought British students together to discuss the moral and spiritual questions of the day while maintaining her links with Germany. In the process, she gained a reputation as a highly effective organiser and networker, not only among students, but within influential circles in the Church of England, academia, and public life. It was these skills, combined with an iron will, penetrating mind, and love for Germany, which led Buller, who left the SCM in 1930 to run a student hall of residence at the University of Liverpool, to develop a controversial project. What happened was described by one of her friends, A.D. (Sandie) Lindsay, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Oxford from 1935-8, as follows:

> "It was in about 1934 when she [Amy Buller] told me that she had been again in Germany and had been seeing a good deal of men and women who were bitterly opposed to the Nazis. Many had told her of their isolation and how much they would like to meet men and women from England, but had added, 'you will not be allowed to talk to us unless you allow the Nazis to talk to you first.' On Miss Buller's suggestion, we got together a group of scholars, theologians, economists, students of politics and others. For some years they went over to Germany and discussed with Nazis and with the others… Finally in the early part of 1938 some of the Nazis came over here [to London and Oxford] and I took part in these discussion conferences."[5]

Commenting on Buller's role, which involved her interacting with Nazis, including the German Ambassador to the United Kingdom (and later Foreign Minister) Joachim von Ribbentrop, chief-ideologue Alfred Rosenburg, and Hitler's close friend Walter Hewel, Lindsay added:

Buller, E. Amy, *Darkness over Germany: A Warning from History*, London: Arcadia Books, 2017.

[5] Lindsay, A.D., "Foreword", in Buller, E. Amy, *Darkness over Germany*, London: The Right Book Club, 1945, v.

"I was impressed by the uncanny skill with which Miss Buller prevented the Nazis from exploiting those discussions for their own purposes, but above all I was impressed by her power of understanding in all its various aspects what was going on, how it was coming about that the idealism and devotion of German youth were being enslaved to monstrous things."[6]

Many social movements, now and historically, have populist dimensions to them: they aim to bring about change by challenging the status quo and by galvanising people to a common view and purpose, often by using emotive, rhetorical language. In this respect, movements that seek to shift the political agenda, such as Make Poverty History[7] or Extinction Rebellion[8], could be termed as populist. What is of concern, however, is when similar tactics are used by extreme political organisations to gain power. It is the resurgence of party-political populism in Europe and elsewhere, aided by the new communication tool of social media, which has led to comparisons being drawn with the rise of Hitler and the Nazis.

Populism of this kind has several defining characteristics.[9] Unlike populist movements built around loose coalitions of activists and civil-society groups united by a common aim, this form of populism involves single political organisations headed by visible leaders who claim to

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[6] Ibid..

[7] Schuessler, Andrea, "Make Poverty History" in: Anheier, Helmut K. and Toepler, Stefan (eds.), *International Encyclopedia of Civil Society*, New York, Springer, 2010.

[8] www.rebellion.global.

[9] For overviews of current thinking on populism, see Kaltwasser, Cristóbal Rovira *et al.*, "Populism: An Overview of the Concept and the State of the Art", in: Kaltwasser, Cristóbal Rovira *et al* (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017, and "Contemporary Theories of Populism", in: de la Torre, Carlos (ed.), *Routledge Handbook of Global Populism*, Abingdon: Routledge, 2019.

represent *the people*. Such movements seek to gain power by attacking what they portray as *establishment elites* that are out of touch with, and unrepresentative of, society at large. To achieve this, and to inculcate a sense of unity among their supporters, populist leaders present society at large (the people whose hopes and aspirations they seek to embody) as homogenous.

Related to this is the deliberate use of *othering*: drawing attention to those who do not fit their profile of *the people*, and portraying them as *outsiders*. This plays to the human instinct of suspicion of those who appear different to ourselves. Populist *othering* often relates to race and national identity. Extreme populist movements invariably promote national identity in strongly ethnic terms, downplaying its civic dimension. Thus, in the populist mindset, national identity is a matter of birth and family heritage, going back generations. In contrast, immigrants who choose to adopt a new nationality by civic means, or descendants of such immigrants, are considered outsiders. The polarising effect of othering makes those deemed as outsiders potential targets for the projection of societal and economic disaffection, and scapegoats for society's ills.

A further feature of populism is that its leaders frequently make use of the language of democracy, claiming to speak on behalf of the people, while attacking those in positions of power and influence as being part of an unrepresentative liberal elite. Once in public office, however, their democratic credentials give way to authoritarianism. To consolidate their power, populists push at, or undermine, the checks, balances, and constitutional framework of democratic systems, including the rule of law, all of which are portrayed as elitist, undemocratic, and in need of reform.

In broad terms, there are two overarching concerns about this form of populism. First, it is both antithetical to and antagonistic towards multi-cultural pluralism. The exercise of populist power is based on the

principle of divide and rule rather than seeking consensus, compromise, and inclusion. It achieves this by projecting a false sense of homogeneity and stasis onto societies that, in reality, have always been fluid, diverse, subject to constant change and the movement of people. Backed by a simplistic, distorted historical narrative, populism builds a false sense of nationhood, and in the process creates division and incites hostility.

This relates directly to the other concern: the divisive and authoritarian nature of populism poses a threat to liberal democracy. Despite their imperfections, liberal democracies offer a way of life in which opportunity and freedom (including the freedom to express a wide range of political views and opinions) are central. To repeat Roman Williams's words, such societies were achieved in Europe 'not without passionate and costly struggle.'

Fascism of the early 20th century took populist principles to the extreme. After gaining power, fascists abolished elections, imposed one-party rule, prevented civil society from functioning, removed the space for debate in the public sphere, and, after a systematic campaign of *othering*, committed acts of mass murder against Jews, homosexuals, Roma and disabled people. While there is no indication yet that contemporary populism is leading to the obliteration of democratic society or mass murder, it is nevertheless a concern that populism is threatening democratic principles, inciting divisive hateful behaviour, and causing people to live in fear. It is also apparent that populist-style attitudes are infusing mainstream party politics, with some leaders pushing hard at constitutional boundaries. Where this might lead, if the checks and balances on the exercise of political power within these societies are not sufficiently robust, is a further concern.

While populism is a political phenomenon, one of the features of its contemporary manifestation, in both Europe and the United States of America, is its association with religion. This has not always been the

case. In the past, religious institutions have come under attack by populists for being part of the established elite. Today, however, populism is associated with conservative evangelical Christianity in the United States; in Europe, there are instances of right-wing populist movements associated with Catholic nationalism.[10] The religious dimension to contemporary populism is disturbing, and echoes concerns expressed by Amy Buller decades earlier.

In the early years of World War II, Buller reflected on her encounters with Nazi leaders and others, and drew her thoughts together in a book, *Darkness over Germany*, which was published in 1943 with a second edition in 1945. While the book lay dormant for many years, it has begun, with a hint of Godwin's Law about it, to attract interest again. The first German edition, *Finsteris in Deutschland: Interview einer Engländerin 1934-1938*, was published in 2016, a new edition was published in the United Kingdom in 2017, and the first American edition was published in 2018. In 2015, in a debate on 'Soft Power and Conflict Prevention' in the House of Lords of the UK Parliament, initiated by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, Lord Ramsbotham said:

> "I have been thinking about the youth of this country. I took from my bookshelf a very remarkable book written by a godmother of mine, Amy Buller. It is called *Darkness over Germany* and it was written during the war. It explains the almost religious grip that Nazism had over the youth of Germany."[11]

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[10] For an overview of religion and populism, see Arato, Andrew/ Cohen, Jean L., "Civil Society, Populism and Religion", in: *Routledge Handbook of Global Populism*, 2017.

[11] Lord Ramsbotham, (2014), "Hansard", https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/ 2014-12-05/debates/14120531000468/SoftPowerAndConflictPrevention? highlight=amy%20buller#contribution-14120531000269 (accessed 26 May 2020).

Buller believed National Socialism touched people in a deep way, akin to a religious faith. She argued that National Socialism spoke to people "in the sphere of their religious understanding, and gave them a new conception of their value and of their place both in the cosmos and in the society around them".[12] While the dire economic and political situation in Germany opened the way for National Socialism, Buller believed it was this quasi-religious dimension that explains how it captured the hearts and minds of so many people, especially amongst the young. She saw that Hitler was perceived by many to be a saviour figure. While she did not regard this "ugly ill-shapen Austrian painter with the raucous voice"[13] as personally charismatic, she argued that he embodied the hopes and aspirations of ordinary Germans during troubled times; something said more latterly of populist leaders. Providing jobs as an antidote to the Great Depression, National Socialism, she argued, was also seen by many as a practical Christian response to the evils of the day.

Buller noted that National Socialism, like religion, was ideological, with a clear sense of its own identity and an almost religious sense of nationhood. Towards the end of *Darkness over Germany*, Buller describes how she spent several weeks studying the notes she had made over the five previous years on her visits to Germany, including extracts from speeches by Hitler and other Nazi leaders. Her analysis of these speeches identified nine ways in which those leaders presented National Socialism in religious terms, which she illustrated with quotes:

– The concept of *infallibility*: "Some of the things other leaders in Germany have said were true, some were false, but I give you something completely true. I give you also a way of life."

– A sense of the *eternal*: "I tell you that in two thousand years National Socialism will still be here. I give something eternal."

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[12] Buller, E. Amy, op. cit., 195.

[13] Ibid., 214.

(The timeframe of 2000 years and the reference to eternal has, of course, echoes of Jesus Christ.)

- A *comprehensive* way of life: "You will find in National Socialism an internal harmony and a kind of spiritual integration."

- Concern for the *personal*: "The Führer doesn't offer you any more theories – he offers you a person in whom you can always believe."

- Having *purpose and practical expression*: "And what is more, you are really important in so far as you contribute to the life of the fellowship and hold the faith."

- Offering *fellowship*: "Now we belong to a fellowship that we can recognize and in which we each have a part to play."

- The *purpose of this fellowship* was expressed in explicit religious terms: "'every movement in history is directly related to God' … we have travelled a long road and now we near the end with the Führer leading us."

- Combatting *evil*: "Be ruthless in defending the faith against those who would destroy it … You know your enemy. It is the Jew."

- Drawing on symbols and ceremonies to appear to offer something transcendent: "In our ritual, in our songs and stories of the past, we are helped to realize that life is much higher than we see and that we belong to a world much greater than the world we perceive around us."[14]

Buller expands on this final point later in the book by including a translation of the Litany of Labour, sung by 160,000 men and women at the Nuremberg Festival on 8 September 1937.[15] Both in structure and

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[14] Buller, E. Amy, op. cit., 196-9.

[15] This litany has been omitted in the recent republications of *Darkness over Germany* but can be found in the 1943 and 1945 editions.

wording, this Litany is formulated in religious liturgical terms: it opens with the ringing of bells, a hymn-like song, then leads into a Summons to all present; this is followed by a Confession, another hymn-like song about work, followed by an act of Remembrance for the Fallen, including wreath-laying; all present then make a Vow and the ceremony ends with bell-ringing and this song:

> "God bless our labour and our efforts
> God bless the Führer and this hour,
> God help us to reclaim the land,
> To serve the Reich with deep devotion,
> May we be ready evermore.
> God bless our labour and our efforts
> God bless our spades with shining blades,
> God bless our work: make it successful,
> That every blow struck with the spades
> May be a prayer for Germany."[16]

This liturgy would have resonated with the many church-attending participants of the festival. The references to God are not evidence of Nazi pietism, however. Behind such ceremonial was a plan to eliminate religion from public life and replace it with atheistic, neo-pagan rituals. There was a cynical realisation that, in a society imbued with Christianity, this would take time. As Hitler later said of the "final solution" to "the Church Problem" (removing the church from public life), "one cannot rush it. It has to rot off like a gangrenous limb."[17] The neo-pagan Litany of Labour, with its nod to God, was a step in this direction.

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[16] Buller, E. Amy, *Darkness over Germany*, London: Right Book Club, 1945, 176.

[17] Scramm, Percy Ernest (tr. Detwiler, Donald S.) *Hitler: The Man and the Military Leader*, Chicago: Academy Chicago Publishers, 1999, 46.

By framing National Socialism as a neo-pagan movement, the Nazis were able to manipulate people psychologically, tapping into some very basic human needs often associated with religion: the search for something that gives life meaning and purpose, and the deep desire for security by having a clear sense of personal identity. Presented in philosophical terms, National Socialism, like religion, also appeared to offer answers to existential questions. In doing so, it could lay claim to possessing truth and, therefore, had the potential to inculcate among its followers a sense of superiority over non-believers. No wonder, then, that Buller concluded National Socialism was not only evil, but a "false religion".

If what Buller described seems to hark from another era, right-wing populist movements in Europe and the United States of America today are holding events with strong Christian overtones that use religious language and ritual. European examples include a demonstration by 'Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamisation of the Occident', which took place in 2016 outside the Frauenkirche in Dresden, in which people carried crosses and candles, and sang hymns and Christmas carols; the Front National's involvement in the annual commemoration march in Paris for St Joan of Arc; a campaign speech by Italian politician Matteo Salvani in which he swore on the Bible to "put the gospel into action".[18] All the while, in the United States, on 1 June 2020, President Trump staged a controversial photo shoot in which he posed holding a Bible while standing in front of the noticeboard of the parish house of St John's Episcopal Church in Lafayette Square, Washington DC, the day after the house had been damaged by fire during protests over the killing of African American George Floyd by a police officer.

What appears to underlie this Christianisation of contemporary populism (particularly in highly secular Western Europe) is not a

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[18] Cremer, Tobias, "Defenders of the faith", in: *New Statesman*, 1-7 June 2018, 21.

rekindled sense of religiosity but something that masquerades as religious: a racist, anti-immigration form of identity politics, which is often, though not exclusively, anti-Islamic.[19] In countries with Christian culture and heritage, populist movements have sought to politicise and instrumentalise religion in order to attack the growing presence of Islam, which they portray as corrupting their Christian societies; a use of religion that political scientist Olivier Roy has termed "kitsch Christianity."[20] Islamophobia of this kind has, of course, led to comparisons with anti-Semitism in 1930s Germany; and, indeed, anti-Semitism also remains an issue of concern today.

A complicating factor, though, is that there are Christians who see the presence of Islam in their society as fertile ground for mission. Although their objective is conversion to Christianity, not expulsion from society, it can nevertheless help legitimise the politicisation of religion for anti-Islamic purposes, enhance fear and a sense of alienation among Muslims, and create tensions between Muslims and Christians. This is further problematised by the populist dimension to religion. Large gatherings where people collectively make affirmations of faith, sing together, and hear sermons designed to stir their emotions, can have a profound influence on participants. If such platforms are used to differentiate those present from others (whether those within their own religion or those of other religions or none), it can be highly divisive and a source of intra- and inter-religious tension and conflict.

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[19] See, for example, Marzouki, Nadia/McDonnell, Duncan/Roy, Olivier (eds.), *Saving the People: How Populists Hijack Religion*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016

[20] Roy, Olivier (2018), "'A kitsch Christianity': Populists gather support while traditional religiosity declines", https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/religionglobalsociety/2018/10/a-kitsch-christianity-populists-gather-support-while-traditional-religiosity-declines/ (accessed 25 May 2020).

Amy Buller wanted to understand and analyse National Socialism for pragmatic reasons. She saw first-hand how National Socialism was harming German society, wanted to do what she could to prevent a repetition elsewhere, and sought to understand how Anglo-German relations could best be rebuilt in the future. These were her motivations for writing *Darkness over Germany*, a book she hoped would help others learn. What lessons, then, might be relevant today, particularly for churches in Europe, in their response to contemporary populism and its quasi-religious dimensions?

An overarching theme in *Darkness over Germany* is that National Socialism emerged for a reason: it was a response to genuine concerns that were not being addressed effectively by government or churches. As Buller wrote, "To a generation without faith, the Nazis gave a brutal philosophy and millions of lives have been sacrificed to free the world of this false answer to a real need, but let us not forget that it was caused by real need."[21] It stemmed from the economic collapse of the Great Depression and its soaring rates of unemployment, and it provided Hitler's National Socialists with the opportunity to gain power. In the German election of 1928, the year before the Wall Street Crash, the National Socialists attracted 2.8 per cent of the vote. In 1930, it was 18 per cent. In 1932, by which point one in three Germans were unemployed, it was 33 per cent, bringing Hitler to power in January 1933. One lesson from the 1930s is that pressing societal issues, such as high rates of unemployment, provide fertile ground for the emergence of malevolent forms of populism.

Another lesson to be drawn from Buller's writings is the danger of complicity. In a recent study of Protestantism in Germany (from which one of the strongest internal resistance movements to National Socialism, the Confessing Church, emerged) Tobias Cremer argues that, in 1933, the Protestant Church's attitude towards National Socialism

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[21] Buller, E. Amy, op. cit. 237.

was "bordering on enthusiasm", and its 'pro-government predisposition and its liberal theology seemed to make it an easy target for *Gleichschaltung* (Nazification) and its transformation into an outlet for Nazi-Neopagan secular religion'.[22]

Cremer's analysis resonates with Buller's view of the ineffectiveness of the Protestant Church in addressing the rise of National Socialism. Buller argued that the economic, political, and social turmoil within Germany in the early 1930s created a spiritual vacuum that the Nazis, not the churches, filled. Cremer identifies an additional factor: the danger of the church being too closely aligned with the government. In a democratic system, there is a need for the different instruments of the state (the executive, legislature, judiciary and, if part of the state system, the church), to retain their independence and provide checks and balances against each other. Should any of these instruments become closely aligned and lose the ability to scrutinise and critique the other, problems can occur. According to Cremer, this is what happened in Germany in 1933. By being too close to government, instead of providing an independent, critical, theologically-grounded prophetic voice in society, the Protestant Church was open to influence by Hitler and the Nazis when they came to power. The Nazis sought to take advantage of this, instrumentalising Christianity for their own purposes. Proximity to political power, then and now, is seductive; the 1930s teach us that such proximity can compromise the church's critical, prophetic voice and make it open to exploitation.

Another lesson is the value of dialogue. From the outset, the discussions Amy Buller arranged between British academics and Nazi leaders were controversial. Many believed it was wrong to interact with Nazis in this way and that Hitler and his associates should be opposed at

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[22] Cremer, Tobias, "The Resistance of the Protestant Church in Nazi Germany and its Relevance for Contemporary Politics", in: *Review of Faith and International Affairs* 17(4), 2019, 37.

arm's length. Buller's critics accused her of being politically naïve and misguided. This, however, was to misunderstand Buller and the strongly held principle that shaped her life's work.

Buller was firm in the view that the punitive terms of the Treaty of Versailles towards Germany after World War I were disastrous and had sowed the seeds for future unrest. Her own approach to securing a lasting peace was to build good international relationships, particularly among young people. Buller recognised the peace-building potential of constructive dialogue. She also recognised, from her long experience of facilitating dialogue, the importance of engendering trust and empathy between those who were suspicious of, or disagreed with, each other. It was an approach clearly shared by a number of the senior clergy of the Church of England who worked closely with Buller and supported her activities, including Archbishop William Temple. Their inspiration may well have come from the story of the call of Levi when Jesus defies the criticism of the scribes of the Pharisees to eat and engage with "sinners and tax collectors" (Mark 2: 13-17).

In one sense, Buller's work in the 1930s failed. She and her colleagues may have gained a better understanding of National Socialism through dialogue, but they failed to prevent conflict. In her study of travellers in the Third Reich, Julia Boyd says of the first of the trips by the Buller delegation to Germany, "the group returned home their good intentions in tatters, full of foreboding for the future."[23] In other ways, however, Buller's work proved remarkably fruitful. By gaining a comprehensive understanding of National Socialism through dialogue, Buller was well placed to inform and educate those involved in post-war reconstruction in both Britain and Germany, including demobilised British soldiers to whom she gave lectures. Being known and trusted in Germany gave Buller credibility in this later work.

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[23] Boyd, Julia, *Travellers in the Third Reich: The Rise of Fascism through the Eyes of Everyday People*, London: Elliott and Thompson, 2017, 196.

Buller's discussions during her trips to Germany also provided material for *Darkness over Germany*, and it was after receiving a copy of this book that King George VI and Queen Elizabeth decided to help Amy Buller and her associates create an educational foundation at Cumberland Lodge in Windsor Great Park for the purpose of encouraging dialogue on pressing societal issues, especially involving young people.

A further lesson, then, is the value of dialogue. Even if it fails at first, the knowledge gained, and the relationships made, can prepare the way towards unforeseen opportunities for healing and reconciliation in the future.

Perhaps the most important lesson from *Darkness in Germany* comes not from its content but its author's character. The story of Amy Buller is remarkable in two respects. First, she was a woman operating in a male-dominated world, interacting with powerful and potentially dangerous people.[24] Second, she was not a person of high professional status, not a diplomat, politician, nor a leading intellectual figure. At the time Buller was convening and facilitating discussions between Nazi leaders and British academics, she was the warden of a student hall of residence. She operated effectively in this environment due to sheer determination and personal courage underpinned by a deep, though questioning, Christian faith. Buller firmly believed that her work was the natural consequence of her faith; it was her Christian duty to engage with and challenge the whole concept of National Socialism because she believed, correctly, that this "false religion" was highly destructive. What Amy Buller role-modelled was, in the end, the importance of having the courage of one's convictions.

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[24] Buller was accompanied in her work by another woman, the historian Elizabeth Packenham (Lady Longford).

The long-term economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has led to the deepest and most extensive recession in living memory, remains unclear. That economic factors are the primary driver of populism cannot be stated with certainty,[25] yet the experience of Germany in the Great Depression nonetheless suggests that severe economic deprivation, and in particular high levels of unemployment, can loudly amplify the populist voice in society. Given the populist political movements already present in many parts of the world, the possible correlation between severe economic downturns and the growth of malevolent populism should be a matter of concern, for churches especially, given how Christianity is being instrumentalised in contemporary populist politics.

Amy Buller believed that the churches failed to respond adequately to the pressing needs of German society in the 1930s. Whether the churches could have prevented National Socialism from gaining the grip it did is a moot point. Perhaps they could, and should, have done more, both in terms of being publicly critical of the Nazis and engaging in robust dialogue with them but they were caught unawares by the Nazis' rapid rise to power, hoodwinked by some of its positive social aspects, and compromised by being too close to them in the early years.

Churches today, however, have the benefit of hindsight. What Amy Buller observed in Germany in the 1930s is a lesson to the churches about the importance of vigilance: to be ready and prepared for upheaval in times of economic and societal stress; about the dangers of being compromised by those who instrumentalise religion for their own ulterior motives; about the long-term value of dialogue and keeping channels of communication open, and a lesson on the importance of having the courage of conviction to act. With these significant lessons in

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[25] For an assessment of the drivers of populism, see Eatwell, Roger/ Goodwin, Matthew, *National Populism: The Revolt Against Liberal Democracy*, London: Penguin, 2018.

mind, churches in Europe and beyond should be alert to what is happening in the political arena now, and what might emerge in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

ABOUT POPULISM FROM
A COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

Emanuel Tăvală∗

Often invoked in media, political and economic discourse but rarely defined, the label *populism* has a tendency to veer toward the infamous, without ideological coverage. And this in spite of abundant specialised literature and over 50 years of tradition. The obstacle faced by all those who have tried to define populism is its ambiguity. Margaret Canovan, in her work *Populism* (New York & London, 1981)[1], already pointed out this difficulty: "the spectrum of diversity within liberalism or socialism is lower than that within populism. The main reason is that the use of the first two terms was largely determined by the adherents."

Could the shameful birth, from unknown parents, of a mutant notion, with exclusively negative reporting valences, and incapable of existing autonomously, be the original sin of populism? Semantically, populism forces synonymy with demagoguery. However, this perspective obscures a political and intellectual tradition with deep anchors in the cultural history of the last two centuries.

Practically-speaking, there is evidence (more often in recent years), of the ascendancy and consolidation of a wide-range of political movements of murky orientation on the left-right axis whose common denominator is a simplistic, Manichaean approach to reality, one

[1] See Adam, Robert, "Populism: o tipologie", in: *Magazine 22 plus (339),* 2012.

oriented to the self-restraint of some nations, which we were convinced were definitively attached to global liberalism. The name given by the press, and not only, to this phenomenon is *populism*.[2]

When we talk about populism, we either think of a form of government that is specifically institutionalised, based on electoral democracy, or of a political current. In the first case we are dealing with a system of government based on a form of democracy, mediated as little as possible by intermediate (representative) bodies, with no system of checks and balances specific to liberal representative democracy, typically led by a charismatic leader (Peron, Chávez) with a special and direct relationship with the people, and whose succession, as a rule, poses huge problems of stability and continuity. In short, using Huntington's terminology, we are dealing with a political system with low institutionalisation and a high level of personalisation. This system is an unstable form of a system of government, which either tends towards liberal democracy or evolves towards a clear form of dictatorship.

In the second case, that of the political current, we place ourselves at the heart of current concerns and worries, because we see how such political movements are developing in many Western liberal democracies: France, Great Britain, Holland, Austria, Germany.

Populism can be understood as a median between simple demagoguery and the radicalism caused by the disappointments of perfectionism: it borrows many of the instruments of the first, exceeds it consistently, but also opportunistically uses the empty space created by the second, without having the courage to fully assimilate it and offer an alternative ideal. Populism thus offers a simplistic, reductionist political position limited in ideational scope, based mainly on stimulating the intensity, at mass level, of primary feelings.

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[2] Giosan, Victor, "Despre originile populismului" in: *Dilema veche (662)*, 2016.

Another source of populism can be identified, which resides not in the intellectual history of the West after 1945, but in its real history of the last 150 years. Western Europe has also experienced a similar phenomenon in the context of limited globalisation in the late nineteenth century and accelerated by World War I: it is about the reaction to the loss of community-rural identity of important masses of people 'thrown' into the new impersonal, urban-industrial society, where opportunities are manifested only at an individual level, and where the safety net and the familiar warmth of the traditional, hierarchical, rural society, and the 'parental care' of the aristocratic elites are missing. However, this mutation usually took place within a nation with a well-defined identity, or at most within the same space of civilisation. From that reaction were born both communism and fascism.

Something similar is happening now. National, cultural and civilisation identities feel threatened by the unintended effects of extended globalisation. We are witnessing a process of global emigration, through which masses of people come from much poorer spaces, fundamentally different from a cultural and religious point of view, in many cases without well-defined national identities, to the much more prosperous western space. Integration is much more difficult because the economic success of liberal capitalism and representative democracy cannot be reflected in a similar cultural and civilisational movement. In this context, corroborated with the ambience created by the first two sources of populism, the real fear of losing national identity and civilisation within the West becomes, directly or indirectly, the central topic of political debate. And implicitly the most important basis for the spread of populism.

Brief Historical Perspective

There are two sources of populism: Russian Narodniks and American populists. Both currents marked the last quarter of the 19th

century. Slavophile, Orthodox, Narodnik intellectuals extolled tradition and fought for *moderniyeszation* and westernisation of Russia. As a synthesis between Western socialism and peasant community raised to the level of a political organisation, Narodnicism even theorised on the advantages of economic regression. Nikolay Chernyshevsky found that "the tradition of common ownership of the land will allow the peasants to develop a cooperative production and move towards a fully communist society".[3] The idea of sacrifice for the people finds its expression in the *Historical Letters* (1869) of Pyotr Lavrov, where it is shown that intellectuals must enlighten the people but at the same time adapt to their healthy way of life. In 1876, the *Zemlya i volya* party (Land and Liberty) became the political showcase of the movement, which it gradually compromises through adventurism and the stake on an unlikely peasant revolution. The American populists, whose political expression was the People's Party, had a different social base. Independent agricultural producers were the core of the movement, and private property was the fundamental economic principle. Opponents were large trusts, banking or railways, which played an increasingly important role, to the detriment of small producers. Their political vision involved an increase in federal power to defend the interests of 'the people'. Unlike Russia, the impetus came from the people, not the elite. The identity issue of populism, therefore, comes from its problematic situation on the right/left axis. As a mixture of revolutionary socialism and economic conservatism, it stands out.

The second historical wave of the movement, Eastern European populism, was a considerable success after World War I, having representations in Romania also - Constantin Stere and Constantin Dobrogeanu-Gherea. The characteristics of these movements are: encouraging private property, agrarian reform and co-operation,

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[3] *Ibidem.*

combating plutocracy and large land ownership, reorganising property based on labour rather than title.

Populist Typologies

The historian Kurt Treptow saw populism as a style and the dominant note of the entire Romanian interwar political spectrum. Such an approach lowers populism to the rank of a stigma, although it has an identifiable ideological basis: valorisation of the people to the detriment of the elite, of the widest possible participation in the decision-making process and direct democracy. These three hypostases can be subsumed into one type: agrarian populism.

A new type of populism, whose variants Margaret Canovan puts together under the name of political populism, appears after the Second World War. It includes populist dictatorship, populist democracy, reactionary populism, and political populism.

The populist dictatorship, also called Bonapartism, Caesarism or Peronism, is a personalised regime. The leader legitimises his power by invoking 'the people' and short-circuiting the traditional political system. The detractors of direct democracy assimilate it to the tyranny of the majority.[4]

Reactionary populism is generally a collision between the reactionary, sometimes xenophobic or racist conceptions of the majority, and the liberal and tolerant ones of the progressive elite. Progress also involves an elitist component: the most advanced teach the less advanced. But as there is no single elite, much less a monolithic people, the conflict rarely takes acute form.

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[4] The most interesting example of the functioning of populist democracy is Switzerland. There, populism coexists with pluralism through a sophisticated federal structure, doubled by a culture of compromise, and the referendum is integrated into the democratic culture.

Politician populism is the most recent and visible form. New media, especially television, have facilitated the emergence of politicians who generate an audience claiming to speak on behalf of the entire population. This is how political parties without ideology (catch-all parties) appeared. The appeal to the people, above the parties and factions, has two major advantages for the one who issues it. First, direct interaction with the masses places it in a relationship of divine right, in addition to which the technician democratic representation seems ridiculous. 'Corruption', betrayal of the country', 'the party of foreigners', 'indifference to the suffering of many': the ideals are about the same. The prototype of the saviour can vary from the benevolent patrician to the charismatic politician, skilled in the use of communication techniques.

If we were to outline populism into a few defining features, they would be: a trans-ideological character, the revolt of the common man against the elite, distrust of intellectuals and politicians, orientation towards the past as a model for the future and denial of progress, small private property as a basis for economic dynamism and equity, inclination towards direct democracy or a strong leader as a form of government. Unlike nationalism, socialism, communism, or fascism, it can be part of such regimes or messages. But to deny it the right to an autonomous existence under an analytical sufficiency is an error.

And yet, we wonder, what is populism? Is it a gangrene of democracy, a perversion of democratic principles, derided in the hands (or mouths) of successful demagogues? Or, on the contrary, is populism the true democracy, the direct expression of the will of the people, short-circuiting the dark intentions of the elites to govern themselves in the name of the people?

To function properly (says a traditional political postulate), representative liberal democracy needs a relatively informed public opinion, able to judge autonomously and rationally in its interest. In this

case, even if the citizen does not have personal skills in areas such as economics, finance, or foreign policy, he will at least be able to rationally judge the programs and allegations of political actors.

On the other hand, liberal political elites, regardless of their left or right orientation, are - says a second postulate - mostly in consensus on the foundations of the rule of law, freedoms, human rights, and even some principles of foreign policy, so that, whoever comes to power, the big policy options will not change, and the adjustments will be made on secondary issues.

Finally, a third postulate says that there is a certain trust of the population in its elites, not so much that it would refrain from criticism, but in the fact that the majority agrees, despite some mistakes, that the intentions of most political actors are correct, that they are not disguised criminals or incompetent impostors. Of course, these postulates do not apply to everyone: there have always been ill-informed people who have voted without even understanding where their own genuine interests lie; there have always been anti-system parties and groups, and radical opponents; there have always been some corrupt or incompetent politicians. But so long as these phenomena are marginal, the consequences are not too serious.

When these three postulates work satisfactorily, we have genuine democracy. But when they work poorly, populism then begins to insinuate itself. From marginal, it becomes central and even threatens to become dominant, not through a coup or rebellion but peacefully, through the democratic ballot box, which makes it almost irresistible.

First, more and more people are increasingly uninformed about the world in which they live. There are several reasons for this and we can list: the decline of written culture and information through newspapers; the influence of television and, in general, the image, whose emotional tsunami often floods any rational consideration (see, for example, the infodemia during the COVID-19 pandemic); the role of the internet and

networks that broadcast in a perfect amalgam both correct information and news, as well as taxes, fakes, the difference of which is difficult to detect without a certain instruction and special attention. Hence the decline of the authority of journalists, opinion formers, and experts: via the internet, almost anyone can choose their 'experts'" to offer up any convenient lie of their choosing. The complexity of the world, on the other hand, which most of the public is not prepared to face, gives rise to new superstitions, especially in the form of conspiracy theories. Thus man becomes immune to truth and deeds and, losing his freedom of rational judgment, easily becomes the slave of mystagogues, impostors and demagogues.

The disorientation of the public allows opportunistic politicians to enter the centre of the political system and refuse the consensus on general issues. Sometimes they are kept out of the political mainstream, as in France or Germany, where they continue to grow and expand their mass base from the existing legitimate dissatisfaction (or not), threatening at some point to move even the centre of gravity of the system. At other times, the populists are right in the middle, because it has given in cowardly. British Conservatives, by borrowing UKIP's shrill policy and allowing half of the party to lead the country to Brexit, are an example of this.

So this is how populism parasitises liberal democracy, even threatening to destroy it, apparently for the good of the people. In fact, it is in the personal interest of adventurers, who, like the tyrants of ancient Greek cities, claim to want to defend the people by vile elites. In antiquity, however, there was a method by which those suspected of tyranny were sent into exile without confiscation of property: ostracism. The method is inapplicable to us who have the rule of law. And yet, how are we to remove the most dangerous populists before they take power? Impossible: we have human rights and the rule of law.

Judas the Populist

In a careful reading of the nuances, Judas is not only the traitor *par excellence* but also the prototype of the populist[5] from anywhere and anytime. Let's remember a few episodes. The first scene[6] takes place when, in the case of Lazarus of Bethany, resurrected after four days, the Christ Saviour receives a sign of gratitude from Mary, the sister of the one brought back from the dead. According to tradition in the oriental culture of hospitality, she anoints His feet with valuable oil. Judas promptly suggests (in the form of a question) that, instead of being squandered thus, the oil could have been sold for three hundred dinars (he was aware of the market situation), which could have been given to the poor. Jesus' answer is mind-boggling: you will never get rid of the poor, but you will not always have Me among you (i.e. historically incarnate). Such a reply, only seemingly cynical, was meant to dull the false philanthropic commitment of the one who would soon betray Him.

The second scene takes place on the very evening of the betrayal, with Judas previously negotiating the price of changing 'party', that is, leaving the circle of disciples to join those who wanted the death of the Son of Man. His identification takes place through the well-known Judas kiss, the improper use of a gesture to camouflage its true meaning. The last scene marks the end of the one who, after betraying, is filled with remorse. Convinced that he has sent an innocent man to death – Judas is witnessing the Saviour's trial - he tries to convince the members of the Sanhedrin that they are wrong about Jesus. They send him away, saying that his regret concerns only himself. Self-excluded from the apostles and instrumentalised by religious leaders, Judas finds his back to the wall, and suicide the only way out.

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[5] Preda, Radu, *Iuda populistul* in contributors.ro (2.10.2012).

[6] The Gospel of John, chap. XII.

What do we understand from here about our current days? First, the populist is he who systematically turns others into prisoners of his plan. Specifically, he invokes the poor, the unemployed, present or potential, the elderly and retirees, undeterred to mimic solidarity with people whose destiny is, in fact, indifferent to him. Cultivating social romanticism, the populist resembles the hero straight out of mythology who, when everything seems lost, brings forth the solution and proposes a plan of salvation. He is irresistible. Political Casanova, deceiver by profession, the sentimental crook who locates the money (or votes) of gullible victims from the corner of his eye. He promises everything. He opens wide horizons of waiting devoid of any connection with reality, unscrupulously exploiting man's capacity for self-deception. Moreover, it is the populist who vehemently announces that he will maintain and strengthen the state of affairs. The victims of his rhetoric are exempt from any effort other than to vote for him. Freezing at a given, previous, historical moment is, in fact, the general feature of populism, hence the irrepressible feeling of restoration that the populist in power produces. He wants, for example, either a 'pure race', which once existed but which is now 'diluted', or a society of equals, beyond natural differences and impossible to ignore, of character and endowment, or a 'Greater Romania' or a custom-made Hungary, i.e. radically revising the current geography, etc. The list of populist projects consists without exception of such adjustments, corrections, cuts, returns, from benefits to social assistance and increases for the wealthy. In short, with such policies the populist will display an absolute sense of justice and will mimic fusion with the passive mob, ready to acclaim the one who delivers the bread and the related circus.

Secondly, the lesson of Judas shows us that the populist takes advantage of the weaknesses of the system, as in the biblical situation with the tension between the Jews and the Roman occupiers. In an updated translation, a weak state or an incapable government party is

heavenly manna for the typology in question. The tribune of the interests of the people will thunder against the mafia, thieves and corrupted, carefully hiding their misconduct and material interest. In today's Romania, despite belonging to the EU and NATO, the construction of the rule of law has not yet been completed, and we rely on institutions capable of keeping us afloat regardless of the pitch of political life and the incessant vituperation of its leaders. Indeed, we are in a dangerously fragile situation. The human insensibility to the populist comes to light with the force of landslides after long rains. Unchained, dragging the stumps of ethical resignation and the gravel of frustrations, the mud reaches the middle of the public square, dirtying everything in its path. Just as betrayal irremediably tarnishes the relationship between people and communities, nothing being the same as before, the populist aims to destroy or at least compromise everything that others have done. He sees himself at the beginning of the world and the end of history, the first and last instance alike, the exercise of power inevitably turning into delirium.

Finally, at the maturity of his turpitude, when the light enters the darkness of the lost mind, the populist has no solution. He wakes up empty-handed. After that, just as Judas transformed into an ad hoc advocate for the poor, he seemed to promise everything, now he can no longer offer any guarantee even for himself. He is met with distrust everywhere he turns and former adherents demand his trial. Figuratively, he's a dead man. From this state of bankruptcy, the fundamental imposture that he instrumentalised only for the lust for power and money is fully exposed, and the final flight through suicide is but one step away. Death offers no deep, disturbing, or heroic solution in such circumstances, but it seems the expected epilogue for a drama that was played badly from the start. In terms of dramatic art, it is the cheapest formula; seeing no alternative, the author simply lets the character disappear. The maximum combustion used by the populist discourse

does nothing but hasten the moment when the vehicle of power must pull to the side of the road. To use this, perhaps inelegant but clear, comparison, the difference between long-term politics and populism is consumption. While the career politician thinks in perspective, inevitably and naturally going through differing moments, sometimes having the chance to govern, sometimes standing in opposition (another chance!), thus proving his character, the populist only wants power, immediate and total, putting all resources towards the service of this unique purpose. He does not possess the political intelligence to accept defeat, alternation or the diversity of actors, to wait, to have a project to which, why not, to join other forces. That is why the fate of the populists is predictable. Good news for those who, here or there, are faced with the spectre of political demagoguery.

It is therefore important not to lose our composure and not to desert the ideal.

II

FREEDOM OF RELIGION OR BELIEF AND POPULISM – "WE" AND "THEM"

UGLY BEDFELLOWS: POPULISM AND ANTISEMITISM

Leon Saltiel[*]

Introduction

The rise of populism in many countries around the world, and particularly in Europe, is a great cause of concern for the World Jewish Congress (WJC), an organisation founded in 1936 to give voice to the interests of Jews and Jewish communities who were subject to the unprecedented threats of Nazism, fascism and the rise of bigotry, intolerance and antisemitism. During the Second World War, WJC staff in Geneva worked hard to save endangered Jews under Nazi occupation by organising escape plans, producing and distributing fake passports, providing humanitarian assistance, circulating news, and coordinating rescue operations.

Following the Holocaust, the WJC has prioritised universal respect of human rights, religious coexistence, education, interfaith dialogue, and the fight against antisemitism and all other forms of discrimination, and been very engaged in all efforts to build a robust and effective UN human rights system. The WJC was one of the first NGOs to be given a UN 'consultative status' as early as 1947, and its experts were important stakeholders in drafting the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the two International Covenants on Civil and Political

Rights (ICCPR) and on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). For example, amendments to article 26 of the UDHR on the right to education, calling for education that strengthens 'respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms' and that promotes 'understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups,' were made possible through the advocacy efforts of WJC delegates.[1] In addition, the WJC played an important role in advocating for and shaping the content of other important UN documents, such as the Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD), and the 1981 UN Declaration on the elimination of all forms of intolerance and discrimination based on religion and belief.[2] Today, the WJC represents more than 100 Jewish communities and institutions around the globe, as the principal voice representing the organised Jewish world.[3]

Populism Feeding Antisemitism

Populism is a convenient but simplistic political device that divides society into two homogenous but competitive camps: 'we' and 'them.' Assuming that people are a complete and undivided unity, populism becomes anti-pluralist and anti-liberal, recognising neither individual rights nor checks and balances. Consequently, it has a strong anti-minority component, against minorities of all kinds, real or imaginary. Make no mistake: populism and antisemitism go hand-in-hand. Populism is based on an 'irrational conspiracy fantasy'. It claims that democracy is fake and blames some groups of citizens for all problems,

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[1] Riegner, Gerhart M., *Never Despair: Sixty Years in the Service of the Jewish People and the Cause of Human Rights,* Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2006, 180–181.

[2] Ibid., 190–193.

[3] For more on the history and contribution of the WJC, see Rosensaft, Menachem Z (ed.): *The World Jewish Congress, 1936–2016,* New York: World Jewish Congress, 2017.

demonising them as 'enemies of the people'. This group is often the Jews, who are scapegoated for all the world's ills, and are implicated in conspiracy myths, which erode the basic fabric of our societies. These include many stereotypes, including Jews controlling the world; running the media, governments and the economy from behind closed doors; the charge of deicide (Jews killing Jesus); being child-killers and practising the blood libel, and so on.

As British sociologist David Hirsh has asserted, 'We cannot understand contemporary populism without understanding its relationship to antisemitism'. He continued: 'It is not accidental that antisemitism is making a comeback as populism elbows its way back into mainstream politics. This fact is hugely consequential, not only for Jews but for anybody who wants to participate in the defence of democratic life.'[4] Regrettably, populist rhetoric and arguments are becoming ever more commonplace in mainstream political life in many nations around the world.

Antisemitism puts 'the Jews' at the centre of all that is bad in the world but, with a terrible irony, antisemitism itself has nothing to do with Jews but it acquires a symbolic nature, even a mystical essence. Antisemitism is a main component of antidemocratic politics[5]. It does not only concern Jews, it concerns all citizens. As the French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre wrote in his *Réflexions sur la question juive*, translated in English as *Anti-Semite and Jew,* published shortly after the liberation of Paris from the Nazis, the antisemite is 'a man who is afraid. Not of the Jews, to be sure, but of himself, of his own consciousness, of his liberty, of his instincts, of his responsibilities, of

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[4] Hirsh, David, "Why Antisemitism and Populism Go Hand-in-Hand", *The Times of Israel*, 14 May 2019, https://blogs.timesofisrael.com/why-antisemitism-and-populism-go-hand-in-hand/ (accessed 18 May 2022).

[5] Saltiel, Leon, "Anti-Semitism should concern us all", *Politico*, 20 June 2022, https://www.politico.eu/article/anti-semitism-should-concern-us-all/ (accessed 16 September 2022).

solitariness, of change, of society and of the world – everything except the Jews'[6], and Sartre goes on to say that 'If the Jew did not exist, the antisemite would invent him.'[7]

Pope Francis expressed similar thoughts when he denounced populism and closely linked it with antisemitism and other forms of hatred and intolerance. The Pope said that populism 'is born of "selfish indifference" and provides fertile terrain for hatred, including antisemitism.' In addition, he decried the recent 'barbaric resurgence of antisemitism' and said populism provides an ideal breeding ground where 'hate rapidly grows.'[8]

Antisemitism has a unique ability to morph, adapt and thus persist through time. It can be found on the left or on the right, and it can be related to all kinds of extremist or populist ideologies. Indeed, antisemitism, the hatred of Jews, has been a disease in all societies throughout the centuries and has been described as history's 'oldest hatred'.[9]

History teaches us that when respect and diversity are challenged in a society by ultra-nationalist and populist worldviews, minorities, and the Jews in particular, are the first ones to suffer. The Jews are an ancient diasporic people, the archetype of a minority, coexisting with many different nations throughout the centuries. This coexistence has been rather turbulent, ranging from pages of glory and prosperity to the darkest periods such as the Spanish Inquisition, the Tsarist pogroms, or the Holocaust. In that way, the Jews have often been described as the 'canary in the mine', feeling the malaise in a society first and providing

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[6] Sartre, Jean-Paul, *Anti-Semite and Jew: An Exploration of the Etiology of Hate*, New York: Schocken Books Inc, 1948, 53.

[7] Ibid, 13.

[8] "Pope: Populism Is Fertile Ground to Foment Anti-Semitism", *Associated Press*, 20 January 2020, https://apnews.com/08ed0eee4e597d154f9ab059bfc7c65b (accessed 18 May 2022).

[9] Mann, John, *Antisemitism: the Oldest Hatred*, London: Bloomsbury, 2015.

an early warning for dangers that linger in the near future. If Jews do not feel comfortable where they reside – and are even contemplating leaving – all should take note quickly and act forcefully.

Historically, Jews have been well-integrated in the countries where they have lived and have contributed significantly to the advancement of human civilisation: scientifically, philosophically, economically, culturally and/or politically. Thus, antisemitism as a rejection of the Jewish identity is also a rejection of the Jewish contribution to humanity. How can one be proud of human achievement if we allow the contributions of Einstein, Freud, Modigliani or Spinoza to be rejected? In these terms, antisemitism is a blow at the heart of world civilisation and of humanity itself. By fighting against antisemitism and discrimination of minorities, one is standing up for human progress, prosperity, and achievement for all.

Resurgence of Antisemitism

In recent years, the antisemitism virus is only getting stronger. As the EU's Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) notes, 'Antisemitism can be expressed in the form of verbal and physical attacks, threats, harassment, discrimination and unequal treatment, property damage and graffiti or other forms of speech or text, including on the internet.'[10] The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) has developed a working definition of antisemitism that includes eleven specific examples of the variety of antisemitic manifestations.[11] This complex

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[10] "Antisemitism - Overview of Data Available in the European Union 2008–2018." European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 12 May 2020, https://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2019/antisemitism-overview-data-available-european-union-2008-2018 (accessed 18 May 2022).

[11] See "Working Definition of Antisemitism", International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, https://www.holocaustremembrance.com/working-definition-antisemitism (accessed 18 May 2022).

nature makes antisemitism difficult to measure, quantify and effectively monitor. It constantly adapts and transforms itself, adopts new language and paradigms related to each circumstance and period, while keeping its main principle intact: the Jews are to blame for everything.

Virtually every opinion poll and study in the last few years has regrettably confirmed a surge in racist and xenophobic manifestations around the world, in particular a rise in antisemitic feelings and perceptions. According to the French interior ministry, in 2018, antisemitic incidents in the country rose sharply by 74% compared to the previous year.[12] In 2019, antisemitic acts in the country increased by another 27%.[13] According to crime data from the German government, in 2018 there was a 60% rise in physical attacks against Jewish targets, compared to 2017.[14] In Canada, violent antisemitic incidents increased by 27% in 2019, making the Jewish community the most targeted religious minority in the country and signalling a new record.[15] Unprecedented number of antisemitic incidents were documented in 2019 in the Netherlands, with a 35% increase compared to 2018,[16] and in the United States, with a 12% increase.[17]

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[12] Peltier, Elian, "Sharp Rise in Anti-Semitic Acts in France Stokes Old Fears", *The New York Times*, 12 February 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/12/world/europe/paris-anti-semitic-attacks.html (accessed 18 May 2022).

[13] "France Reports 27% Increase in Anti-Semitic Acts", *The Times of Israel*, 26 January 2020, https://www.timesofisrael.com/france-reports-27-increase-in-anti-semitic-acts/ (accessed 18 May 2022).

[14] "Anti-Semitism: Germany Sees '10% Jump in Offenses' in 2018", *BBC News*, 13 February 2019, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-47223692 (accessed 18 May 2022).

[15] Lazarus, David. "Canada Sees 27% Rise in Violent Anti-Semitic Incidents in 2019", *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, 7 May 2020, https://www.jta.org/quick-reads/canada-sees-27-rise-in-violent-anti-semitic-incidents-in-2019 (accessed 18 May 2022).

[16] Liphshiz, Cnaan, "Record number of anti-Semitic incidents documented in the Netherlands in 2019", *The Times of Israel*, 18 February 2020,

Furthermore, in 2018, in the largest ever survey of Jewish opinion, covering twelve European countries and involving almost 16,500 Jews, FRA found that 90% of respondents felt that antisemitism was growing in their country and 30% had been harassed. An alarming 38% had considered emigrating, a distressing fact considering that Jews have lived and contributed to European civilisation for millennia.[18]

Two UN reports presented at the UN General Assembly in October 2019 both sounded the alarm about a worrying rise of antisemitism in all parts of the world. The Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, Ahmed Shaheed, identified antisemitic-motivated violence as 'toxic to democracy and mutual respect' and urged states to adopt a 'human-rights based approach' to combat the hatred of Jews.[19] The Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, E. Tendayi Achiume, noted a resurgence in antisemitic violence targeting Jews, including hate crimes, hate speech, harassment, intimidation, Holocaust denial, antisemitic vandalism and the use of antisemitic symbols all around the world, and called on all UN member states to take concrete actions to combat and to prevent manifestations of antisemitism.[20]

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https://www.timesofisrael.com/record-number-of-anti-semitic-incidents-documented-in-the-netherlands-in-2019 (accessed 18 May 2022).

[17] "Antisemitic incidents in the US reached the highest on record in 2019, ADL says", *CNN*, 12 May 2020, https://edition.cnn.com/2020/05/12/us/antisemitic-incidents-highest-2019/index.html (accessed 18 May 2022)

[18] Henley, Jon. "Antisemitism Rising Sharply across Europe, Latest Figures Show", *The Guardian*, 15 February 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/news/2019/feb/15/antisemitism-rising-sharply-across-europe-latest-figures-show (accessed 18 May 2022).

[19] Report of the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, Ahmed Shaheed, to the UN General Assembly, A/74/358, 20 September 2019.

[20] Report of the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, E. Tendayi Achiume, to the UN General Assembly, A/74/25, 30 July 2019.

In May 2022, Dr. Shaheed released his Eight Point Action Plan to take action to combat antisemitism.[21]

The shocking attack against the synagogue in Halle, Germany in October 2019, during Yom Kippur, the holiest day in the Jewish calendar, is a case in point: although the intentions of the attack were clearly antisemitic, victims were a passer-by and a client in a Turkish restaurant. Antisemitism not only targets Jews, it also targets our values, democracy, the rule of law, respect for human rights, the basic fabric of our societies.

Rise of Populist Parties in Europe and Elsewhere and their Antisemitic Tendencies

Populism has entered mainstream politics in Europe and around the world and more and more political parties with far-right, anti-liberal and nationalist agendas are gaining power. In Germany, the AfD party (Alternative for Germany) won 10.3% of the vote during the 2021 German federal elections and received 83 seats in the German parliament, losing 11 seats from 2017 but still keeping an important stake. One of AfD founders and a senior political figure, Björn Höcke, described the Berlin Holocaust Memorial as 'a monument of shame in the heart of the capital,'[22] but, shockingly, an internal party arbitration

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[21] Taking Action to Combat Antisemitism: Follow-up Action Plan for Advancing the Implementation of the Recommendations of the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief in his 2019 Report to the UN General Assembly, https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2022-05/Action PlanChanges-May2022.pdf (accessed 16 September 2022).

[22] Dearden, Lizzie. "German AfD Politician 'Attacks Holocaust Memorial' and Says Germans Should Be More Positive about Nazi Past", *The Independent*, 19 January 2017, https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/germany-afd-bjoern-hoecke-berlin-holocaust-memorial-shame-history-positive-nazi-180-turnaround-a7535306.html (accessed 18 May 2022).

court found that he had not 'intentionally violated the party's values'.[23] Another AfD elected official, Thomas Tillschneider, claimed in a speech in 2018 that the German Jewish community is using 'Islam' to create 'multicultural conditions in Germany' with the goal of 'weakening German culture,' and 'ultimately the abolition of our people.'[24]

France has similarly seen an increase in populist voices, both from the right and from the left. Far-right leader Marine Le Pen, made it to the second round of the 2022 French presidential elections, receiving 41.45% more than what she received in the previous elections. While she continues to campaign for 'the themes of allegedly uncontrolled immigration and the internal threat from militant Islam,' she has skilfully distanced herself from the overt antisemitism and vulgarity of her father, Jean Marie Le Pen.[25] In parallel, a lot of antisemitic expression has been observed during the yellow vest protests in the country.[26]

A hopeful development comes from Greece, a country that suffered a long and deep economic recession in previous years. This dramatic drop in the standard of living gave rise to populist and extremist political parties, the most notorious of which is the neo-Nazi Golden Dawn. Its political platform, newspaper, and website consistently promote

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[23] "Despite Holocaust Remarks, AfD Lawmaker Björn Höcke Allowed to Remain in Party", *DW News*, 9 May 2018, https://www.dw.com/en/despite-holocaust-remarks-afd-lawmaker-bj%C3%B6rn-h%C3%B6cke-allowed-to-remain-in-party/a-43715394 (accessed 18 May 2022).

[24] Gensing, Patrick, "Antisemitism: Flammable Conspiracy Legends", *The ARD News*, 9 November 2019, https://www.tagesschau.de/faktenfinder/verschwoerung-antisemitismus-101.html (accessed 18 May 2022).

[25] Lichfield, John, "Marine Le Pen: a Populist Who Will Never Win the Popular Vote," *UnHerd*, 11 October 2018, https://unherd.com/2018/10/marine-le-pen-populist-will-never-win-popular-vote/ (accessed 18 May 2022).

[26] See Williamson, Lucy, "Gilets Jaunes: How Much Anti-Semitism Is beneath the Yellow Vests?", *BBC News*, 19 February 2019, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-47286576 (accessed 16 September 2022).

antisemitism, Holocaust denial, racism, and xenophobia.[27] In parliament, the group has often spoken out against the democratic regime, attacked Greek political leaders, the media, and minorities, and spread antisemitic libels and conspiracies. In September 2015, Golden Dawn received 7% of the vote but then plummeted and did not enter parliament in July 2019, as a result of consistent opposition from mainstream political parties and the media. A court case, linking its leaders with ordering the murder of a left-wing activist and branding the group as a 'criminal organisation,'[28] concluded in October 2020 with a guilty verdict and its top cadres are currently in jail.[29]

Throughout 2020 and 2021, in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, several antisemitic incidents have been recorded at demonstrations against pandemic prevention measures in many cities around the world, which deny or trivialise the Holocaust. These included the comparison of COVID-19 restrictions to those imposed by the Nazis, or to that of the current 'unvaccinated' slogan with the protestors wearing yellow stars and emulating the ones Jews were forced to wear in Nazi Germany. A stunning reversal of victims and perpetrators takes place when Corona virus deniers/anti-lockdown demonstrators see fit to

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[27] Facebook and Twitter have suspended the party's accounts. See Cuddy, Alice, "Twitter Blocks Account of Greece's Far-Right Golden Dawn Party", *Euronews*, 5 January 2018, https://www.euronews.com/2018/01/05/twitter-blocks-account-of-greece-s-far-right-golden-dawn-party (accessed 18 May 2022).

[28] "Anti-Semitism in Greece: A Country Report," Anti-Defamation League, https://www.adl.org/resources/reports/anti-semitism-in-greece-a-country-report (accessed 18 May 2022).

[29] Helena Smith, "Greek court jails Golden Dawn leaders as it rejects calls for delay", *The Guardian*, 22 October 2020, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/oct/22/greek-court-rejects-bid-to-delay-jailing-of-golden-dawn-leaders (accessed 18 May 2022).

compare themselves to resistance fighters like the Scholl sisters, or even Anne Frank.[30]

In the Muslim world, antisemitism, conspiracy theories, and populist rhetoric still find fertile ground. State-sponsored media regularly features TV shows, newspaper articles or cartoons with vile antisemitic connotations. This happens in a region with very few or hardly any Jews, which makes antisemitism a tool of political manipulation. For the Islamic Republic of Iran, antisemitism serves as 'a central foundational component to the [state's] ideology.'[31] Former Malaysian Prime Minister, Mahathir Mohamad, who took pride in being labelled 'antisemitic,' has claimed that Jews 'rule the world by proxy.'[32] A recent study found that school textbooks in the Middle East still promote incitement to hatred or violence against Jews, women and other minorities or religious groups.[33]

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[30] Christoph Hasselbach, "Coronavirus: How German protesters are trivializing Nazi-era persecution", 28 November 2020, *Deutsche Welle*, https://www.dw.com/en/coronavirus-how-german-protesters-are-trivializing-nazi-era-persecution/a-55753236 (accessed 18 May 2022).

[31] Weinthal, Benjamin, "Iran is the 'world's chief trafficker in antisemitism,' says US monitor", *The Jerusalem Post*, 29 April 2020, https://www.jpost.com/middle-east/iran-news/us-agency-irans-regime-propagates-and-tolerates-antisemitism-626223 (accessed 18 May 2022).

[32] "In shakeup, virulently anti-Semitic Malaysian PM submits resignation", *The Times of Israel*, 24 February 2020, https://www.timesofisrael.com/in-shakeup-virulently-anti-semitic-malaysian-pm-submits-resignation

[33] See "ADL Analysis Finds Saudi School Textbooks Still Teach Anti-Semitic Incitement and Hatred", Anti-Defamation League, 19 November 2018, https://www.adl.org/news/press-releases/adl-analysis-finds-saudi-school-textbooks-still-teach-anti-semitic-incitement (accessed 18 May 2022).

Contemporary Manifestations of Antisemitism

During the COVID-19 pandemic, ancient antisemitic libels were awakened, coupled with modern conspiracy myths, religious intolerance, and populist exploitation. This unprecedented situation unleashed a 'tsunami of hate and xenophobia, scapegoating and scare-mongering,' in the words of UN Secretary General António Guterres.[34] The old libels of Jews poisoning wells and being responsible for the Black Plague found renewed popularity and were linked with conspiracy myths that the Jews created, spread or are taking advantage of the virus as a way to become rich or even control the world. From Argentina[35] to Yemen,[36] these absurd theories found fertile ground. No country was immune. Notorious antisemitic texts, like the 'Protocols of the Elders of Zion', were also cited to express a populist, simplistic, and conspiratorial explanation of developments.[37]

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[34] UN Secretary-General António Guterres, "Appeal to Address and Counter COVID-19 Hate Speech", 8 May 2020, https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/ sg/speeches/2020-05-08/appeal-address-and-counter-covid-19-hate-speech (accessed 18 May 2022).

[35] "Argentine journalist: Coronavirus was created by rich Americans and Israelis", *The Times of Israel*, 7 April 2020, https://www.timesofisrael.com/ argentine-journalist-coronavirus-was-created-by-rich-americans-and-israelis/ (accessed 18 May 2022).

[36] "The Jews, U.S. Are Behind Coronavirus Pandemic; We Should Unite in Jihad against the Jews; Enmity towards Them Is an Identifying Characteristic of Muslims", MEMRI, 20 March 2020, https://www.memri.org/tv/yemen-houthi-leader-mahbashi-friday-sermon-coronavirus-jews-american-aggression (accessed 18 May 2022) and "Coronavirus Is Part of a Plan by the Jews, Israel, U.S. to Control Mecca, Medina", MEMRI, 16 March 2020, https://www.memri.org/tv/friday-sermon-yemeni-scholar-ibrahim-ubeidi-coronavirus-jewish-plan-control-mecca-medina (accessed 18 May 2022).

[37] See, for example, Cohen, Ben. "The Return of Populist Anti-Semitism", *Israel Hayom*, 26 April 2020, https://www.israelhayom.com/2020/04/26/the-return-of-populist-anti-semitism/ (accessed 18 May 2022) and Friedburg, Edna,

The same sentiment was corroborated by the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, Ahmed Shaheed, who remarked that antisemitic hate speech had risen alarmingly since the outbreak of the COVID-19 crisis. He went on to say that he was 'extremely concerned to see that certain religious leaders and politicians continue to exploit the challenging times during this pandemic to spread hatred against Jews and other minorities.'[38]

With many governments realising the dangers of antisemitism and taking measures to combat it in the public sphere, antisemites have found a cunning way around it. Instead of vilifying the Jews as individuals, they now attack Israel, as the Jewish collective. This new form of antisemitism, often dubbed 'Anti-Zionism' and disguised as legitimate political expression, carries with it all the antisemitic stereotypes of the past: Israel is portrayed as being a bloodthirsty, manipulative, untrustworthy state, the only country in the world with no legitimacy to exist among the family of nations. Others try to dilute the horrors of the Holocaust by comparing Israeli counter-terrorism actions to the Nazis. Israel, as a thriving democracy, is – and should be – open to all criticism. However, when this criticism becomes obsessive, unbalanced, and biased, and when Israel is held to different standards

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"Hatemongers Exploiting Coronavirus Pandemic to Push Anti-Semitism Worldwide", *Chicago Sun-Times*, 5 May 2020, https://chicago.suntimes.com/2020/5/5/21248296/anti-semitism-anti-immigrant-racism-bigotry-pandemic-holocaust-museum-edna-friedberg (accessed 18 May 2022).

[38] "Rise in antisemitic hatred during COVID-19 must be countered with tougher measures, says UN expert", 17 April 2020, https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2020/04/rise-antisemitic-hatred-during-covid-19-must-be-countered-tougher-measures (accessed 18 May 2022)

that other democratic states, it often hides the antisemitic motives behind it.[39]

As the usage of the internet continues to expand with billions having access to the World Wide Web, the online sphere has become a fertile ground for the dissemination of antisemitic and other hateful messages, inspired by populist, xenophobic and intolerant ideologies. Social media networks, with billions of active monthly users, have become the largest supplier of hate speech and the go-to platform for expressions of bigotry against minority groups. The perceived anonymity of this medium lowers inhibitions and fosters an environment in which racist and discriminatory language can flourish. In addition, the online space allows for a rapid dissemination of this harmful content, moving it from the fringes to the mainstream, leading to the gradual social acceptance of such material. This is a grave cause for concern, even more so as this social acceptance is not only confined to the online sphere, but often translates to the world at large, inciting and motivating perpetrators to action, such as carrying out antisemitic and racist attacks against individuals and houses of worship, sometimes with murderous consequences.[40]

One of the first studies of its kind, a 2016 report published by the WJC in collaboration with Vigo Social Intelligence, entitled 'The Rise of Antisemitism in Social Media,' gauges and measures the extent of racism and bigotry in the online sphere. The study analysed tens of millions of posts in twenty languages on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, blogs, and other forums. It found that more than 382,000

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[39] See, for example, Colter, Irwin, "Making the World 'Judenstaatrein'", *The Jerusalem Post*, 22 February 2009, https://www.jpost.com/opinion/op-ed-contributors/making-the-world-judenstaatrein (accessed 18 May 2022).

[40] See, for example, Chavez, Nicole et al. "Pittsburgh Synagogue Gunman Said He Wanted All Jews to Die, Criminal Complaint Says," *CNN*, 31 October 2018, https://edition.cnn.com/2018/10/28/us/pittsburgh-synagogue-shooting/index.html (accessed 18 May 2022).

antisemitic posts were posted to social media platforms over the course of that year – an average of more than 43.6 posts per hour, or one post every 83 seconds.[41] Worryingly, these numbers would be higher if this study was conducted today, as the usage of social media has increased, and populism and extremism have reached mainstream politics in many countries around the world.

A July 2022 report of UNESCO and the United Nations, supported by analysis by researchers from the Oxford Internet Institute, in partnership with the World Jewish Congress found Holocaust denial and distortion present on all social media platforms.[42]

Addressing the Scourge

Building social cohesion and combating antisemitism and polarisation are the main pillars behind the work of the World Jewish Congress, which is engaged in a number of initiatives briefly highlighted below:

- The WJC is convinced of the importance of education as a means to building a robust citizenry, with a strong belief in democracy and fundamental freedoms and immunity from extremist and hurtful ideologies. The hatred and ignorance

[41] "The Rise of Anti-Semitism on Social Media: Summary of 2016," study produced by the World Jewish Congress in collaboration with Vigo Social Intelligence, available at https://worldjewishcongress.us2.list-manage.com/track/click?u=19ae4a24c6127732d059baebf&id=2558dcc20a&e=c15703e023 (accessed 18 May 2022). A follow-up study on "Anti-Semitic Symbols and Holocaust Denial in Social Media Posts: January 2018" is available at https://worldjewishcongress.us2.list-manage.com/track/click?u=19ae4a24c6127732d059baebf&id=551a138af4&e=c15703e023 (accessed 18 May 2022).

[42] "UN report: Oxford analysis reveals up to half of Holocaust-related content on Telegram denies or distorts facts," available at https://www.ox.ac.uk/news/2022-07-13-un-report-oxford-analysis-reveals-half-holocaust-related-content-telegram-denies-or (accessed 16 September 2022).

unleaded during the COVID-19 pandemic have exposed a serious deficit in education policies around the world. In that respect, the WJC has partnered with UNESCO to sponsor a series of workshops organised by UNESCO and OSCE/ODIHR in order to train education policy officials on how to counter antisemitism through education. In 2019, three such workshops were conducted with participants coming from more than sixty countries in all regions of the globe[43] and several follow-up activities are being developed.

− The fight against online hatred, which uses the power and reach of social media to propagate insidious messages, has become a priority of our work. The WJC has joined a number of international initiatives on this topic, building close working relations with many of the internet giants to develop guidelines, policies and tools to fight this phenomenon. It is our conviction that the digital and the analogue worlds do not exist in parallel to each other, but are deeply intertwined, because the people/users act both analogically and digitally. It is important to combat hate in both worlds, and laws and human rights standards applied to offline should also apply to online.[44]

− The WJC is involved daily in advocacy, diplomacy and other outreach activities, raising awareness, informing decision-makers around the world, cooperating on joint projects with

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[43] "International Workshop for Policymakers 'The Role of Education in Addressing Anti-Semitism'", UNESCO, 2 December 2019, https://en.unesco.org/events/international-workshop-policymakers-role-education-addressing-anti-semitism (accessed 18 May 2022).

[44] For more, see Barak-Cheney, Yfat/ Saltiel, Leon, "'Unfriending' Online Hate: The Contribution of the World Jewish Congress," Universal Rights Group, 8 November 2019, https://www.universal-rights.org/by-invitation/unfriending-online-hate-the-contribution-of-the-world-jewish-congress/ (accessed 18 May 2022).

relevant actors, expanding the circle of like-minded actors, and advocating for concrete policy change where needed. The WJC also actively engages with multilateral stakeholders, such as the United Nations, participating in all relevant UN forums such as the General Assembly, the Human Rights Council and UNESCO. We also closely cooperate with other UN bodies and agencies, in both Geneva and New York, such as the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Special Procedures and other international organisations and actors, which have a mandate that relates to antisemitism, to jointly develop programs and initiatives. We also work with our affiliated communities around the world, giving them tools and advocating on their behalf with governments and other organisations to address any issues they may have. In addition, the WJC reaches out and builds coalitions with many other civil society actors, organisations, communities, and youth groups.

- The WJC has inaugurated a series of international conferences with the participation of Special Envoys and other high-level government officials mandated to combat antisemitism and intolerance. We facilitate the exchanges of these officials with the Jewish communities, as well as dialogue between themselves for better coordination, sharing of ideas and best practices, and evaluating progress in the shared fight against antisemitism. In 2019, the WJC held two such sessions, in Bucharest during the Romanian EU Presidency and in Munich,[45] while online sessions took place during 2020 and

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[45] "Special Envoys and Coordinators for Combating Antisemitism (SECCA) reconvene in Germany under auspices of WJC", World Jewish Congress, 29 October 2019, https://www.worldjewishcongress.org/en/news/special-envoys-

2021. In 2022, in person events took place in Jerusalem and Prague.

− The WJC consistently calls upon all governments to take strong actions to combat antisemitism by, for example, appointing a national coordinator, creating a national action plan, integrating Holocaust education and education against antisemitism in national curricula, improving data-gathering on hate crimes, providing funding for the security of Jewish communities, and the adoption of the IHRA definition on antisemitism in its totality as a practical guide for law enforcement, educators, prosecutors and judges, and other policy makers to identify the different facets by which antisemitism can manifest itself and to inform their work on this topic.

− The WJC puts great importance on the education of policy makers and diplomats in order to fight antisemitism. Antisemitism is a complex phenomenon, and one needs to study it carefully in order to effectively combat it. In this regard, the WJC has launched a series of educational and training workshops on antisemitism and the memory of the Holocaust for diplomats, policymakers, and other officials. More than sixty Ambassadors and diplomats participated in the first two workshops,[46] in Geneva and Paris, which proved to be very useful. In February 2022, the World Jewish Congress, in partnership with the Holocaust and the United Nations

and-coordinators-for-combating-antisemitism-secca-reconvene-in-germany-under-auspices-of-wjc-11-5-2019 (accessed 18 May 2022).

[46] "WJC hosts first-ever seminar series on Holocaust memory and antisemitism for UN Geneva and UNESCO diplomats and ambassadors", World Jewish Congress, 19 January 2020, https://www.worldjewishcongress.org/en/news/wjc-hosts-first-ever-seminar-series-on-holocaust-memory-and-antisemitism-for-un-geneva-and-unesco-diplomats-and-ambassadors-1-0-2020 (accessed 18 May 2022).

Outreach Programme of the Department of Global Communications and UNESCO organized a virtual briefing on Holocaust education and remembrance addressed to members of UN missions in Geneva and New York and UNESCO delegations in Paris.

− In an effort to combat Holocaust denial and distortion, in particularly online, the WJC has developed, in partnership with UNESCO, the website AboutHolocaust.org, an online resource with basic facts about the Holocaust that can easily be accessed and shared on social media. From 27 January 2021 − International Holocaust Remembrance Day − when Facebook users search for terms associated with the Holocaust or denial of it, the social media platform prompts them to visit AboutHolocaust.org, where they are referred to comprehensive and reliable information on the genocide of European Jewry, as well as the mass killings of other national, ethnic, and political groups by Nazi Germany and its accomplices during World War II.[47] Since 27 January 2022, this tool is also available for TikTok users.[48] In addition, the WJC supports UNESCO and the Holocaust and the United Nations Outreach Programme initiative to develop research, guidance and resources to

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[47] "WJC partners with Facebook to provide comprehensive Holocaust education resource to Facebook users", World Jewish Congress, 27 January 2021, https://www.worldjewishcongress.org/en/news/world-jewish-congress-partners-with-facebook-to-provide-comprehensive-holocaust-education-resource-to-facebook-users (accessed 18 May 2022).

[48] "WJC, UNESCO partner with TikTok to offer comprehensive Holocaust education resource to its global community", World Jewish Congress, 27 January 2022, https://www.worldjewishcongress.org/en/news/wjc-unesco-partner-with-tiktok-to-offer-comprehensive-holocaust-education-resource-to-its-global-community (accessed 16 September 2022).

strengthen educational responses to Holocaust denial and distortion online.[49]

- The WJC is very active in interfaith relations, realising that building inclusive societies and combating hatred is a common fight that no one group can win on its own. We have spearheaded dialogue between the three Abrahamic religions – Judaism, Christianity, and Islam – as well as other faiths.[50] We believe that interfaith cooperation can make an important contribution to peace and to better understanding worldwide. Interreligious engagement can bridge divides, inspire people, and emphasise our common humanity and shared values. There is a very big role for faith leaders of all religions to play and we need to build coalitions, reach out across the aisle, to design common actions to combat hate and division. The President of the World Jewish Congress, Ronald S. Lauder, during a recent speech at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome, prioritised the fight against hate, racism, and all forms of religious intolerance, as well as the safeguarding of freedom of worship, by stating that 'the campaign against racism, antisemitism, Islamophobia and anti-Christian attacks will be infinitely more effective if it is united. Christians should lead the defence of Jews and Muslims. Muslims should lead the defence of Christians and Jews. Jews should lead the defence of Muslims and Christians. And we must all stand together against racism.'[51]

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[49] "Q&A: New research to map Holocaust denial and distortion online", UNESCO, 9 March 2021, https://en.unesco.org/news/qa-new-research-map-holocaust-denial-and-distortion-online (accessed 18 May 2022).

[50] "Inter-Faith Dialogue", World Jewish Congress, https://www.worldjewish congress.org/en/focus-areas/inter-faith-dialogue (accessed 18 May 2022).

[51] "WJC President Ronald S. Lauder calls for unity in fight against hate in address to Vatican officials", World Jewish Congress, 8 November 2019,

- − In addition to advocating for the interests of Jewish communities, fighting antisemitism, and preserving the memory of the Holocaust, the WJC believes that it is important to highlight the positive Jewish experience and contribution to world civilisation. Honouring the historic Jewish role in society is important not only to fight prejudice and bigotry but also to strengthen the position of minorities in every nation. A December 2018 Special Eurobarometer report found that only 3% of Europeans claim to be very well-informed about the history, customs and practices of Jews in their own country.[52] It is important to close this knowledge gap, so it is not filled by stereotypes, false narratives or ahistorical interpretations. To that effect, the WJC is part of the 'Networks Overcoming Antisemitism' (NOA) project, co-funded by the European Commission, which has as one of its aims to 'diffuse positive narratives through socio-cultural educational activities including cultural festivals, school-based programmes, film and social media campaigns using new resources and scaling up existing good practice.'[53]
- − Last but not least, the WJC believes it is our duty as Jews to speak up on behalf of other vulnerable populations and stand in solidarity with them. In this respect, we consistently speak out in support of persecuted minorities around the world. At sessions of the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva, for

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https://www.worldjewishcongress.org/en/news/wjc-president-ronald-s-lauder-calls-for-unity-in-fight-against-hate-in-address-to-vatican-officials-11-5-2019 (accessed 18 May 2022).

[52] "Special Eurobarometer 484: Perceptions of antisemitism", January 2019, https://data.europa.eu/euodp/en/data/dataset/S2220_90_4_484_ENG (accessed 18 May 2022).

[53] "Networks Overcoming Antisemitism," https://www.noa-project.eu/ (accessed 18 May 2022).

example, the WJC has spoken out against the plight of Christians and other religious minorities in the Middle East, the plight of the Rohingya Muslim minority in Myanmar, the persecution of people with albinism, and the increase of online hate against Christians, Muslims, Jews, and other groups.[54]

All people are threatened by the rise of populism, extremism, and intolerance. Antisemitism is a primary manifestation of this phenomenon but not the only one: all citizens are potential targets, and this challenge requires a concerted response and action. We must try to build coherent societies, based on cooperation, humility, and dignity. Only by working together can we guarantee a better future for us, our children, and the generations to come.

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[54] See, for example, the March 2020 HRC session, "WJC Takes to UNHRC Floor to Advocate for Human Rights," World Jewish Congress, 19 March 2020, https://www.worldjewishcongress.org/en/news/world-jewish-congress-takes-to-un-human-right-council-floor-to-advocate-for-minority-rights-3-4-2020 (accessed 18 May 2022).

UNDERSTANDING THE RISE OF POPULISM IN EUROPE – HOW CHURCHES CAN RESPOND –

EXPERIENCES AND CHURCH STATEMENTS FROM GERMAN PERSPECTIVES

Dietrich Werner[*]

Introduction: Signs of Growing Polarisation in European Societies – Is it Fear or Hope that Reign the Sentiments of People?

It is a sensitive subject to bring up the rise of populism in Europe in a city like Dresden. It is here that massive right-wing populist demonstrations started each Monday some five year ago with the movement called PEGIDA[1], which stands for the weird slogan 'Patriotic Europeans against the Islamisation of the Occident', the forerunner of the right populist party AfD (Alternative for Germany).

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[1] Zeit online, 15.000 Anhänger der Pegida protestieren in Dresden, 16 December 2016, https://www.zeit.de/gesellschaft/2014-12/pegida-demonstration -dresden-islam (accessed 18 May 2022)

It is in this city that the city council supported a public declaration about a *Nazinotstand* (emergency due to presence of Nazis) in October 2019, which was meant as an urgent call to sensitise the public on more resistance against right-wing extremism and populism, but most probably was not the most adequate rhetoric form to do this, as the reputation of the city has further suffered.[2] It is in Dresden that the regional parliamentary elections saw AfD recently gain 27,5% of the votes and take second place as most influential political party after the CDU (32,1%). Similar trends have become obvious in recent elections in Thuringia, where the AfD became the strongest political factor in 248 of the 624 electorates, gaining 23,% of the votes in total and becoming stronger that CDU (21,%), but still behind Die Linke (the Leftist), which was the strongest (31,0%) in this country. It is in Dresden that the church synod of the regional Church of Saxony has to deal with the dilemma of the resignation of its leading bishop Rentzing, who was found out to have published articles in an extreme right-wing political journal years ago, which sounded nationalistic in a way which became unbearable for the church working with him.[3]

What is going on in Germany, particularly in East Germany, with regard to the growing influence of political parties and movements operating at the far-right end of the political spectrum? How is this affecting church life and the public witness of Christian churches? What can the churches do in a context of growing polarisation between the far right and far left, which goes together with an apparent constant weakening of the middle spectrum of political and social life in Germany? The key question being asked in sister churches facing right-

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[2] Frankfurter Allgemeine, *Dresden streitet über „Nazinotstand?*, 03 November 2019, https://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/inland/beschluss-des-stadtrats-dresden-streitet-ueber-nazinotstand-16466849.html (accessed 18 May 2022).

[3] Serfontein, Anli, *Conservative East German bishop resigns,* Church Times, 18 October 2019, https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2019/18-october/news/world/conservative-east-german-bishop-resigns (accessed 18 May 2022).

wing populist political parties, for instance in Brazil and Argentina, is 'How can we properly respond to our task as churches to be prophetic in our public theology and witness without endangering the very unity of our church and causing even deeper splits within our own church?', a question that has become a similar concern for other churches in Germany and in Europe as a whole. Is the price for maintaining a strong prophetic and social ministry in society the acceleration of the 'minorisation' of the church from the mainstream of society, or even its inner rupture and polarisation? Which form of a public ministry is advisable for the church to simultaneously hold together the task of listening to the real concerns of marginalised, threatened, neglected people or those who feel apart from the ongoing developments, and at the same time stand faithful and committed to its core values in terms of human rights, social justice and inclusion? How to balance and to keep the pastoral ministry of the church and the prophetic ministry of the church together? This is one of the core questions of this article.

Recent research done by Konrad Adenauer Foundation in Germany reveals a striking and contradictory picture concerning optimistic and pessimistic views on the future of Germany and Europe in general: 44% of Germans still view future perspectives as more or less optimistic, while an overwhelming majority of those voting either for AfD or the Leftist (Die Linke) view future political, social and economic perspectives very negatively. This contrast is even stronger in comparison between the right and the left: 83% of those close to AfD view future perspectives as predominantly negative, while 50% of those voting left view the future in negative terms.[4] What is emerging with these surveys is that a certain percentage of the population is

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[4] Der Tagesspiegel, *Studie sieht wachsende Polarisierung der Gesellschaft*, 24 May 2018, https://www.tagesspiegel.de/politik/waehler-in-deutschland-studie-sieht-wachsende-polarisierung-der-gesellschaft/22597670.html (accessed 18 May 2022).

characterised by mainly negative perceptions on their role and the positive future of society. The Swedish Timbro Foundation, a think tank on social and political research, has affirmed these trends for European societies in general. The term they use to describe those in Europe who are characterised by feelings of disappointment, of being left behind, who are asking for strong new leaders to come forward and replace the 'elite' are called 'authoritarian populist' movements in Europe. According to the authoritarian populism Index 2019, some disturbing results have been identified:

> • 26,8 percent of voters in Europe – more than one in four – cast their vote for an authoritarian populist party the last time they voted in a national election.
> • Voter support for authoritarian populists increased in all six elections in Europe in 2018 and has, on an aggregated level, increased to ten out of the last eleven elections.
> • The combined support for left- and right-wing populist parties now equals the support for social democratic parties and is twice the size of the support for liberal parties.
> • Right-wing populist parties are currently growing more rapidly than ever before and have increased their voter support by 33 percent in four years.
> • Left-wing populist parties have stagnated and have considerable influence in southern Europe only. The median support for left-wing populism in Europe is 1.3 percent.'[5]

Several other studies underline the significant increase in trends towards the political polarisation in Germany and Europe in which extreme voices are often louder, more present and heard more frequently than the often silent majority of those still oriented towards less extreme

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[5]   Timbro – Authoritarian Populism Index, 19 February 2014, https://populismindex.com/report/ (accessed 18 May 2022)

and more centrist positions.[6] The Bertelsmann Foundation Global Study 'The Bigger Picture' offers the analysis that polarisation has also become a growing phenomenon on a global scale due to the impact of both demographic changes, economic globalisation and digitalisation and their influence on certain sectors of society which are no longer not fully integrated.[7] The increased presence of right-wing populist parties in Europe is making European integration far more difficult than before[8], the lingering and tragic, British dilemma of Brexit - while caused by populist fake news propaganda – is in turn fuelling ongoing right-wing populist trends in other European countries as well. Although a discourse has started on whether the peak is over for right-wing nationalist parties, and whether the political mainstream is revolting against them in some European countries,[9] we have no real clear evidence that the process of social and political polarisation, which is fuelling right-wing populism, has slowed down. What is of particular concern is that many right-wing populist politicians seem to have

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[6] Deutschlandfunk, *Die deutsche Gesellschaft polarisiert sich*, 21 November 2016, https://www.deutschlandfunk.de/fes-studie-die-deutsche-gesellschaft-polarisiert-sich.2852.de.html?dram:article_id=371976 (accessed 18 May 2022)

[7] Petersen, Thieß, *The bigger picture: Megatrend-Report sieht wachsende Polarisierungsgefahr*, 3 September 2019, https://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/de/themen/aktuelle-meldungen/2019/september/the-bigger-picture-megatrend-report-sieht-wachsende-polarisierungsgefahr/ (accessed 18 May 2022).

[8] Riegert, Bernd, *Europas veränderte politische Landkarte, 20 June 2019,* https://www.dw.com/de/europas-ver%C3%A4nderte-politische-landkarte/a-44237791 (accessed 18 May 2022).

[9] See the important recent statement from a CEC conference in Malaga, Spain, in October 2019: *Have hope not fear! Responses to populism from a religious and human rights perspective*, in: https://www.ceceurope.org/populism-and-human-rights-in-sharp-focus-at-cec-conference/ (accessed 18 May 2022). Taylor, Paul. *Has Europe reached peak populism?,* 5 September 2019 https://www.politico.eu/article/europe-reached-peak-populism-far-right-anti-european-government-election/ (accessed 18 May 2022).

targeted climate activists and political policies around environmental care as their main enemy, arguing that they need to protect people from falling prey to the 'left-wing, new environmentalist religion'. Thus, the political polarisation is centred around one of the most urgent needs on which people need to come together to form a united front and curb the effects of CO_2 emissions on a global scale and keep global warming limited to 1,5 C degrees. One of the German right-wing politicians has declared the Greens as the main enemy, stating: 'The Greens are the ones ruining Germany. The Greens want to ban the combustion engine, want to end coal mining. That's why we must fight against the Greens. That is the main goal.'

There are many instances in German church life that show how churches are aware of these issues and working to portray clear signals of solidarity with migrants against right-wing propaganda and warn against shallow stereotypes and hate speech propaganda. Whether it is in public talks in dioceses and local congregations,[10] or in public receptions of major denominations,[11] or during church synods,[12] churches have become alert as many of them have a clear sense that a growing right-wing nationalism cannot, in any way, be tolerated in view of Germany's, and its churches', particular history of National Socialism. The recent EKD synod in November 2019, conducted in Dresden's historical city, came up with a strong and passionate warning statement that the churches have a crucial task of maintaining peaceful dialogue within

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[10] Evangelische Kirche, *Umgang der Kirche mit Populismus: Klare Kante, klare Botschaft* , 10 January 2019, https://www.ekhn.de/aktuell/detailmagazin/news/umgang-der-kirche-mit-populismus-klare-kante-klare-botschaft-1.html (18 May 2022).

[11] See Roman Catholic Bishop Reinhard Marx, in: https://www.katholisch.de/artikel/23293-marx-beklagt-zunahme-von-nationalismus-und-populismus (accessed 18 May 2022).

[12] See the Roman Catholic and the Protestant Bishop in Saxony together, in: https://www.mdr.de/sachsen-anhalt/kampf-kirche-populismus-100.html

society, to listen to real concerns and challenges people are facing, while at the same time strongly oppose any form of hate speech, antisemitism, Islamophobia and right-wing populism:

> "Wir nehmen eine wachsende Schere zwischen Arm und Reich und soziale Benachteiligung wahr. Lohndumping und die Verlagerung von Arbeitsplätzen, sowie Altersarmut und steigende Mieten wecken zunehmend Ängste. Die Kirche hat hier die Aufgabe, sich mit diesen Problemen auseinanderzusetzen, um damit auch verkürzenden populistischen Argumentationen, Extremismus und Gewaltbereitschaft vorzubeugen. Dafür müssen Räume für konstruktive Lösungen geöffnet werden. Zunehmend belasten auch Antisemitismus und Islamfeindlichkeit sowie Rechtspopulismus und Rechtsextremismus das gesellschaftliche Klima. Dem muss entgegnet werden: Rassismus und Ausgrenzung widersprechen dem christlichen Gebot der Nächstenliebe und der Würde des Menschen. Verbale und physische Verrohung und Gewalt dürfen keine Mittel der politischen, weltanschaulichen und religiösen Auseinandersetzung sein. Religionen dürfen kein Anlass für Hass, Unfrieden und Krieg sein, vielmehr sind die Friedenspotentiale der Religionen auszuschöpfen, damit sie als Werkzeuge des Friedens dienen können."[13]

However the complex interrelation or interaction between churches, dynamics of polarisation and society need a more nuanced and differentiated perception. Just stating that there is increased polarisation in society does not yet answer the question of what dimension is mainly affected by polarisation, and whether it is the political, the economic, the

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[13] EKD, *Kirche auf dem Weg der Gerechtigkeit und des Friedens*, 13 November 2019, https://www.ekd.de/kundgebung-ekd-synode-frieden-2019-51648.htm (accessed 18 May 2022).

ethnic or social or a cultural and religious dimension which is affected and utilised in dynamics of polarisation? What, precisely, are the roles of the churches in all of this? Are churches simply mirrors of existing trends of polarisation in society, are churches sometimes even causes of polarisation, or are they in fact reinforcing polarisation? Are churches capable of bridging and reconciling polarised tendencies in societies, or can they even transform the root causes which have let to polarisation? Questions like these can help deepen an analytic look at national situations which are quite different in various European settings and nations, and therefore might need also define different answers and different nuances in the church's response.

At a short glance, it already proves the overall common key insight that populism works with ideological instruments to capitalise on fear, i.e. hidden fears, overt fears, insinuated fears, instrumentalised fears of people who perceive some of the repercussions of globalisation, digitalisation, Europeanisation and migration as genuine threats to their identity and their chances of a decent life. A key objective on the topic of this essay, therefore, is whether and how Christian churches can actually respond to this crisis with a well-founded message: 'Have hope, do not fear'.[14]

Characteristic Marks of Right-wing Populist Movements in Germany or Europe

Before looking into church-related responses and biblical-theological resources to respond to right-wing populism in more detail, a further differentiation needs to be developed in terms of what right-wing

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[14] CEC, *Have hope not fear! Responses to populism from a religious and human rights perspective,* October 2019, http://www.cceurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/20191019-DM-Communique-CEC-Conference-on-Populism.pdf (accessed 18 May 2022).

populism currently are in the European and, predominantly from this perspective, German context:

A initial working definition in popular discourses is offered as follows:

> "Right-wing populism, or national populism, is a political ideology which combines right-wing politics and populist rhetoric and themes. The rhetoric often consists of anti-elitist sentiments, opposition to the perceived Establishment, and speaking to the "common people". While both right-wing populism and left-wing populism object to what they see as the capturing of liberal democracies by elites, populism of the left also objects to the power of large corporations and their allies, while populism of the right normally focuses its attention on immigration. In Europe, the term right-wing populism is used to describe groups, politicians and political parties that are generally known for their opposition to immigration, especially from the Islamic world and in most cases Euroscepticism. Right-wing populism in the Western world is generally - though not exclusively - associated with ideologies such as anti-environmentalism, neo-nationalism, anti-globalization, nativism, protectionism, and opposition to immigration."[15]

It will be helpful to distinguish between kick-off themes that have the potential to lead to ideological or political polarisation in society or churches, and an established ideological stream which uses certain kick-off themes and emerging trends of polarisation within one unified ideological concept and unified trend. Issues which in the past have proved to be able to kick off polarised opinions and trends, both within societies and churches in Western Europe, have included many diverse themes such as:

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[15] See *Right-wing Populism,* https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Right-wing_ populism (accessed 18 May 2022).

- Ethics of peace, military service, atomic weapons, and the arms race;
- Atomic energy;
- Family and partnership ethics;
- Abortion and reproductive health issues;
- Nutrition ethics: vegetarianism and meat-eaters,
- Climate change: anthropogenic and not-anthropogenic viewpoints
- Migration and Maritime Search and Rescue Operations for Refugees – with or without engagement by the churches;
- Nationalism.

While not all kick-off themes in ethical, political and ideological controversies are easily regrouped, picked up or integrated into major right-wing populist ideological concepts, it is obvious and evident from much of the current research that right-wing populist concepts combine at least six core elements (at least in the German context):

A)   *Claiming the 'Saving of the Christian Occident'*

It has already been stated that the PEGIDAS movement, which had their first demonstration in Dresden on 20 October 2014 over several occasions was marked by a coloured and illuminated Christian Cross being carried through the streets, decorated in black, red and gold, colours symbolising the unity of the German Christian nation against foreign aggression since the 19th century. Right-wing populist movements present themselves as an emergency mode of defence against aggressors perceived as destroying 'our' Christian culture and its values with 'culture-strange' Islamic mass immigration and even by alleged strategic plans for an 'exchange of whole populations'. In reclaiming Christian values of the occident, however, it is not so much love over against the stranger which is popularised, but critique against

the betrayal of the Merkel government which has allowed too many immigrants to enter a closed German territory – a last resort example of the 'cultural Marxist destructionist strategies of the ruling elite' in Germany.

B) Fighting Against the Institutional Church

Another core element which presents itself in continuous tension and contradiction with the first is that the established protestant church is viewed and presented or caricatured as corrupt and co-opted by the state. Fighting against the institutional church, which is viewed as left-liberal, externally controlled, and forced into line by the state, therefore, becomes an imperative. While claiming vague, cultural, Christian values, the institutional embodiment of these values in the protestant (or Roman Catholic) Church is severely criticised, and campaigns are launched in a broad manner to prove that people must leave and disapprove of a church that is refusing dialogue with those who think differently. In the Jubilee Year of the Reformation 2017, there was even a major call to prepare for the foundation of a new purely German church, that would gather those dissatisfied with the established church, offer a new Creed limited to the very essentials of Christian faith, clearly renounce the destruction of national entities like the German people, and encourage the reawakening of a German theology. Directly before the Kirchentag in Dortmund 2019, a major protestant church gathering with more than 100,000 participants, a pamphlet called 'The Unholy Alliance, the Alliance of the Protestant Church with the Powerful and with the "Zeitgeist"' was published, which read as a massive attack on the credibility of the protestant church.[16] The main thesis proposed there is that the protestant church has lost track and is controlled and forced into line by state ideologies, namely the substitutional 'green climate

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[16]   https://afd-thl.de/wp-content/uploads/sites/20/2019/06/Kirchenpapier_Online version.pdf; see also: https://afd-thl.de/download/16785/

religion' and the declaration that mass immigration is a demand for Christian love towards its neighbour. It is interesting that, according to research, none of those who signed and published this paper has been a member of any of the protestant churches in Germany and the assault is done in a rather polemical and highly ideological form. However, it is all geared to spoil the reputation of the church in society and to create a climate of accusation and mistrust amongst Christians. While an excellent response and critical, detailed commentary was published by a colleague from protestant academy Berlin to this AfD paper,[17] the damage it has caused has already spread far beyond a limited internal church dispute, thus proving to present another step towards poisoning the climate of public debate and creating an atmosphere of hatred and rejections against Christian in local churches.

C) Propagating a Static and Ethnically Homogenous Concept of 'the People'

This goes together with the third core element which consists of a concept of 'the people' or 'our people!', which always operates on a binary logic and sets up boundaries of separations between 'us' and 'them', usually interpreted as ethic Germans and any foreigner. Those who are the 'other', whether culturally, ethnically, religiously or sexually different, are posed and perceived as a threat to one's own identity and identity concept. At work in the background is a conceptualisation of a pre-stable, harmonious reality of different national people living side by side without mixing, and any major mingling and merging should be avoided, and each set of people encouraged to reinforce only its distinct and unique characteristic marks

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[17] Lohmann, Heinz-Joachim, *Kommentar zum Kirchenpapier der Alternative für Deutschland: Unheilige Allianz. Der Pakt der Evangelischen Kirche mit dem Zeitgeist und den Mächtigen*, July 2019, https://www.eaberlin.de/ nachlese/chronologisch-nach-jahren/2019/pressemitteilung-kirchenpapier-afd/ kommentar-zum-kirchenpapier-der-afd.pdf (accessed 18 May 2022).

and identity patterns. What is being encouraged is a pre-stabilised ethno-plurality based on clear separation and basically apartheid patterns of thinking. Some of these concepts are close to the so-called identity movement *Identitäre Bewegung,* which opposes any migration and refuses to allow for any real intercultural encounter between people of different ethnic, cultural or religious backgrounds.

D) Fight Against the Alleged Elite and Parliamentary Democracy

The closed and static concept of the 'people' (Volk) is combined with a certain reduced perspective of democracy and political rule, which is strongly marked by exclusivism and anti-elite rhetoric and associated with a general appeal to mistrust existing political rulers, parties, and the political elite, thus pluralism as such is utterly rejected. If any argument can be killed with the accusation that it comes from the elite, the alternative is actually a projected, stable entity of 'the people' which tends to become the dictator of political orientations while setting out of motion all existing democratic processes of mutual negotiation, political compromise, mutual listening and finding the common good, all of whom mark the essence of parliamentary liberal democracy. Thus it has been argued that the growth of right-wing populist trends presents a serious crisis in democracy in Europe, if not a general recession and devaluation of democracy in the world. Strikingly enough, in Eastern German contexts, what has really been and experienced as repressive and totalitarian regime during the period of imposed state socialism in Eastern German history is used and instrumentalised as a stereotype to be applied to the present democratic regime despite so many Eastern Germans enjoying a considerable improvement of both their living standards, financed to a large extent by Western German solidarity, as well as much more political liberties in general.

E) Fear over against Islam and other Religious Traditions

The next element to go together with this is a widespread fear over against Islam, which is mainly perceived in caricatures as a violent religion of terrorists. It is interesting to note that hostile and rejective feelings against Islam or Muslims are stronger when the presence of Muslims in local neighbourhoods and rural regions is less visible. The negative perception of Islam, although very often void of any concrete experience in relating to Muslim neighbours, does not allow for any positive approach to interfaith collaboration or open interfaith neighbourliness.

F) Perception of Media Presented as Fake News Factory and Conspiracy Producer

Public media, particularly those who still offer critical and investigative journalism, are regularly presented and accused of serving up a fake news factory and/or of being the arm and instrument of conspiracy powers working against 'the people'. The accusation that the critical press is a disguised and dishonest form of press institutions and evil powers at work in all that is presented negatively or critically on right-wing movements in society is part of the ideological warfare that has unfolded and is still continuing in major regions of Europe.

G) Half-hearted Distancing itself over against Right-wing Extremism

A final point needs to be made with regard to an important distinction that continuously needs to be kept in mind. Right-wing populist parties always make attempts to distance themselves from right-wing extremism and to borrow or make an entry into the area of genuine mainline conservative orientations. Here a clear and differentiated understanding of the three phenomena: right-wing populism, conservatism and right extremism is needed:

Right-wing Populism is a movement which views 'the people' as a homogenous entity and is called to present 'the true people', as their

political will is not felt to be properly represented by the political parties and instruments of parliamentary democracy. 'The people' - defined by populist movements - are usually put over against the 'others' seen as 'those above', the elite, or seen as those who think differently, i.e. the people are always seen in opposition to those who rule and those who are not aligned with populist thinking.

Right-wing Extremism is a potentially or factually violent version of right-wing populism. While right-wing extremists take on board several or some lines of thought from right-wing populist movements, their main difference is that they do not simply want to reform or provoke the existing political system, but want to radically transform, even violently overthrow and abolish the given parliamentary system. The violent approach to political change and transformation and a certain degree of militancy presents itself as a more radical alternative to strategies of negotiations and political lobbying. In Germany, during recent years and months, there has been an alarming increase of right-wing militancy, and cases of murder have occurred that clearly have right-wing extremist ideologies as a motivating factor (NSU assassinations of migrants; Kassel president murder, frequent death threats to politicians from CDU or the Green Party).

Conservatism on the other hand is a political orientation within the mainstream of society not to be confused with right-wing populism, although right-wing populist parties often try to buy in or absorb conservative circles from the centre of the political spectrum. Representatives of political movements with conservative viewpoints often see themselves as custodians of a strong state and of traditional values embedded in a Christian family, in strong leadership, and in law and order. While right-wing populist challenge and oppose the established order and its representatives, conservatives see themselves as their guardian; they often represent traditional elites while right-wing populists oppose the elites. While right-wing populists criticise and

mistrust the mechanisms of parliamentary democracy, conservatives view them as indispensable pillars of a just and peaceful order. Conservatism and right-wing populism should never be easily equated, as they are quite different and distinct. Churches also often represent a sizeable part of the population that regards itself as conservative. Right-wing populism often benefits from the weaknesses of established conservative parties and their insufficient ability to articulate and integrate the positions of concern and worries of certain sectors of the population that feel insecure, disempowered, or unheard.

Most disturbing in recent months is the clear indicators pointing to a growing influence of right-wing extremist networks, and an increased readiness to resort to criminal violence and personal attacks by all kinds of extremist groups often working silently in society. The brutalisation of language and rhetoric unfortunately bring with it the brutalisation of actions and behaviour over which people in public offices, like both local politicians, as well as pastors and bishops, have become increasingly worried in recent months.

Root Causes of Right-wing Populisms in Europe

One could easily spend a whole lecture reviewing current discourses on root causes for the spread of right-wing populist movements in Germany or Europe. Let us, for the sake of time, focus our attention on three major factors:

- The relatively minor causative role of migration issues;
- The significant role of rising social inequality and rural areas' impoverishment or de-structuration of rural spaces;
- The broken social elevator system in Europa.

A major research project done by TU Dresden 2018[18] on causative factors for populist movements shows the following:

- Migration movements are often not a direct or primary cause for the political swing to the right, but only an enforcing and accompanying factor utilised for ideological warfare.
- Causal factors for right-wing populist movements are socio-economic, cultural or region-specific processes of social divisions, polarisations and splits, or the disengagement of sectors of the population that feel left behind and not fully integrated into the mainstream. Fears or real experiences of economic decline play as important a role as cultural factors of estrangement and lack of cohesion in populations.
- The instrumentalisation of media plays a huge role in aggravating subtle feelings of a sense of threat, a discrimination, or an exclusion in a given context; refugees are often misused as a projection wall for all kinds of social worries and political fears.
- Fear of losing one's own regional, cultural, or ethnic identity is blown up and presented in a large scenario as the background for the political threat of accelerated migration.
- Social and cultural experiences of disruption, or lack of participation, are interpreted as imposed fates of being cut off from relevant social and political developments and the political mainstream. Many feelings like this grow in less educated social milieus but are by no means restricted to the lower sector of less educated parts of the population.

What is striking is the historic correlation between the growing social inequality in industrialised countries in Europe and the growing

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[18] See: *Migration und Populismus. MIDEM Jahresbericht*, TU Dresden 2018, in: https://forum-midem.de/cms/data/fm/download/TUD_MIDEM_Jahresbericht 2018_WEB_RZ_2.pdf (accessed 18 May 2022).

sense of social and political polarisation. The imbalanced allocation and distribution of capital and assets in Germany have gravely accelerated in the last two or three decades. Only 11% of the population nowadays own 65% of the capital of the country.[19] Globally, the stark contrast between different layers and ownership in terms of capital and assets is even far bigger. Inequality dramatically increased in Germany between 1999 and 2005, visible in the rising Gini-coefficient in terms of financial resources available per person.[20] Social inequality, which stopped increasing in 2005 is, since 2010, once again rising steadily. Economic disparity and inequality in Germany are the second highest in the whole Euro area.[21]

In 2016, the OECD published a major study on the 'Broken Social Elevator – How to promote Social Mobility'.[22] The key finding is that several countries' social mobility has slowed down considerably. For a family, for instance, from the lower-income sector of society in a country like Germany, it takes an average of six generations to move up socially and economically to the medium average income level. The same immobility and huge gap in social inequality exists in Argentina.

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[19] See: Loesche, Dyfed, *Ungleiches Deutschland ist gleicher als der Rest*, 16 January 2017, https://de.statista.com/infografik/7599/vermoegensverteilung-weltweit-und-in-deutschland/ (accessed 18 May 2022)

[20] See: Kaufmann, Stephan, *Armut: Umverteilung von oben nach unten hat abgenommen*, 13 December 2019, https://www.fr.de/wirtschaft/armut-umverteilung-oben-nach-unten-abgenommen-13072363.html (accessed 18 May 2022).

[21] See: Klöckner, Marcus, *Die Einkommensungleichheit ist in Deutschland heute 'weit höher' als noch vor 20 Jahren,* 8 August 2016, https://www.heise.de/tp/features/Die-Einkommensungleichheit-ist-in-Deutschland-heute-weit-hoeher-als-noch-vor-20-Jahren-3291482.html (accessed 18 May 2022).

[22] OECD, *A Broken Social Elevator? How to Promote Social Mobility – Overview and Main Findings,* 15 June 2018, https://www.oecd.org/social/soc/Social-mobility-2018-Overview-MainFindings.pdf (accessed 18 May 2022).

Apart from economic and social mobility-related factors, there are certainly also cultural and political factors that have enforced or caused the emergence of right-wing populist movements in Germany, for instance:

- The use of a top-down approach during the first phase of the reunification process in Germany, which left East German populations with little or less opportunities to fully own what they were experiencing in the process of social and political transformation after 1989.
- The destruction, neglect, and de-structuring of rural spaces, which gradually lose vital centres of livelihood and social cohesion in their rural spaces (first the pharmacy, followed by the school, the post office and, finally, the bus stop are dissolved in a small, rural village and cause 40% of the inhabitants to vote for AfD).

Biblical-theological Resources for Encountering Polarisation in Society: Basis Tensions and Core Mandates in the Understanding of the Church

We earlier identified the following theological question as one that is key in the context of churches faced with polarisation in society: How can churches balance and relate to each other their pastoral mandates (be close to people, listen to them, accompany them on the ground) and the prophetic mandates of the church (speaking truth to power, challenging those who neglect justice, peace and human rights in society). As soon as we emphasise the pastoral and diaconal mandates of the church, we tend to put our attention on the unity and apostolicity of the church. When we emphasise the political role, the critical prophetic tasks of the church, we tend to see the church as marked by catholicity and holiness or sanctity. We can thus see that balancing the church tasks concerning pastoral and prophetic dimensions are related to balancing the four essential marks of the church to which Christianity confesses together in

the ancient creed on each Sunday: Unity, Catholicity, Apostolicity and Sanctity or Holiness. None of these can work without the other, all are interrelated and need one another. If people over-nationalise the church and the understanding of Christian faith, the danger is the loss of the catholicity of the church, as well as its unity. If people are only focussing on the prophetic critique of ruling powers and the critical distance towards power when emphasising the sanctity of the church, they might risk the unity of the church and its solidarity and listening function with all people (apostolicity). The essential marks and key dimensions of the church can serve as a compass and indicator for balancing between pastoral and prophetic, between missionary and diaconic, between transformative and affirmative mandates, and actions in the work of the church. The four essential dimensions of the church also indicate a learning movement of ecumenical formation, as we can correlate these dimensions: unity needs inclusivity of the church and the principle of leaving no one behind in dialogue. Catholicity leads to ecumenicity and the interest in articulating one national identity of the church against another national identity. Apostolicity of the church protects the church from resting within one ethnic or national identity only, and promotes the development of intercultural sensitivity and openness. Sanctity or Holiness of the church in turn reminds the church to stay firm and independent from certain political powers or string social movements that are contrary to the Gospel, as the church must be determined by the Holy Spirit, which contrasts with some of the principalities and powers of this world.

We can enumerate what this might mean in detail just by listing a few of the essential biblical visions of the mandates of the church.

a)   *The Church is Called to be Steadfast as an Ambassador of Reconciliation in a Fragmented World*

The ancient world was far from united and continually peaceful. The Mediterranean region was full of tensions, and the vitality of migrant

movements created tensions as early as the first harbour church city in Corinth. Being an ambassador of reconciliation in a situation of tension, polarisation and conflict from its very beginning gradually became a key component in the mission of the church. Although the church has been confronted with enmity and social polarisation from its birth, the task cannot be reduced to communicating the Gospel only to those like-minded. Indeed, it remains a demanding, albeit rewarding, mandate to communicate the Gospel of reconciliation to 'all the world' (2 Cor 5:17-21).

b) The Church is Called to Serve both the Truth and the Unity of Humankind

Standing up for the truth of the Gospel (John 14:6) and, at the same time, standing up for the unity of the Church as a promise of the unity of humankind (Eph 4:1-6) are two sides of the same coin; both mandates cannot be dissociated. There are remarkable reminders and promises to Jesus's disciples of how much Jesus wanted them to stand firm for the principles of truth as revealed in Christ for the whole of humankind, not just for one tribe or one nation (John 8:31-23; John 14:6; John 18:17). Remaining in the truth allows Christians also to stand firm with each other. The unity of the church is maintained through the Spirit and visible in a bond of peace with others, as well as the common hope lived and confessed together for the world. (Eph 4:1-6)

c) The Church is a Community of those Different and Diverse

The church always remains a *koinonia* of people from different cultural backgrounds; it cannot be reduced to a tribal community. Tribalism is contrary to the church of Jesus Christ, which overcomes all existing divides. The Church as a Community/*Koinonia* of the different (ethnically, culturally, socially) live with the principle of Inclusivity as embedded in the famous clause of Ephesians (Eph 2:11-20): 'You are no

longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household.'

d) The Church has Always Experienced Conflicts and Threats from False Prophets

Since ancient times, the Church has learned to live with the consequences and sometimes conflicts resulting from preaching and living the Gospel authentically (Acts 16:1-22). This first story on European soil visibly and colourfully highlights the conflicts the apostles had to face when faithfully preaching the Gospel in their times. The Gospels and the Book of Acts is full of stories that expose the awareness the early Church had of the need for permanent discernment of the Spirit and a critical distance from false prophets (Luke 21:8-19), while at the same being prudent not to become presumptuous and self-righteous (1 Cor 13:12).

e) Exercising Responsibility for Protecting the Integrity of the Church Can Lead to Divisions, as Well as to Acts of Re-unification

Exercising ecclesial responsibility is protecting the identity of the church in cases in which visible separation is demanded from movements that violate essential principles of God's love and justice. Examples are mentioned in the letter of St. Paul and in post-Paulinian letter of the NT canon (1 Cor 5:11-13; John 1:4). Re-establishing church communion with those who renounced their destructive attitudes or behaviours in cases in which they repent and transform was a practise known in the earliest forms of Christianity in the Ancient Church (see for instance 2 Cor 2:6-11). It involved dealing with movements showing attitudes and slogans that might, in part, be contrary to the Gospel, thus not only an issue for pastoral theology but ,in certain cases, also for church discipline and for determined Christian leadership – else the credibility of the church as a whole might become endangered. This is not easy and, in many cases, church leadership might not be trained

for this dimension, but it is important also to recognise this task as the ultima ratio.

Learning from Similar Situations of Churches Facing Polarisation in Previous Historical Contexts

It is not a unique and single situation, nor one without analogy, that the identity and unity of the church finds itself challenged and tested in contexts filled with trends of polarisation. We can feel encouraged when comparing our contemporary situation with earlier situations, which – while differing in many aspects from ours today – have also led the church to increased self-affirmation, steadfastness, and integrity in both keeping its identity, as well as maintaining its unity to the extent possible in the given circumstances. While we cannot go into detail about each context here, it might be briefly mentioned that several situations from the past remind us that Churches have wrestled with varying manners of issues of Church identity and unity, sometimes more successfully than in other cases:

a)   There was a strong sense of polarisation between early Jewish-Christian-Palestinian groups and Hellenistic Christians in the Ancient Church in Mediterranean contexts. The famous Council of the Apostles (Acts 15) shows the ability of the Ancient Church to deal with this conflict without placing one side into the victor's role and the other into a loser's role. Both had to give up on certain things and compromise while keeping the essence of the Gospel, which is determined to reach beyond cultural divides.

b)   A deep sense of polarisation was also seen between the reformatory protest and reform movements in the late medieval ages in Europe and their conflict with centralised imperial Church structures of the Papal Church during the late medieval era (period of the Classical Reformation of the 16th century). This time it ended with a schism

and visible institutional separation in the church, i.e. the emergence of Protestant Christianity, as the intended overall reform of the whole church was refused at that time.

c) Following the classical period of Reformation, a deep sense of polarisation persisted within Protestant Christianity, i.e. between the left wing of the Reformation (Baptist, Peace and Charismatic Churches) and protestant territorial Churches aligned with feudal authorities (the era of the confession wars). It was not until the 20th century that reconciliation and healing of memories was established between the Lutheran Churches and the Mennonite Churches, for instance.

d) The most poignant and difficult period of polarisation that occurred for Churches from German backgrounds certainly comes with the Nazi period in Europe. A polarisation had unfolded between the nationalistic-racists movement of the German Christians during the Nazi dictatorship and the minority movement of the Confessing Church in the period of fascism in Germany in the 30ies and 40ies. Within the so-called 'German Church Struggle', the famous *Barmer Theologische Erklärung* from 1934 served as the most important theological witness against any attempts of state interference into the internal affairs of the Churches and against any right-wing nationalistic ideology seeking theological legitimacy from certain sectors within Protestantism. The Barmen Declaration has had a remarkable history of inspiring churches and Christians in non-western contexts for resistance against military dictatorship, right-wing populist movements, and any narrowing down and hindering of the proclamation of the Gospel in all realms of life, i.e. any assault on the range of issues on which the Churches have to speak up publicly for the sake of the dignity of human beings and for the sake of their love of God.

e) Finally, we should not forget those more recent periods of polarisation within the Ecumenical Movement of the 20th century, which happened between the Anti-Apartheid activists, for example, and those Churches which supported during long decades the theological legitimisation of racist attitudes and separate development in Southern Africa. The debate and controversy on racism in ecumenism were accompanied by deep divisions and heated argumentation, particularly when the Lutheran World Federation (LWB) declared this an issue of *Status Confessionis* and suspended the membership of South African churches (Daressalam, 1977).

Examples like this show that periods of wrestling between the right balance of pastoral and prophetic mandates of the Church, in contexts which seem to impose tensions of polarisation on the Church or where the Church has itself caused polarisation, are often not just short interim phases in the history of the Church, but can persist for decades and block or even harm the credibility of the witness of Churches. At the time, it is clear that churches have the potential of learning processes and of stimulating learning in their social context by dealing with issues with public relevance and ethical value for several generations to follow. Thus, utmost care and theological diligence is demanded in periods when churches are wrestling with trends of polarisation in society, as much is at stake not only for the churches and their unity but for the whole of society.

Between Pastoral and Prophetic Approaches: Examples of Guidelines and Position Papers from German Churches on how to Respond to Populism

To follow are a few examples indicating how intensively protestant churches in Germany have wrestled with challenges brought about by growing right-wing populist movements. Since early 2019, the federal

church, EKD, opened a thematic website on dealing with right-wing populism, which was seen as quite a significant step. On EKD's national website, a clause reads in strong and clear language:

> "The Protestant Church in Germany (EKD) together with many fellow citizens in Germany affirms an open, tolerant, and just society which is founded on the unconditional acceptance of the undeniable dignity of each human being. Therefore, EKD cannot stay neural wherever human beings are marginalised, discriminated against, persecuted, or threatened and treated with contempt. The EKD is standing up against right-wing populist, right-wing extremist, racist or xenophobia attitudes. To overcome barriers between human beings of different background from its very beginning has been a mark of Christian faith and of the Christian Church."[23]

Several key texts and statements are shared and offered on this web resource that come from various regional churches and different institutions within the Protestant Church of Germany.

One of the more recent, strong, theological resources developed is a lecture authored by Markus Dröge, the previous presiding bishop of EKBO churches in Berlin-Brandenburg. In a talk delivered at a pastor's conference in Berlin-Dahlem in 2017, he coined the powerful and provocative statement, 'Right-wing populism deforms human beings into citizens of anger only, the Gospel transforms human beings into citizens of courage.'[24]

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[23] EKD, *Kirche gegen Rassismus, Rechtspopulismus und Rechtsextremismus,* https://www.ekd.de/kirche-gegen-rechtspopulismus-und-rechtsextremismus-49866.htm (accessed 18 May 2022).

[24] Evangelisch.de, *Bischof Dröge: Rechtspopulisten mutig entgegent,* 25 March 2017, https://app.evangelisch.de/inhalte/142872/25-03-2017/bischof-droege-rechtspopulisten-mutig-entgegentreten (accessed 18 May 2022); Domradio.de, ,*Sprache der Ausgrenzung und des Hasses'*, 26 March 2017,

When referring to Barmen I and the irrevocable task of translating the human-friendliness of God into all concrete fields of politics today, he strengthens the understanding of the prophetic ministry of the church while at the same time emphasising the need to be in dialogue with people.

According to Bishop Dröge, becoming an elder in the church while providing active support to groups and movements that follow attitudes which are hostile to human dignity and decency is irreconcilable with the order of the church and its ministries. However, it cannot just be party membership that provides the criterium for excluding somebody from membership in church offices. What is demanded from the church is a critical case by case approach. Interviews need to be conducted with candidates that may introduce hostile attitudes and hate speech into the church now or in the future. Standing firm in faith for the church means that Christians should want and need to contribute their good intentions and their best actions towards an ongoing transformation process of our society in a constructive manner rather than denouncing society and the parliamentary system completely without offering any concrete alternatives and thus falling prey to the temptations of destructive right-wing populistic propaganda.

A few months later, during its synod in spring 2019, his church in Berlin-Brandenburg followed this general approach by coming up with an impressive statement, called '*Haltung zeigen* – Standing Firm'.[25] Outlining four thematic fields: social justice, living in plural contexts, controversies around public truth, and care for creation, this statement is a masterpiece both in form and content as it presents the key positions of

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https://www.domradio.de/themen/%C3%B6kumene/2017-03-26/evangelische-bischefe-rechtspopulisten-mutig-entgegentreten (accessed 18 May 2022).

[25] Az. 1624-07.04:10/01, Beschluss der Landessynode betr., April 2019, https://www.ekbo.de/fileadmin/ekbo/mandant/ekbo.de/1._WIR/04._Landessyno de/13._2019_Fr%C3%BChjahr/13_1_2019_Fr%C3%BChjahrssynode_Beschl%C3%BCsse/DS111_B_-__Haltung_zeigen.pdf (accessed 18 May 2022).

a responsible public theology of the protestant church. Four steps follow the four themes: 'We realise and listen – we believe – we commit – we renounce and object'. The careful listening to ongoing concerns of the population, and the standing firm with the principles of churches' social ethics and doctrine, are combined. Pastoral concerns and prophetic and public theology concerns are carefully balanced with each other. The document also reads as a passionate appeal to bridge polarisation in society by entering into a honest and sober dialogue with people. The appeal for a genuine dialogue with those citizens who have real concerns about social cohesion, social support and access to common goods and education is also a self-critical appeal to the protestant churches. To understand the tone of this declaration, here is one quotation in German:

> "Wir nehmen wahr, dass viele Menschen in unserem Land Sorge um ihr tägliches Auskommen haben. Der Abstand zwischen Arm und Reich ist weiterhin zu groß. Familien mit geringem Einkommen stehen am Rand der Gesellschaft. Wohnen wird – vor allem in den Städten – für viele nahezu unerschwinglich. Immer mehr Menschen sind auf Grundsicherung angewiesen; der Gang zur Tafel wird für sie zum Normalfall. Zugänge zu Bildung und gesellschaftlicher Teilhabe werden aufgrund sozialer Herkunft und Lebenslagen erschwert. Einige Regionen haben kaum Anteil an der gegenwärtig positiven wirtschaftlichen Entwicklung".[26]

Another work manual is published by Diaconia Germany in 2018 under the title '*Umgang mit Rechtspopulismus* – How to cope with

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[26] Ibid. https://www.ekbo.de/fileadmin/ekbo/mandant/ekbo.de/1._WIR/04._ Landessynode/13._2019_Fr%C3%BChjahr/13_1_2019_Fr%C3%BChjahrssyno de_Beschl%C3%BCsse/DS111_B_-__Haltung_zeigen.pdf

Right-Wing Populism'.[27] It offers straightforward practical advice for church-related staff and professional workers in diaconal institutions who might become objects or targets of hate speech and right-wing populist propaganda. The practical publication gives the following concrete advice:

a) Not to fall prey to trends of scandalisation and emotionalisation in dialogue with populists, but always try to return to hard facts, maintaining a sober debate and correcting distorted perceptions.

b) Encourage church related staff to learn about clarity and firmness in essential Christian positions. Any form of group-related hostility or attitudes are irreconcilable with the basic values of Christian diaconia.

c) Make a clear distinction between persons and positions while remaining clear in terms of Christian position over against hate speech and racist propaganda, and make a clear distinction between the attitude the church is speaking up against and the persons who are behind them and occasionally hiding behind these attitude. Each human being has to feel that he/she is taken seriously as a partner in encounter and worth being heard.

d) Be careful with invitations to report to or be interviewed by right-wing media outlets as you are often instrumentalised, and these medias are viewed and consumed only in limited circles of like-minded people, with little to no reach out to a larger and more nuanced audience.

e) Take into consideration concrete proposals for a revised form of a 'house order' to define and protect institutional places of

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[27] Diakonie Deutschland, *Handreichung zum Umgang mit Rechtspopulismus,* 25 March 2022, https://www.diakonie.de/broschueren/handreichung-zum-umgang-mit-rechtspopulismus/ (accessed 18 May 2022).

the church, parish halls, and diaconia centres from being misused by right-wing groups as battlegrounds for their propaganda.

Some of the regional churches have also tightened their legal instruments to avoid being misused by candidates wanting to use the church as a forum to spread hate speech. For instance, the EKBO complemented its constitutional framework in 2013 with a legal clause excluding all official offices and ministry of the church whose candidates actively support a party or movement that overtly and expressively supports misanthropic or homophobic attitudes and political positions, which violate the dignity of each human being. The definition of what is meant by misanthropic attitudes is taken from legal documents which can be referred to as anti-discrimination law in Germany and which are also obligatorily in accordance with EU law in Germany.

It has long become clear in German ecumenical dialogue that rejection and self-distancing from populist positions are not enough for the Church. Instead, this second question has gained importance, particularly if the Church is mindful of its key mandate to act as a mediator and an ambassador of reconciliation in society: How to win the other for a deepened dialogue of reconciliation and learning is the key to broadening dialogue and new ground for social cohesion in society. To open up 'spaces of dialogue in which different positions can be heard' has become a key motive in recent statements and papers from EKD churches.[28] In an EZW publication, Harald Lamprecht argues that churches, as well as society, need to have a broader and more courageous culture of conflictive dialogue as, on all sides, the

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[28] See: EZW Veröffentlichung: Rechtspopulismus und christlicher Glaube, EZW Texte 256, Reinhard Hempelmann/ Harald Lamprecht. In: https://www.ezw-berlin.de/html/119_9942.php; see also: https://www.ezw-berlin.de/fileadmin/user_upload/ezw-berlin/publications/downloads/EZW-Texte _256.pdf

temptation rises to keep oneself within the known comfort zones and not to leave one's own milieu of perceptions and opinions, i.e. a real failure to have a cross-line dialogue between different milieus and political streams in the society:

> "Eine nicht unwesentliche Mitursache für die gegenwärtigen gesellschaftlichen Probleme ist ein weit verbreitetet Verlust an Streitkultur. Es ist zunehmend unüblich und daher ungeübt, Meinungsdifferenzen im, offenen argumentativen Gespräch anzugehen. Das Sich-Einlassen auf die Argumente des anderen und die Verteidigung der eigenen Position ist anstrengend – keine Frage. Auch die Unterscheidung zwischen der Person und ihrer Position ist eine Zivilisationsleistung…(Doch) vielen Bürgern fällt das schwer... Das Ideal eines offenen, diskursiven Austauschs von auch kontroversen Argumenten, in gegenseitiger Achtung der Person und ohne Denkverbote ist gegenwärtig nur noch in Nischen zu finden. Es ist aber für das Funktionieren der Demokratie unerlässlich."[29]

An international consultation organised by Bread for the World, Church of Sweden, Lutheran World Federation, and the Protestant Academy of Berlin 2018 in Berlin, deepened this point exactly and pleaded for a deliberate process to widen the space of courageous conversations between different milieus in society while not moving backwards on any of the core positions the churches needs to hold due to the obligations of the Gospel and its support for the dignity of each human being, disregarding class, ethnic identity or cultural and religious background.[30] To overcome polarisation in society, churches need to

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[29] https://www.ezw-berlin.de/html/119_9942.php

[30] See: Harasta, Eva / Sinn, Simone (eds): *Churches as Agents for Justice and against Populism,* EVA:Leipzig, 2019. *Churches as Agents for Justice and Against Populism,* https://www.lutheranworld.org/content/churches-agents-justice-and-against-populism (accessed 18 May 2022).

identify instigators on both sides, and strengthen those public figures who can be instigators for an alternative and more peaceful cause of social and political development. Depolarisation does not work without promoters for de-escalation and courageous conversations beyond the used territories to open up a new common language beyond existing divides.[31]

Summary and Conclusions

What is Important for Churches to Deal with Right-wing Populism Considering both their Pastoral and their Prophetic Mandates?

The following eight conclusions might summarise what we can offer as suggestions and theological advice to churches struggling with how to respond to right-wing populist tendencies in some European societies at present:

a) Articulate clear limits and red lines where hostility, violation of human dignity, hate speech, division and fake news are declared into a program – this is an essential mandate of the prophetic ministry of the Church.

b) Do not refuse any dialogue where genuine concerns, fears and anxieties of people are expressed or could come to the forefront, and which are not really heard - this is an essential mandate of the pastoral ministry of the church.

c) Develop an improved culture of a genuine dispute instead of withdrawing into social and political milieus with like-minded people; what are the *courageous conversations* your church needs to engage in publicly? This is an essential commission of the

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[31] See interesting observations from the Dutch philosopher Bart Brandsma: https://islam-aktuell.de/index.php/themen/islam-in-deutschland/interreligioeser-dialog/item/445-gegen-polarisierung-und-gen-loyalitaet; see also: https://islam-aktuell.de/gegen-polarisierung-und-gen-loyalitaet/

reconciliation mandate of the church. Courageous dialogues are dialogues in unknown territories with unfamiliar partners where the truth is put to test and where we need to communicate with those with whom we are not used to communicating.

d) Search for what can be formulated and felt in common, what unites people, what brings reconciliation and what strengthens social cohesion in villages, cities, and regions - this is an essential mandate of the ecumenical ministry of the church based on the dimension of catholicity and unity of the church and its vision for the unity of humankind.

e) Make every effort to enlarge and transform the perception of Islam and of people of different religious traditions, as often the negative views are stronger the less a real encounter with people of other living faiths actually takes place. Interreligious engagement and dialogue with all people of goodwill is an essential mandate of the missionary ministry of the church, a consequence of its apostolicity and the sharing in the common *Missio Dei*.

f) Hostile views concerning global climate change need to be seriously addressed by a 'Global Decade of Churches for the Healing of Creation' proposed at the forthcoming WCC assembly.[32]

g) Share stories about positive narratives of migration: from migration as a threat to migration as a unique opportunity for learning and experiencing mutual benefits. Share stories where migration experiences are crowned with success of integration and mutual enrichment.

h) Contribute to efforts strengthening the lost political centre milieu of European societies, as the political centre in some countries seems

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[32] See WCC, *Kairos for Creation – the Wuppertal Call*, 25 June 2019: https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/kairos-for-creation-confessing-hope-for-the-earth-the-wuppertal-call (accessed 18 May 2022).

to be disappearing rapidly leaving space only for the extremes. The unsolved problem of an integral approach to social and human development and participation in social progress needs to be urgently solved and addressed by governments (broken social elevator).

i) Take part in producing and creating a new language of common development, of the shared common good and of participatory reconstruction of an ecological civilisation that safeguards the rights of future generations. A joint ecumenical work on *Laudato Si* and new concepts of shared good life for all (*buen vivir*) is crucial for new common avenues, as well as an antidote against the threats of right-wing populism.

SCHOLARLY ISLAMOPHOBIA

Mohammed Jamouchi[*]

Introduction

Islamophobia is not specific to the working classes,[1] it is also expressed by elites (political, media, academic, intellectual, researchers and other experts) from which some radical political tendencies[2] and anti-multiculturalist[3] European populist leaders have taken inspiration these last decades. The scholarly form of Islamophobia is aroused by the high class, whose favourite topics are immigration and the misfortunes

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[*] Director of the Istituto di Skriptura; Member of Centre d'Études et de Recherches en Sciences Sociales since 2010. © Globethics Publications, 2023 | DOI : 10.58863/20.500.12424/4291178 | CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 International.

[1] On the lived, documented and quantified realities of Islamophobia in Europe see : ECRI (Commission européenne contre le racisme et l'intolérance : Bruxelles); FEMYSO (Forum of European Muslim Youth and Student Organisations : Bruxelles); CCIB (Collectif Contre l'Islamophobie en Belgique : Bruxelles); CCIF (Collectif Contre l'Islamophobie en France : Paris); Observatorio de la islamofobia en los medios (Madrid) ; Grupo de estudio sobre islamofobia : Cataluña); FAIR (Forum Against Islamophobia and Racism : UK); Tell MAMA (Measuring Anti-Muslim Attacks : UK); CAIR (Council on American-Islamic Relations : USA); Penel, Edwy, *Pour les musulmans*, Paris: La Découverte, 2016.

[2] No European state is immune to this phenomenon: Front National, Bloc Identitaire, Vlaams Belang, Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs, Lega Nord, Unione Democratica di Centro …

[3] Le Pen, Orbán, populists (Flemish, Catalan and the Italian Northern League) among others.

of a population subject to change (communitarianism, integration, assimilation and acculturation). But when did this animosity begin? Why has Islam become the new phobia? And above all, how do these elites feed this apprehension?

The Power of Words

The power of words and the shock value of images: Paris Match is perfectly aware of the power of the verbal and the iconic power of persuasion; as is the prologue of John: "In the beginning was the Word […]" (John 1:1). But this Parisian weekly's motto applies even better to Charlie Hebdo, which takes it to the extreme. Naming is the act of bringing into existence. The power of words should not be underestimated; it should not be considered a soft power. Words are likely to wreak havoc among endogenous and exogenous, indigenous and non-indigenous[4] populations: "Is Islam compatible with the West?"; "can Muslims be assimilated to and soluble in French society?". Intellectuals (ideologists, professors, academics…) now support and write casual words that carry heavy consequences when it comes to ethical responsibilities. Their words, coupled with their reputation,[5] result in fantasies, phobias, and twisted imagination that distort and amplify so as to reach individuals and community and feed the collective unconscious.

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[4] A categorisation of society into just two basic groups, such as 'indigenous' and 'non-indigenous', creates clear dividing lines, very often with a rigid pattern of domination and subordination. These categories are not relevant in politics in identifying citizen participation.

[5] For centuries, the most eminent thinkers (Thucydides, Augustine, Machiavelli, Hobbes, Luther, Calvin, Burke, Bentham, Nietzsche, Freud...) have fed/nurtured the idea of an egoistic and pessimistic perception of humanity in contrast to the actions of revolutionary figures (Jesus, Mohammed, Gandhi, Luther King, Mandela...) who went against the mainstream.

The Discourse on the Other

What worldview can we have of an Islam - misidentified (are we talking about a faith, members, a culture, or a civilisation?), poorly understood, poorly studied, subject to numerous interpretations and multiple fantasies – claimed (as an ethnic, cultural and/or religious affiliation) by one-fifth of the global population?

Studying the relationship between Muslims and Europe's construction requires a deconstruction of our respective imaginations. The possible variations of 'Islam' is troublesome for the researcher; it grants impunity when faced with potential opponents, for how can anyone invalidate a chosen position with so many variations of Islam on offer? From here, there is only one step to making an enemy of them.

Individual and collective identity build political constructs when placed in opposition to the other. The nature of it is binary: a group, a faith, an ideology versus another; the West versus communism; the liberal versus the planned economy, etc. Following the Cold War, the economic market, coupled with human rights, were intended to reconcile us. It was also necessary, in line with the diktat of economic growth[6], to justify the continuing production of arms, for which an ideological gap had to be filled. The solution: finding the perfect enemy. Just as the Red Peril was substituted by the Green, Islam replaced communism. In the context of a double economic and moral crisis, of capitalism and Marxism, Islam has become visible. This new rising concern has become the ideal and indefensible enemy.

Sociologist Abdellali Hajjar shows how the concept of 'assimilation' is linked to numerous factors related both to political and social context, as well as to the shifts of understanding in its meaning. His innovative

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[6] On spoliation / the plundering of "natural resources", minerals "from Muslim countries made poor" and presented as the "bad guys" see : Ateş-Snijdewind, « Waarom moslims en vluchtelingen als het kwaad worden voorgesteld » in *Nieuw Wij*, Amsterdam, 15 mei, 2021.

approach analyses, for instance, how an administration measures the 'assimilation' of candidates[7]. The investigative journalist Edwy Penel also condemns assimilation: 'the Islamophobes ask for the eradication of Islam', requiring that Muslims erase themselves in the process. To be accepted, Muslims must first become unseen and unheard. "Assimilation is a terrifying order which was also the one of French colonisation, to accept the other one on the condition that they are no longer themselves, and to distinguish them only in the case they decide to look like us and accept them only if they give up what they were before".[8]

Contrary to the Method

Against all expectations and against all approaches, when it is not simply steeped in deception, Islamophobia is systematically built on gross error, confusion, pseudo-statistics and other amalgams. Included within this set of approximate realities can be found the unsubstantiated fantasy of colonial sciences, sometimes with a mix of romantic or unsympathetic orientalism[9] inherited from the 19th century. Revisited and updated at the end of the 20th century, they now emerge in line with the today's standards. With a disregard for logic, reason and other humanistic values, man is no longer sheltered from a certain tendency - natural or cultural - of belittling and discriminating its ideological 'opponents'.

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[7] Hajjat, Abdellali, *Les frontières de l'"identité nationale". L'injonction à l'assimilation en France métropolitaine et coloniale*, Paris: La Découverte, 2012
[8] Penel, Edwy, *op. cit., 77.*
[9] In North Africa, the colonial sciences (history, ethnology, anthropology, sociology) are invested by a sometimes fantasised orientalism (Delacroix, Dinet, Doutté, Kandinski, Gautier, Hugo, Majorelle, Regnault and others); in sub-Saharan Africa by ethnology conducive / to suitable for all paradigms (Deluz, Griaule, Paulme and others).

Construction of Islamophobia

   The academic construction of scholarly Islamophobia, or of an imaginary Islam, appears on various occasions. In contemporary times, one of the stages in the construction of the 'scholarly Islamophobia' object in academic circles can be traced back to the mid-19th and early 20th centuries in the heart of the colonial era, 'in the writings of French administrators-ethnologists', under the Third Republic. This hostile speech towards Islam in France took root and was elaborated within such prestigious institutions as 'le Collège de France, la Sorbonne and l'École libre des Sciences politiques'. The leading lights are Tocqueville[10], Maupassant and in particular Renan[11], whose 'hostile theses to Islam will have the ear of Jules Ferry'. The historian and political scientist Olivier Grandmaison describes the theses[12] relating to "the inferiority, harmfulness and dangerousness of Islam" as "renanism"[13]. The political scientist Gilles Keppel has surprisingly, and no less academically, managed to make it seem evident that the word islamophobia is a recent invention.[14] All the while, the historian

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[10] That said, the judgements and prejudices of Alexis de Tocqueville's youthful ardour in the context of colonial fever would be much more nuanced in his mature writings such as in *Democracy in America*.

[11] As a professor at the Collège de France, Renan enjoyed a masterly reputation, which gave scientific value to his prejudices and other legitimate opinions. In addition, he is perceived as a great writer because of his election to the Académie française.

[12] These theses have had a lasting effect on the study of continental social sciences in contrast to the emancipation and Anglo-Saxon development of *post-colonial studies*.

[13] Grandmaison, Olivier, *" Ennemis mortels " Représentations de l'islam et politiques musulmanes en France à l'époque coloniale,* Paris: La Découverte, 2019.

[14] From a media point of view, nothing will have been as spectacular, disconcerting, disturbing, unexpected and paradoxical for the sensitivity of French public opinion -under the new regime- as a revolution carried out and

Grandmaison, states that "the scholarly Islamophobia of colonial France presents thematic analogies with contemporary Islamophobia", that the scholarly Islamophobia of the colonial era is similar to that which is propagated today by high-profile intellectuals. This new face of hatred is part of the long history of colonial xenophobia that does not state its name. Other sociologists rigorously describe how the object of 'Islam' has progressively been seen as a 'problem'.[15]

Another significant step is marked by the media impact of a publication - Aristotle at Mont Saint-Michel [AMSM],[16] whose central theme is the denial or minimisation of Arab civilisational, cultural and linguistic participation in the transmission of Greek heritage (*in casus* Aristotelian) to European culture. In other words, Sylvain Gougenheim's ideological and demagogic proposal is a clumsy attempt to show that Europe discovered Greek heritage without any external intervention.

In addition, intellectuals such as Alain Finkielkraut do not miss an opportunity to repeat again and again, much like a litany or mantra, that there is 'a problem with the Islam of France'[17] when he is invited to

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completed in the name of a clergy. This revolution of the mullahs is even more moving, impressive and upsetting than the political Islam of the Muslim Brotherhood. On the media impact, see Delthombe, Thomas, *L'islam imaginaire. La construction médiatique de l'islamophobie en France,* Paris: La Découverte, 2005; Bourdieu, Pierre, *Sur la télévision*, Paris, Liber-Raisons d'Agir, 1996. However, it is not mentioned that this is a Platonic (Iranian) Republic and (Shiite) Imâmology, which dethrones a thousand-year-old monarchy (founded by Cyrus).

[15] Hajjat, Abdellali/ Mohammed, Marwan, *Islamophobie. Comment les élites françaises fabriquent le problème musulman*, Paris: La Découverte, 2013.

[16] Gougenheim, Sylvain*, Aristote au mont Saint-Michel. Les racines grecques de l'Europe chrétienne*, Paris, Seuil, 2008.

[17] Bowen devotes his entire first chapter to him – see Bowen, John R., *L'islam un ennemi idéal*, Paris: Albin Michel, 2014. ; Penel, *op. cit.* draws a parallel between the evolution of the French academician and the malaise of French society, of which the intellectual is the "symptom".

France Inter and other public radio stations as the only unopposed player.

A Scholarly Controversy

Scholarly Islamophobia became known and was made public when the publication of a controversial and disputed[18] book (AMSM) hit the headlines in the spring of 2008, during a tense French and international geopolitical era (Sarkozy's Dakar speech, Benedict XVI's Regensburg speech) in which European companies and politicians seemed to show their contempt with complete impunity.

AMSM is a purposefully crafted construction of circumstance, which accounts for this scholarly Islamophobia, written at a time when the discourse on the "Greek roots of Europe" had been reactivated;[19] even suggesting "to rectify school textbooks" in order to recall the place of Islam in European heritage, as per a recent (2002) EU report[20]; and

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[18] It is worth noting in passing the low editorial standards of the time, as was the case, for example, when Bernard-Henri Lévy's *Testament de Dieu* was published by *Le Nouvel Observateur* in 1979, severely criticised by the historian Pierre Vidal-Naquet at the time.

[19] The concept of "founding disagreement" was put forward by Olivier Abel during a colloquium organised by the Avicenne Association. The Avicenne think-tank (interconvictional association, composed of Michel Gheude, Mohammed Jamouchi, Marc Lenders, José Reding) working on the construction of Europe organised a public debate on secularism and Article 51 of the future European Constitution on 13 December 2003 in Brussels. See: Michel Gheude, Mohammed Jamouchi, Marc Lenders, José Reding, « Le désaccord fondateur » in: *La Libre Belgique* 17 November 2003; *Le Soir*, 18 November 2003; in: *La Revue Nouvelle*, January 2003; « L'Europe à la recherche de valeurs communes. Le désaccord fondateur » in *Le Courrier international*, 08 January 2004.

[20] Gouguenheim, *op. cit.*, 14.

when the burning debate on 'national identity'[21] in France was being put back into the public arena.

This construction poorly conceals an ideological judgement on Islam that was already present in many debates. It shows that "behind the clothes of scholarly discourse – a clothing threaded of thin arguments - a new form of Islamophobia is hidden and alluded to"[22] (Robert, 2010). It was also criticised in a column by Alain Gresh[23] (*Un historien au service de l'islamophobie*) and was challenged from the outset by academics who castigated it in a petition for obvious breaches of academic criteria. Through a meticulous study of the controversy triggered in 2008 by Sylvain Gouguenheim's book, a collective work (GAEN) examines the mechanisms of scholarly Islamophobia and its uses, and political issues linked to memorial mobilisation.

Deconstructing Islamophobia

By deconstructing the pseudo-arguments of Islamophobia, Grandmaison disproves the unfounded and fallacious/insidious statements of certain French elite, according to whom the term 'Islamophobia' is a recent invention of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood and the Iranian mullahs. In his time, Étienne Dinet, orientalist painter, author of the first biography[24] of Muhammed, already denounced the violent anti-Muslim speeches alleging "Islamophobic delirium"[25] [26], the Islamophobia of politicians, scholars and xenophobic

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[21] Hajjat, *op.cit.*

[22] Robert, Aurélien (2010), « L'islamophobie déconstruite », in *La vie des idées*, https://laviedesidees.fr/L-islamophobie-deconstruite.html (accessed 25 May 2022)

[23] Gresh, Alain, "Un historien au service de l'islamophobie", in: *Le Monde Diplomatique*, 7 May 2008.

[24] In French, *La vie de Mohammed, prophète d'Allah*, Piazza, 1918.

[25] Gresh, op.cit.

orientalists of the early 20th century. Since then, scientific research has been carried out and has shed some light on undeniable historical facts that can no longer be falsified as easily as they were in the days of colonial science.[27] Thus, it makes the deconstruction of the 'Muslim problem' possible.[28]

Beyond the indignation raised by this book, the first response of academics on scholarly Islamophobia is developed under the direction of Max Lejbowicz, subtitled 'Science and Ideology'[29] against AMSM. Another group of researchers devotes an entire book to its methodical refutation. At the beginning of this essay, Irène Rosier-Catach states abruptly, laconically and unambiguously: "Sylvain Gougenheim has written a bad book. The Greeks, the Arabs and Ourselves [GAEN] is also a work of circumstance. Its authors, specialists in the Islamic, Byzantine and Western Middle Ages, react to a highly controversial book (AMSM) which they present as an intellectual deception. The authors of the collective response [GAEN], all from the academic world (EPHE, EHESS, CNRS), use their erudition and formal tools of deconstruction to criticise Gougenheim and what they call 'scholarly Islamophobia'". The writers of GAEN retort that "Gouguenheim is not a specialist on the subject of his book, and that he does not have the necessary knowledge to give scientific credit to his theses". Furthermore, his work is presented as a revisionist enterprise of intellectual history. This is contrary to the humanist ideals of stigmatising a population and essentialising it (reducing an entity to an

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[26] This vision of an East that mirrors the West should be compared with Edward Said's equally revealing vision: the unconscious East of the West. See Dinet, Étienne, Ben Brahim, Sliman, *L'orient vu de l'occident*, Paris: H. Piazza & P. Geuthner, 1921.

[27] See footnote 9.

[28] Hajjat. Abdellali/ Mohammed, Marwan, *op.cit.*

[29] Lejbowicz, Max (ed.), *L'islam médiéval en terres chrétiennes. Science et idéologie*, Villeneuve d'Ascq: Presses universitaires Septentrion, 2009.

identity). Was it not the intention of the legislator in 1905 (law on secularism) to achieve social pacification? However, there has been a shift from the neutrality of the state to the neutrality of society.[30] More than a reconfiguration of secularism, François Daroin mobilises a "new secularism", sometimes referred to as a "substantialist turn",[31] by stating that "this new secularism must now target Muslim visibility...". He ends his report by pointing out that "this secularism is incompatible with human rights".[32]. There is a surreptitious shift from the neutrality of the State to the neutralisation of Muslims by people who use State services.

Impact of Knowledge

The persecution of a group because of its cultural, religious, ethnic, or other affiliation is not a recent phenomenon but dates back to the dawn of humanity. The creation and feeding of an anxiety-inducing atmosphere does not incite people to live together peacefully.

One of the favourite themes of Islamophobia is immigration, in particular (leading to a clash of civilisations) its consequences (multiculturalism, communitarianism that is more passive than active, depending on the different public policies adopted by each state), its presumed solution (integration, assimilation) and its presumed danger (the great replacement), which have been blamed for a certain radicalisation on both sides. Hence the political denunciation of multiculturalism as an obstacle to integration into life in wider society.

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[30] On the notion of state neutrality in Belgium, see: Wouters, Inès, « « Neutralité inclusive » et « neutralité exclusive », ou comment le dévoiement de notions juridiques protectrices sert à justifier des pratiques discriminatoires », in: *D3Mag – Magazine mensuel détroit*, September 2021.

[31] Portier, Philippe**,** « Le tournant substantialiste de la laïcité française », in : *Horizontes Antropológicos***,** (52), 2018, 21-40.

[32] Report submitted to Prime Minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin by Deputy François Daroin, *Pour une nouvelle laïcité*, mai 2003.

Gouguenheim's publication made headlines in 2008 after provoking significant controversy. The spirit of the Enlightenment is increasingly illuminated by a succession of polemics, the latest one called 'Islamo-Gauchism'. This scholarly aggressivity has been coupled with a no less aggressive dissemination of a negative vision of Islam to the general public, presented as hostile to the free exercise of reason and the progress of science.

This reactivation of 'Renanism' is significant. Are these occasional works indicatives of the type of society being promoted? Are we trying to build an exclusive or inclusive society? To avoid the reality of specific economic and social issues, they have symbolically been transposed into issues arising from the problem of immigration. The debate, thus perverted and displaced, has cost immigrants dearly and has slowed down the process of integration".[33] Very often, the strategy of diversion does not fail to succeed.

The observations of the anthropologist John Bowen and the investigations of Penel remind us that ideas have social consequences that sometimes lead to tragic events (hate crimes and premeditated homicides). The works of Bowen and Penel - of different but complementary construction – point out that, once normalised, these ideas become dangerous.[34] Thus, intellectuals with media coverage and

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[33] Weil, Patrick, *La France et ses étrangers. L'aventure d'une politique d'intégration de 1938 à nos jours*, Paris : Gallimard, 1995, 487.

[34] "You end up creating a danger by shouting every morning that it exists. By dint of showing the people a scarecrow, we create the real monster." (Zola). Both the Bible and the Qur'an forbid the use of bad words, bad language towards people because this kind of behaviour can literally kill a person, since the word acts deeply on the other. Bad words act on the mind and the body (through the secretion of harmful substances), to the point of making the person depressed, unhappy, ill, traumatised or even annihilated. Moreover, the same gesture, the same word does not necessarily have the same meaning, the same impact: the violence of one is not the violence of the other.

high visibility – with which any amount of intellectual honesty would hardly allow – raise the spectre of an Islam threatening France and its republican values[35] on radio and television platforms. Consequently, the reduction of the Muslim faith to a political and security problem[36] by politicians does not augur well.

These authors denounce the instrumentalisation of fears[37] through this new face of hatred. Despite Gougenheim having produced a "bad book", his fallacious discourse quickly spread on the Web and revived anti-religious sentiment.

Conclusion: Cultivating a Plural Memory and Integrating an Open Society

Creating and surfing on the fear of the other is not only the prerogative of right-wing populists, uneducated or hateful, it is also the construction of a concept that is elaborated in high places and at a high level, at the top of the enlightened but misinformed or politically dependent, intellectual elite. Ideas and words can have a far-reaching impact on societies.

Cultures and memories are rooted in specific historical contingencies. Cultivating a plural memory, while integrating a society open to differences, means recognising and ratifying divergences and points of rupture ("us" and "them");[38] it means recognising and

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[35] No scientific study establishes a causal link between immigration and increased violence.

[36] "Too often the sorcerers' apprentices who govern us give birth to monsters" see: Penel, *op. cit.*, 78.

[37] For Delthombe, *op. cit.*, French journalist and essayist, there are 'three key elements of the fear of Islam: the trauma of the Algerian war, the visibility of the Muslim religion and the fear of the Islamisation of lifestyles'.

[38] See *Mk* 9:40; *Mt* 12:30 ; *Lk* 11:23; see also, in a xenophobic sense, Cesari, Jocelyne, *Être musulman en France*, Paris: Karthala, 1994: Chapter X. "Them and Us": Postcolonial Racism, 167-171. An antithesis is needed between

fertilising convergences and points of encounter ("neither Jew nor Greek").[39]

Knowledge of one another is a strong basis for the improvement of living together.[40]

The French outlook on and its judgment of Islam, in the light of the Franco-Algerian dispute, raises serious concerns about a potential return of the Islamophobic discourse in the great French national story, particularly by the reappropriation of the father figure of Charles Martel and the historical figure of Joan of Arc. Opposing the other is motivated by colonial xenophobia that does not state its name, as well as a more subtle form of xenophobia. This academic Islamophobia, which dates back more than a century, is not an isolated phenomenon but a structural one. Since the beginning of the 20th century, but especially since the beginning of the third millennium, there has been both increasing attention and increasing tension between the two sides.

Talking of Islam in France is to summon up a painful history: as of the days of De Gaulle and Algeria, it summons up the nostalgia and grief over a French department lost offshore in the Mediterranean.

What ideological lantern is therefore lighting in the country of the Enlightenment nowadays, of the great Revolution and of human rights, which is also distinguishable in its specific secularism and its

"them" and "us" (in the ethnic sense), between being inside/at the centre of the group or outside/at the periphery, those who are "in" and those who are "out" (in the sociological sense), evidence of the deep and dangerous divisions/rifts that separate many religious groups.

[39] On the principle of equality or fairness, see Gal 3:27-28, 1 Cor 1:31; Hadith: "...No superiority of the Arab over the non-Arab, nor of the non-Arab over the Arab, nor of the White over the Black or of the Black over the White. ...]" (Ahmed and at-Tirmidhi).

[40] The Qur'an explicitly encourages the encounter with otherness, as intended by Him: "[...] We have made you into nations and tribes, that you may know one another..." (Qur'an 49, 13) This verse, which affirms the idea of monogenism, is one of the best known and most quoted.

problematic colonial and post-colonial relations (such as the Algerian syndrome), and which is also at the forefront[41] of scholarly Islamophobia? Today even, Diogenes the Cynic would be fully mimicking his former role of illuminating the path of those who no longer distinguish what is evident in all its clarity.

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[41] France clearly appears as a laboratory of Islamophobic ideas that are spreading to the French society; and exporting to England, the United States and Australia. One can be outraged to see that beyond the Hexagon, France (country of humanism) is cited as a model of Islamophobia.

III

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION
AND POPULISM

POPULISM AND FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION, IRRECONCILABLE DIFFERENCES

Jónatas E.M. Machado[*]

Introduction

Freedom of expression in a broad sense is sometimes described as a *cluster right*[1] comprising a wide range of communicative freedoms, such as freedom of opinion, press, broadcasting media, audio-visual programming, telecommunications, social networks, journalists' rights, artistic license, academic freedom and edition of books and films[2]. With such a comprehensive reach, freedom of expression is a cornerstone of free, open, plural and democratic societies. It is understandable, therefore, that all political, religious and ideological groups will want to have access to the media so that they can disseminate their ideas and

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[1] Thomson, Judith Jarvis, *The Realm of Rights*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990, 55f.

[2] Benjamin, Stuart M, 'Transmitting, editing, and communicating: determining what "the freedom of speech" encompasses', in: *Duke Law Journal*, 60 (8), 2011, 1673f.

thus influence the course of life in society. This is a legitimate aspiration that a free and democratic constitutional order must recognise and safeguard.

Democratic constitutions often contain provisions intended to ensure freedom of expression for various sectors of society, a reasonable degree of equal communication opportunities and access to the media. However, for political, ideological or religious groups with a more identitarian, centralised and authoritarian vocation, freedom of speech is represented as an annoying obstacle to be removed as soon as possible, an instrument of interference of foreign political and economic interests and, in some cases, a factor in promoting relativism, indifferentism and cultural and moral decay. In fact, what is, in many cases, intended is the removal of scrutiny, transparency and exposure that a wide freedom of expression and information provides. It is for these reasons that paying attention to the importance of freedom of expression in a democratic society and to the challenges that it has been facing with the development of populist movement is necessary. This is what we attempt in this article, fully aware the reader understands that reality is far more complex than what we can demonstrate in these few pages.

Content and Purposes Freedom of Expression

Freedom of speech as we know it today began to assert itself in Western Europe and the United States primarily as a by-product of the Protestant Reformation, the Enlightenment and liberal revolutions.[3] This doesn't mean that prior to that there was no freedom of expression at all or that there are no more grounds for its limitation subsequently. But it

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[3] Zippelius, Reinhold, 'Die Entstehung des democratischen Rechtsstaates aus dem Geiste der Aufklärung', in: Juristen Zeitung (23), 1999, 1126f; Bullinger, Martin, 'Multimediale Kommunikation in Wirtshaft und Gesellschaft', in: *Zeitschrift für Urheber- und Medienrecht 40*, 1996, 750f.

is in the aftermath of the Second World War and the Holocaust that freedom of expression became strongly rooted in contemporary constitutionalism, as a conscious and deliberate reaction against national socialist, fascist and communist authoritarianism. It was enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the European Convention on Human Rights, and it also achieved consecration in the democratic constitutions of European states and in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union. Since then, there has been a symbiotic link and mutual strengthening between freedom of expression and democracy. An open society is a *free marketplace of ideas*[4] built upon principles of individual autonomy and decentralisation of authority. Freedom of speech 'is applicable not only to "information" or "ideas" that are favourably received or regarded as inoffensive or as a matter of indifference, but also to those that offend, shock or disturb the State or any sector of the population. Such are the demands of that pluralism, tolerance and broadmindedness without with there is no democratic society.'[5]

This does not mean that freedom of expression should be protected without restrictions. Even the most ardent defenders of this right recognise that it does not protect those who, without reason, shout "Fire!" in a crowded theatre.[6] The current problems related to the

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[4] Abrams v. United States, 250 U.S. 616, 624 (1919) (Oliver Wendell Holmes, dissenting opinion); Kerr, Robert, 'From Holmes to Zuckerberg: Keeping Marketplace-of-Ideas Theory Viable in the Age of Algorithms', in: Communication Law and Policy24 (4), 2019, 477f.; Blasi, Vicent, 'Holmes and the marketplace of ideas', in: *The Supreme Court Review*, 2004, 1f.

[5] ECHR, *Handyside v. the United Kingdom*, judgment of 7 December 1976, Series A No. 24, §49

[6] This point was famously made by Oliver Wendell Holmes, in Schenck v. United States, 249 U.S. 47 (1919), ˝The most stringent protection of free speech would not protect a man in falsely shouting fire in a theatre and causing a panic. (…) The question in every case is whether the words used are used in such circumstances and are of such a nature as to create a clear and present danger

protection of personal and private data, the regulation of violent TV programs or videogames, pornography, or the fight against hate speech, the creation of alternative facts, the spread of conspiracy theories or fake news, just to give a few examples, show that there are still strong reasons to restrict freedom of expression, even in a free and democratic society.[7] The national courts and the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg have a key role to play in weighing up freedom of expression with other rights and interests that are legally protected in the event of a collision between them. There may be scope for intervention by the Court of Justice of the European Union, in Luxembourg, with regard to freedom of expression in the event of a violation of the Charter of Fundamental Rights by the European Union or by a Member State acting under European Union law.

Freedom of expression serves several functions. First of all, it allows for the expression of individual subjectivity, allowing people to manifest their authentic, genuine feelings, thoughts and opinions.[8] In this sense, it pays tribute to the dignity and moral, emotional and rational autonomy of human beings, as unique producers of meaning. Without this possibility, individuals could not be themselves, know themselves or make themselves known to others. Human interaction would be incomplete and imperfect.

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that they will bring about the substantive evils that Congress has a right to prevent.´ Larson, Carlton F.W., 'Shouting "Fire" in a Theater': The Life and Times of Constitutional Law's Most Enduring Analogy,in: *William & Mary Bill Rights Journal 24 (1),* 2015, 181f.

[7] Strong, S.I., 'Alternative facts and the post-truth society: meeting the challenge', in: *University of Pennsylvania Law Review Online 165 (1),* 2017, 137f.

[8] Murchison, Brian C., 'Speech and the Self-Realization Value', in: *Harvard Civil Rights-Civil Liberties Law Review 33 (2)*, 1998, 443f.

Another important function of freedom of expression is the search for truth and knowledge.[9] Despised by Pilate in his cynicism, who doubted its existence, truth has recently been called into question by some so-called postmodern thinking, saying (albeit in a self-refuting way) that there is no such thing as absolute truth but only social constructs and linguistic conventions.[10] But truth remains important in politics, law, economics, society, religion, science, education, sport, or, as we have recently seen, in guaranteeing global public health.[11] Jesus's words "You will know the truth and the truth will set you free"[12] remain entirely correct and pertinent in our day and age. Freedom of expression must protect the intellectual, cognitive, and methodical tools that enable individuals and communities to seek and know the truth. Basically, freedom of expression protects the possibility that all propositions will be tested through confrontation with contrary propositions, in a kind of permanent and open discursive process of *disputatio* or 'cross-examination'. Deliberate lies, alternative facts, and fake news are not particularly welcome in the sphere of public discourse.[13]

Democracy and the rule of law require freedom of expression and information. Citizens need to know and understand the problems facing the political community so that they can choose the political programs

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[9] Schauer, Frederick, "Free speech, the search for truth, and the problem of collective knowledge", in: *SMU Law Review 70 (2),* 2017, 231f

[10] Dennett, Daniel C**.,** "Postmodernism and truth", in: Daniel Dahlstrom (ed.), *The Proceedings of the Twentieth World Congress of Philosophy, vol. 8*, OH: Philosophy Documentation Center, 2000, 93f.; MacKinnon, Catherine A., "Points against postmodernism", in: *Chicago-Kent Law Review 75 (3),* 2000, 687f.

[11] Larsen, Allison Orr, "Constitutional Law on an Age of Alternative Facts", in*: New York University Law Review 93(2),* 2018, 175f.

[12] John 8: 32.

[13] Timmer, Joel, "Fighting falsity: fake news, Facebook, and the First Amendment", in: *Cardozo Arts & Entertainment Law Journal 35 (3)*, 2017, 669f.

and the people who can best guarantee their resolution. Citizenship is only feasible when it is possible to know the real functioning of public institutions and the social and economic effects of their conduct. Freedom of expression allows the necessary scrutiny of public office holders, the assessment of public resource management practices, and the detection and repression of the pathologies of power, such as illegality of the conduct of public authorities, abuse of power, incompetence, inefficiency, clientelism or corruption. Democracy and the rule of law depend on the possibility of citizens to participate, directly or through their elected representatives, in the discussion, negotiation and deliberation on matters relevant to the whole political community.

Elections are legitimate only insofar as citizens are free to form, express and revise their opinions on the most varied themes and to express those opinions in universal, free, equal, direct, anonymous, and periodic elections. For that, it is necessary for them to be exposed to different perspectives. In the words of the US Supreme Court, "the widest possible dissemination of information from diverse and antagonistic sources is essential to the welfare of the public".[14] Many social problems, such as hunger, poverty, corruption or economic, financial or health crises can be avoided if wide freedom of expression is guaranteed, which is why the protection of whistle-blowers is essential. Democracy requires a permanent critical commitment that only a broad form of freedom of expression and a polycentric media structure can guarantee. And this requires a regulatory framework, at national, supranational and international levels, that ensures the diversity of perspectives, the freedom and independence of journalists, the protection of investigative journalism, the protection of the confidentiality of information sources, the autonomy and confidentiality of the newsroom, public debate on all political, economic and social

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[14] Associated Press v. U. S., 326 U.S. 1, 20 (1945).

issues of public interest and the transparency of media ownership up to the level of the beneficial owner.[15]

Freedom of expression is important for society in general. In all areas of our personal and political life, it is vital to hear various opinions. The Bible says that 'For lack of guidance a nation falls, but victory is won through many advisers.[16] Freedom of expression combats systemic pressures towards conformity and protects the diversity of the gene pool of ideas. In this way, freedom of expression allows knowledge and learning, the emergence of new ideas, the refutation and abandonment of old ideas, and the peaceful transformation of society. Freedom of speech rests on the notion, as history teaches us, that things are not always as they seem: what appears true is not always true, just as what seems false is indeed not always false. In this sense, freedom of expression is based on a positive valuation of diversity and pluralism, and on the acceptance of dialectical tension. It underlines the importance of ensuring protection from dissident and innovative views, because this depends on the existence of more possibilities and alternatives for society and more freedom of choice for individuals. Thus, freedom of expression prevents normative stagnation and gregarious conformism, favouring mutual knowledge, inter-comprehension and approximation between antagonistic social groups. It also protects the possibility of agreeing to disagree, until a new fact or idea restarts the debate.

Then Along Comes Populism

The main objectives of populism's media strategy are to use communication and propaganda to manipulate public opinion, influence

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[15] Recommendation CM/Rec (2018)1of the Committee of Ministers to member States on media pluralism and transparency of media ownership (Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 7 March 2018 at the 1309th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies).

[16] Proverbs 11:14.

electoral processes, destabilise democratic systems and promote liberal and anti-democratic ideologies with a democratic appearance.[17] There may be also a geo-strategic dimension of the struggle for power between States, and of dispute for the hegemony in the world. Populists seek to take advantage of the various deficits in the fields of democratic participation, civic and political education and media culture. They know that many citizens are uninformed and have no interest in the core issues that underpin the democratic rule of law. In some cases, populists use pathologies installed in the democratic system (e.g. corruption, incompetence, instrumentalisation of public causes for private purposes, crisis of confidence in democracy) to present themselves as undisputed saviours. They resort to polarising and extremist discourse, dividing the world into friends and foe, which may be particularly desirable to some media outlets more interested in entertainment and audiences than in promoting democratic and inclusive debate around topics of general interest.[18]

Populist politicians do not hesitate to resort to insults, threats, fallacies and falsehoods to achieve their goals, all the while attempting to silence critical voices, identifying and stigmatising individual journalists who dare to ask uncomfortable questions, and presenting some mainstream media outlets as obstacles to executive action or even as enemies of the people.[19] In some cases, they actively promote the

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[17] Gaughan, Anthony J., "Illiberal democracy: the toxic mix of fake news, hyperpolarization, and partisan election administration", in: *Duke Journal of Constitutional Law & Public Policy 12 (3),* 2017, 57f.

[18] Hundley, Annie C, "Fake news and the First Amendment: how false political speech kills the marketplace of ideas", in: *Tulane Law Review 92 (2)*, 2017, 497f.

[19] Day, Terri R./ Weatherby, Danielle, 'Shackled Speech: How President Trump's Treatment of the Press and the Citizen-Critic Undermines the Central Meaning of the First Amendment', in: *Lewis & Clark Law Review 23 (1)*, 2018,

production and dissemination of fake news or take advantage of those who engage in this activity. Politicians who, in a narcissistic way, want to present themselves as representatives of the totality of the people, in demagogic and identitarian terms, will try to make sure that all critical discourse is labelled as seditious and unpatriotic. They will try to maximise the communicative opportunities currently available to them. Both Donald Trump and the Brexiteers procured the services of Cambridge Analytica, a British company which utilises Facebook users' personal information data, harvested without their consent, to help build psychological profiles in view of targeting them with Trump and Brexit political campaigns. From the beginning of his Presidency, Trump used Twitter to spread his many short, incisive, and manipulative messages. The falsehoods were such that the Twitter company went so far as to insert a fact-checking warning into those messages.[20] Trump threatened to retaliate.[21]

In the United Kingdom, Boris Johnson's team 'is keen to ensure that they control the premier's message on digital media, replicating successes of the Tory election campaign'.[22] What's more, 'in side-lining the mainstream media, the British leader is following a pattern set by populists around the world.'[23] In Brazil, President Bolsonaro's son was investigated on suspicion of being a leader of the group that creates and

311f; Rusomanno, Joseph, '"Falsehood and Fallacies": Brandeis, Free Speech and Trumpism', in: *Communication Law and Policy 22 (1)*, 2017, 155f.

[20] 'Twitter tags Trump tweet with fact-checking warning', BBC News, May 27 2020 https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-52815552 (accessed 27 May 2020)

[21] Trump threatens to shut down social media companies', BBC News, 27 May 2020, https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-52821304 (accessed 28 May 2020).

[22] Ross, Tiss, **'**Boris Johnson Copies Trump in War on U.K.'s Mainstream Media**',** Bloomberg, 11 Feb. 2020 https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-02-11/boris-johnson-copies-trump-in-war-on-u-k-s-mainstream-media (accessed 27 May 2020).

[23] Ross, *op. cit.*

disseminates fake news to intimidate and threaten judges and other public authorities on the internet.[24] Some of the owners of media outlets (e.g. tabloid press and talk radio) are actively involved in promoting populism, since they know that they may benefit from the regulatory initiatives of populist leaders, especially if they shut down or severely weaken the competition. When Recep Tayyip Erdogan made significant efforts to extend his control over the Turkish media, he shut down many media outlets, captured public media, and made sure that private media would be controlled by his political friends. Some point out that many newspapers in Turkey have identical headlines.[25] This populist drift has resulted in more hatred, more division, more radicalisation, more racism, and more xenophobia. The journalists' mission has become increasingly treacherous.

Available time and space do not allow for the further development of this point, but it is already possible to understand that the dangers to human rights, democracy and the rule of law are evident.

What Should Christians Do About It?

Populism should be fought against by exposing falsehood and fallacies with more speech, with a strong emphasis on 'education, civic awareness and confronting the danger of an inert people'.[26] This is where the church can and should play an important role. The church, in

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[24] 'Polícia identifica filho de Bolsonaro como líder de esquema de "fake news", *Diário de Notícias*, 25-4-2020, https://www.dn.pt/mundo/policia-identifica-filho-de-bolsonaro-como-lider-de-esquema-de-fake-news-12117873.html   (accessed 27 May 2020).

[25] 'Turkish government's biased media pool helps opposition', *Ahval*, Mar 28 2019   09:38   Gmt+3   Last   Updated   On: Mar   30   2019   10:55 https://ahvalnews.com/turkey-local-elections/turkish-governments-biased-media-pool-helps-opposition (accessed 27 May 2020).

[26] Rusomanno, *op. cit.*, 155f.

its Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant and Evangelical manifestations, can make an important contribution in this context, placing itself alongside the different functions of freedom of expression. To do this, the church must be aware that it cannot present itself as an unassailable example in this matter. If it is true that the church is the result of intense theological, hermeneutical, moral, and political debate over two millennia, focusing on the truth of the first and last questions of existence, it is also true that this debate has often generated animosities, antagonisms, divisions and conflicts.

It is an indisputable fact that permanent theological discussion has allowed the removal of ideas considered unorthodox to stabilise creeds, canons, doctrines and dogmas. But it also generated *odium theologicum* and the stigmatisation and persecution of so-called heretics, apostates, schismatics and infidels. This debate has not always obeyed the rules of Christian fraternity by telling the truth in love, being often dominated by the spirit of animosity, division and faction. Many Christians paid the price of expressing their opinions with their freedom and their lives. The Church must be aware that for too long it has sought to rely on arguments of formal authority and to silence debate and dissent on various grounds, and under various pretexts.

Still, despite its structural vulnerabilities, the Church can still play important cards in a democratic society. Based on the absolute *Logos*, it has an existential and irrepressible commitment to truth and knowledge. Its conviction that human beings are rational, moral and communicative beings, having been created in the image of God, underlies an uncompromising respect for the inherent dignity and uniqueness of each person. Likewise, the Church's realistic view of the fallen and corrupted nature of human beings can make it a relentless ally in the fight against falsehood, manipulation, demagoguery, corruption and evil. On the other hand, being inherently plural and diverse, even within the large existing confessional families, and thanks to its experience resulting

from a history of pain and suffering, the Church can show the world that there is no viable alternative to the permanent, peaceful and respectful exchange of information and ideas, through civilised and uncoerced dialogue. The mutual knowledge thus generated can allow for the peaceful coexistence of different points of view, or, who knows, may enable the approximation of formerly distant and incompatible positions and the healing of old wounds.

With this awareness and attitude, the church must strive for the integrity of the sphere of public discourse and the promotion of media literacy among its members, facilitating the respectful exchange of ideas between individuals with different opinions. The Church must unite in the struggle for the right to the truth regarding the politically and socially relevant facts, underlining the importance of truth in the formation of public opinion and political will, defending freedom in the dissemination of true facts on the exercise of power by its holders, and upholding the right to listen to different perspectives and alternatives before making a decision. Christians must be active in the defence of the truth in all spheres of life and denounce those who make a political career by disseminating alternative facts and fake news. Christians must stand alongside freedom and the transparency of the media, investigative journalism, and a regulatory framework that protects the channels of true information and promotes the repression and accountability of agents and platforms that disseminate falsehoods.

Conclusion

Democracy and populism are substantially and structurally incompatible. Democracy needs integrity and truth. Populism builds on lies and deception. Christians must be on the side of truth because it is a requirement of human dignity, equality and justice. Truth liberates. The Church must be part of the solution and not part of the problem. It can and must play an important pedagogical role in preparing Christians for

active, responsible and critical citizenship inspired by their faith commitments. For them, freedom of expression must serve the search for truth and knowledge and the democratic self-government of the people in an atmosphere of integrity and fraternity. The Church, by definition, can never indulge a post-truth society

RELIGION, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND SURVEILLANCE

Susanne Wigorts Yngvesson[*]

To live in a surveillance society is nothing new. One can say that people have always lived in surveillance societies as part of living together in a community. In an anthropological sense, to surveil is partly about being in control and partly to confirm social, moral, and physical borders. It is about identity. In a religious or theological sense, surveillance can be understood as control over ideas, people, and dogma. When one thinks of surveillance, it is worth keeping this perspective in mind, since the concept is nowadays intrinsically linked to modern interpretations, not least influenced by the philosopher Jeremy Bentham and his concept of 'panopticon', and later introduced by Michel Foucault in his book *Surveiller et Punir* (1975).[1] If one believes that a religious or human rights perspective would always take the position against a surveillance society and surveillance technologies, that would be naïve. There is no thick or thin line that one can identify as good or bad technology. It depends on how it is used, how it works, and in what way it is used to categorise people and groups, how it influences public and private spaces, how it is incorporated into people's daily life, et cetera.

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[1] Bentham, Jeremy, [1791]: *The Panopticon Writings,* London: Verso, 1995.

In this article, I will not address populism and freedom of expression per se, i.e. as two issues that I closely focus upon. Rather the perspectives are intertwined in the overall discussions and examples. Surveillance technologies can be used to stimulate populism and limit freedom of expression, as well as they can contribute to the opposite. The outcome does not only depend on the technology and its capacities, but on the persons, citizens, states, religious groups, and companies who use it.[2]

After centuries of technological innovations alongside industrialisation, the concept of surveillance has been associated with a Big Brother society, i.e. asymmetrical surveillance by the state or employer to surveil citizens or employees with different tools, visible or invisible. The aims of surveillance are a multitude: protection, security, efficiency, steering of behaviour and opinions, prevention of unwanted actions, et cetera. After the 9/11 terror attack in New York and Washington in 2001, the idea and implementation of surveillance technology has increased unimaginably, in parallel with a political view of the 'war against terror', and in parallel with possibilities for advanced technology that has become an essential part of how we, as humans, understand our life as individuals and as communities. One consequence of the paradigm is a certain gaze upon religious communities, where some become more visible than others, such as Muslims who wear the hijab or any other symbol which identifies them as Muslim.[3] This surveillance gaze can also be activated between Muslims. For example, a New Yorker who experiences the dilemma facing members of his mosque, who fear breaching their religious principles by suspecting an

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[2] I have analysed the intertwined relation between ideas, religion, human rights, and politics in *Övervakad. Människor, maskiner och Gud*, Stockholm: Timbro, 2018.

[3] For a discussion about surveillance and visibility/invisibility, see Casper, Monica/ Moore, Lisa Jean: *Missing Bodies. The Politics of Visibility,* New York: NYU Press, 2009, 1-131.

innocent Muslim of being a police informant in a context where the whole community is perceived by the State as a threat to national security. Or a Muslim in India who relates her fear at the intrusion into her religious freedom by politicised Hindu fundamentalist vigilantes while her data from her phone or computer is collected by the State.

Surveilled and Surveillors in the Big Other

In the field of surveillance studies, people today not only talk about a Big Brother society, but also about a Big Other society, a concept introduced by Shoshana Zuboff.[4] The paradigm of the 'war against terror' is one aspect of surveillance, to this the following examples can be added: social media, private security industry, commercial interests, climate and health control, data traffic, physical communications, border controls, computer games, collecting and sorting biometrical data, and more. In the new surveillance society, humans all over the globe (more or less) voluntarily participate in surveillance. We are both surveilled and surveillors while we, for example, use smartphone apps in religious practice, as well as many other things we do in our daily lives. One can use a smartphone to self-surveil one's daily Bible reading and prayer discipline. Meanwhile, another person can follow their practice and engage by giving a big digital hand if the person fulfils the daily schedule or participates in or shares the prayer. The believer will expose herself for praise, affirmation or corrections that will change their way of behaving. This is nothing new, but smart technology may deepen the feeling of being surveilled. Not least because the border between what is acceptable or unacceptable to share is often a point of discussion. The logic of the argument in the long term can develop into the question:

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[4] Zuboff, Shoshana: *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism. The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power,* London: Profile Books, 2019.

why should anyone deny sharing everything about oneself with the religious community where one belongs?

Bex Lewis noticed from her The Big Bible Project and Christian Discipleship Online research between 2010-15 that surveillance in religious communities can be liberating for some and, at the same time, restricting for others. This tension relates to both formation of faiths and "the subsequent imperative to mission". The result of her study shows that "the surveillant affordances offer the opportunity for 'many to many' interactions between peers, rather than the 'one to many' of the pulpit and the people".[5] She argues that using social media in religious contexts becomes a formational strategy. As peers include not only fellow believers but users beyond the Christian community, additional dimensions of performance emerge. Boundaries between secular and religious dimensions of a user's life may collapse, generating challenges and opportunities for spiritual integrity and formation.

Another form of voluntary surveillance practices by religious communities can be found in a series of smartphone applications designed to self-monitor spiritual disciplines. Choosing to be nudged towards practices such as Bible reading and prayer, users are selecting technologies of the self that are not so much about control but an expression of self-paternalism. It is a "mode of governance that subtly promotes particular (personally) desired behaviours".[6] From a religious point of view, one can ask how this circular system of expression produces a certain religious person, a person one chooses to become – or that the 'system' teaches one to become.

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[5] Lewis, Bex, "Social Media, Peer Surveillance, Spiritual Formation, and Mission: Practising Christian Faith in a Surveilled Public Space', in: *Surveillance & Society* 16(4), 2018, 517-532.

[6] Pridmore, Jason / Yijing, Wang, "Prompting Spiritual Practices through Christian Faith Applications: Self-Paternalism and the Surveillance of the Soul', in: *Surveillance & Society* 16(4), 2018, 502–516.

All-new smart technologies are embodied in the world and built into the political and commercial systems. Zuboff calls it *Surveillance Capitalism*:

> "Instead of claiming work (or land, or wealth) for the market dynamic as industrial capitalism once did, surveillance capitalism audaciously lays claim to private experience for translation into fungible commodities that are rapidly swept up into the exhilarating life of the market … surveillance capitalism embodies a new logic of accumulation."[7]

Mapping Surveillance, Religion and Human Rights: A Proposal

To relate this complex and manifold question about surveillance to religion, also a varied concept, is of course a challenge. In 2016, Eric Stoddart and I initiated the *Surveillance & Religion Network*, to frame some of the theological, ethical and human rights issues which we found relevant in the initial stage.[8] The two-year project ended with a special issue in the scientific publication *Surveillance & Society*.[9] The questions and arguments in this article will partly be presented and inspired from that issue, and partly a continuation from where Stoddart and I left it in 2018. We had the ambition to include experiences and reflections from

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[7] Zuboff, Shoshana, "Surveillance Capitalism and the Challenge of Collective Action", in: *New Labor Forum*, 28(1), 2019, 10-29.

[8] Surveillance & Religion Network, https://ericstoddart.wp.st-andrews.ac.uk/surveillance-religion-network/ (accessed in 2 June 2022). The network was funded for two years by the Arts & Humanities Research Council in England.

[9] Stoddart, Eric / Wigorts Yngvesson, Susanne, "Surveillance and Religion", in: *Surveillance & Society*, 16 (4), 2018, 393-398. For a deeper understanding of the combination of surveillance and Christian theology see Stoddart, Eric, *Theological Perspectives on a Surveillance Society: Watching and Being Watched*. Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2011.

different religions, but for different reasons most of the contributions were from Christian contexts, even though the results show, of course, that there are a multitude of issues raised within Christian communities and surveillance. These are in themselves experiences that in some part also can be applied to other contexts of faith.

After we had problematised and raised central issues about surveillance and religion, Stoddart and I identified various sorts of surveillance: first, surveillance within religions, for example when religious communities use surveillance to monitor or control people for different reasons; second, surveillance of religious groups, for example when the police or companies sort and categorise people according to religious identity; third, surveillance as a way of religious groups understanding and sorting people outside their own community, for example norms that underline the religious community as different from other groups and behaviours. Further, from these perspectives we identified eight clusters about the intersections of religion, law, and human rights:[10]

Uncontentious	A	Legally and religiously permitted	
	B	Legally required and religiously permitted	
	C	Legally and religiously required	
	D	Religiously required and legally permitted	
	E	Legally permitted but not religiously permitted	
Contentious	F	Legally required but not religiously permitted	
	G	Religiously permitted	

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[10] Stoddart/ Wigorts Yngvesson, *op.cit.,* 394-396.

		but illegal	
	H	Religiously required but illegal	
Contentious	F	Legally required but not religiously permitted	F1 … and outside human rights
			F2 … although within human rights
	G	Religiously permitted but illegal	G1 … and outside human rights
			G2 … although within human rights
	H	Religiously required but illegal	H1 … outside human rights
			H2 … although within human rights

From this overview one can see that there are issues about surveillance and religion that are relatively uncontentious and others that are often considerably more contentious. The borders between the sections can vary, depending on the religion, law and human right which is the focus. Further, contexts and ideologies can influence the understanding of a certain surveillance practice, so that a practice can be regarded as uncontentious by some people on one occasion and contentious by the same people in another situation.

Lateral, self, state, commercial, high-tech, and non-technological surveillance strategies intersect with religious practices, identities, and ethical concerns. Parallel to these intersections are also narratives for all religions and worldviews that need to be analysed in relation to religious

and surveillance practices. This is not a question about some essence of religion, but questions on the construction of certain values, ideas, faiths, et cetera. Community, belief, and practice, each energised by faith, are woven together with systems of monitoring, data analysis, and influence. Faith is, in probably unique combinations, woven with political, cultural, economic, and historical perspectives. It is by taking surveillance and religion as complex constructions that the intersections are often fascinating and worthy of critical consideration. The result of the map merely serves as a tool to launch complex analyses.

The model of the intersections of surveillance practices in relation to religion, law, and human rights demonstrates a richly complex field of study. The ways in which these intersections are navigated will largely depend on the contextual hermeneutics of religious groups, some with reference to centralised systems with different levels of control (e.g. the Roman Catholic Magisterium of teaching and discipline, the *ulama* and *al-mutaww'in* in Saudi Arabia, the chieftain of the Cushitic peoples of Greater Somalia). Other religious groups rely on decentralised arrangements (e.g. in the education of teachers of Islam, the aborigines of Australia, parts of the Pentecostalism movement), but both centralised and dispersed models practice within contexts of global mass communications that can generate new influential allegiances that variously reinforce or destabilise traditional lines of religious authority.

Uncontentious Acts of Surveillance, Law, and Religion

To help with the application of the map, Stoddart and I exemplified situations of surveillance, technologies, and religion. One example of what is mostly regarded as uncontentious activity in (A) is the practice of using a smartphone app for self-monitoring the regularity of one's reading of sacred texts (although a community that broadly eschews modern technology, such as the Amish, might not permit such). Even if it is both legally and religiously permitted, it can be problematic in an ethical sense, depending on how one regards limits of privacy and

subjection towards a religious system. In a case study of a Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (FLDS) community in Canada, known to its members as Bountiful, Deirdre McDonald illustrates how surveillance works between its own members. She describes the religious group as insular in the way that people control the information and the evaluation of it, that the group also maintains and deploys secrets and secretive practices as a strategy to control its own members and manage its relationship to law enforcement agencies. She argues that "the function of secrecy and visibility in an insular religious community is both diverse and evolving".[11]

The legal requirement to report a fellow believer who is being 'radicalised' might also be permitted within an ethical system of a faith community. To choose not to report could retrospectively be considered as lack of an ethical framework, control, and in the long term as a lack of trust. In this sense a certain level of surveillance can be considered a good action, a social surveillance of people's network, communication, and opinions to be able to foresee unwanted behaviours and beliefs (B).

The use of data collection and scrutiny to monitor those working with vulnerable people could well be required both legally and religiously according to state legislation and the tenets of a religious organisation. In a broader perspective, it can even be welcome so as to be transparent about diaconal activities, since it serves as a good example to rest of the society. For example, during the Covid-19 pandemic, churches 'medialised' themselves as people who care for isolated, elderly persons, helping them by delivering groceries and singing to them to break their feelings of loneliness. This is also a part of daily life for many religious communities, to help the poor and

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[11] McDonald, Deirdre, "Regulating Visibility: Secrecy and Surveillance in Insular Religious Communitie"sin: *Surveillance & Society* 16(4), 2018, 488–501.

vulnerable, but during the pandemic it became 'news', a voluntarily and uncontentious form of surveillance.

In some religious traditions, regular oral confession to a priest is mandatory and legally permitted (but would not be if the priest secretly recorded the confession) (D) – although it is worth observing that religious requirements can sometimes be treated by different groups with degrees of stringency (such as in expectations of disciplined fasting or almsgiving). How members and officials weigh such stringency with varying degrees often merits critical study, with questions such as the virtue of fulfilling 'requirements', the aim and consequences of the action, how it effects the common good at a work-place, for example, (people who are fasting can become unfocused at work and sometimes a danger to others).

There are practices that, although permitted legally, are not allowed by a religious group in light of its traditions (E). Deploying CCTV in a place of worship might, by some religious groups, not be permitted based on certain perceptions of privacy. Also, consuming certain films, art, literature, political publications, can be permitted legally but not allowed by a religious group or by the leaders of that group. These later examples become controversial when the religious group's practices are regarded as too strange compared to the majority opinion.

Contentious Acts of Surveillance, Law, and Religion

The more contentious intersections of law and religion are particularly interesting (F-H). Let it be emphasised once more that cultures and nations may have different views and borders for what is legally or religiously permitted or illegal. The discussed map is an overview of complex concepts. Furthermore, it is, of course, unwise and mistaken to assume that a state's legal framework is mapped exactly to human rights conventions. For one thing, human rights are not one holistic system, but different articles, ideas, values, and principles,

which often collide in practice and implementation.[12] Quite what the result and values look like will depend on the specific human right (or cluster of rights) in play (e.g., freedom from arbitrary interference with privacy, *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, Article 12, or freedom of thought, conscience and religion, Article 18). Having said that, it is fruitful to analyse the concepts of surveillance and religion in addition to a human rights agenda.

Something that can be legally required but not religiously permitted might signal a religious group that falls under the definition of 'radicalisation' a particular state could employ as justification for reporting a person to the police (F). The religious group's point of view could be that any community member's co-operation with 'enemies' reflects a lack of belief and/or an act of betrayal to weaken or eliminate the religious group or its practices. Further, the example mentioned earlier of a state requirement to report a fellow worshipper who is being "radicalised' can be viewed in a new light. Where a state considers almost any religious activity as subversive, the legal requirement to inform risks falling outside the borders of human rights from the state's point of view − or another way to put it: such a requirement would underline certain aspects of Article 18, namely freedom from religion and other rights addressed as security (F1). This would likely bolster a religious group's ethical argument not to permit such reporting. In such cases, informing is not permitted within the ethical framework of that religious community. Where a state uses a national security caveat to proportionately limit freedom of religion (F2), the grounds on which the religious prohibition of informing on a radicalised worshipper are considerably less secure. The lines and borders of such laws and motivations for restrictions of religious freedom are continuously extensible and negotiable, for the state as well as for religious groups.

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[12] See for example Donnelly, Jack, *Universal Human Rights in Theory and Practice,* New York: Cornell University, 2003, 38-53.

In history as today, it can be extremely hard to belong to a religious (or atheist) community or defend a belief as an individual. This is an experience many religious minorities face worldwide. Through history until this day, we know that the law does not guarantee religious freedom and other human rights for everyone. While it can be truly motivated to forbid certain religious activities and to surveil it to protect children, for example, it is also common for the law to be designed to persecute people in the name of religion or politics, and sometimes even in the name of human rights. The current tensions in India between its democratic commitment to religious freedom and pressure from hardline Hindu nationalists to restrict the activities of minority religions are an example of this. Jijo James Indiparambil has identified the politicised religious vigilantism against Christian, Muslim, and other minority faith communities. His study casts light on the strain that can be placed on legal protections against discriminatory surveillance. While religious freedom is guaranteed in the constitution and respected and practised in India, there are also laws in several Hindu-majority states that have limited this human right, and, in order to implement the new laws, they use "discriminatory monitoring and surveillance based on religious affiliation".[13] (F1)

There may also be instances where an action is religiously permitted and also illegal (G). In some countries, it is illegal for a religious community or leader (or anyone) to hold people's personal information (particularly of religious identity) without explicit consent. This may also be regarded as an immoral action within the religious group, depending on how the data is used, even though the religious community would agree on an (informal) permission even if illegal. A surveillance system can be used without technological equipment when

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[13] Indiparambil, Jijo James, "Does Surveillance Intersect with Religious Freedom? The Dialectics of Religious Tolerance and (Re)Proselytism in India Today", in: *Surveillance & Society* 16(4), 2018, 432–445.

gathering information on an ordinary situation, e.g. how people dress and where they go. One example is a Ghanaian Jehovah's Witness who followed the government-enforced closure of their places of worship in 1989, of clandestine meetings in homes, which they reached by walking in work clothes to give suspicious neighbours the impression that they are merely a farm labourer. Further, the case of a religious group encouraging some members to engage in sousveillance[14] towards a discriminatory state (G1) might garner international support. On the other hand, a religious group that encourages its members to practice lateral surveillance of women entering an abortion clinic might well find their ethical stance challenged from a human rights and a majority perspective (G2). Action that is religiously required, such as monitoring of women in a closed, insulated, patriarchal religious community, may amount to chattel slavery and be illegal in some jurisdictions, and be regarded as a violation of human rights in most states (H). There is sometimes the possibility that religiously required action might be illegal but still be within human rights conventions (H1). this might be a religious group, in a state that prohibits or seriously constrains freedom of religion, consensually gathering data on people's encounters with security services. Likewise, in some states, it can be illegal to practice or talk about one's beliefs, religion or atheism when it collides with the official religion or political agenda. With reference to the Uighurs in China, surveillance technology has shown to be very efficient at oppressing this Muslim group. The same technology is used to inform the world of what is going on. Citizens, lawyers, religious leaders, non-profit organisations, and others can surveil the surveillor. Finally, the case of women being monitored in a closed, isolated, patriarchal

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[14] Sousveillance means shortly that one brings social or technological surveillance to a human rather than an hierarchical level as in surveillance, for example by wearable personal technologies such as smartphones.

religious community from which escape is scarcely realistic would likely be criticised for being both illegal and outside human rights (H1).

Concluding Reflections

One thing Eric Stoddart and I noticed while working on this project is that nearly every religious context we studied or approached is quite unaware of the issues raised in this surveillance society. Some religious communities are of course well aware from their experience, but when it comes to the reflection of how surveillance technologies are used against and within religious groups, people and practices, there is a distinct lack of reflection. One big issue that I did not raise in this article is the connection between commercial interests and intelligent technology, which is able to shape not only individuals but communities and the inner self, i.e., how people think, act and believe – and what we think about. Shoshana Zuboff describes this as a new world where human beings become products of a surveillance capitalistic system. This is a global phenomenon and religious practices are of course also part of the system. Even if the system is global and unimaginably complex and strong, it is, after all, not determined to become this or that. Religious people and communities should become more aware of the politics, the ideologies and the aims of (surveillance) technologies to be able to shape them into an ethical way of living with the intelligent machines, and also be better placed to criticise the misuse of it.

Further research into how religious groups designate surveillance practices as permissible will open theological, philosophical, anthropological, and sociological complexities. The hermeneutics operating within, for example, Christian readings of the divine and human gaze in the New Testament might be usefully critiqued. The authority ascribed by a religious group to its own sacred texts may well be contested through internal struggles worked out in strategies of power. Such investigations will be valuable to faith practitioners but also

contribute to wider literacy amongst policymakers concerning how religion and surveillance intersect. Similarly, although practices may be required today by a religious group, the evolution of those practices over time points to the dynamic ways of religion.

IV

CASE STUDIES - EXPERIENCES AND CHALLENGES

THE PARADOX OF RELIGIOUS POPULISM - THE CURIOUS CASE OF BELGIUM

Johan Temmerman[*]

When one talks about populism from a religious perspective, the increasing diversity of philosophies of life cannot go unmentioned. This is strongly the case if one focuses on the Belgian context. The complex political structure with separate levels of government per language group resulted in a diffuse social climate, with Flemish and Walloon cultures on the one hand and Dutch and French as foot languages, complemented by German as the third official national language, and the Brussels cosmopolitan-oriented metropolis in between. This complex state structure came about through numerous historical-cultural shifts. In recent decades, globalisation and migration have added a number of specific elements to this complex society, making fluidity and multiple modernity characteristic of contemporary Belgium.

In this contribution I will outline the challenges that diversity and pluralism pose to religions, using this Belgian reality. First, I will provide a brief historical overview of the religious landscape in relation to political developments in Belgium. Next, I will mention the ecumenical and interreligious initiatives that are prevalent as

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institutional responses to diversity and populism. During this brief study, I noticed a paradox in which populist conceptions of religion appeal to universalist foundations, but at the same time question this universalism when it comes to the plurality of meaning. Finally, I conceptualise the concept of pluralism theologically, in order to eliminate this paradox.

In the article, I use the often-quoted definition of populism from Cas Mudde. He describes political populism as being grounded in a dichotomy of society, with 'the people' opposed to 'the elite'. The people, through populist politicians, represent the 'true' and 'pure' general will, while the elite are corrupt and only pursue their own interests.[1]

Religious populism has rarely been studied. I use my own definition, based on some characteristics of the recruiting rhetoric that is popular in religious communities. These characteristics are a literal interpretation of holy texts and dogmatic rules of faith, the superiority of one's own tradition and a moral disapproval of modernity. Religious populism distinguishes between 'true' and 'false' believers, between those who practice religion personally and those who are 'lukewarm' (cultural) followers.

The Religious Landscape

When Belgium was founded in 1830, it was given a very liberal constitution. Included in it was freedom of religion. This was a direct result of the *Constitution civile du clergé* concluded in 1790. Under the influence of the French Revolution, the property of the Catholic Church was confiscated, and priests were given civil service status. Following that, Napoleon concluded a concordat with Pope Pius VII on July 15,

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[1] Mudde, Cas (2019), "Populism in the Twenty-First Century: An Illiberal Democratic Response to Undemocratric Liberalism", Pennsylvania: Penn Arts & Sciences, https://amc.sas.upenn.edu/cas-mudde-populism-twenty-first-century (accessed 13 July 2022).

1801, in which freedom of worship was restored, and in exchange for the church property already sold, the priests received a salary from the state. Both key moments mark what Marcel Gauchet calls the end of the absolutist phase in Europe, which from the 17th century onwards guarded the balance between secular and religious power. The Napoleon Concordat of 1801 reconciled the irreconcilables, according to Joseph Schumpeter, because it officially granted the church freedom of cult and, thus, to act socially while endorsing the primacy of the state. Priests were required to swear allegiance to the law.[2] The new Belgian constitution also organised freedom of religion in this way. In practice, this initially meant that on the religious level the Catholic Church recovered its dominant function. The French philosopher and politician Jules Simon (1814-1896) summarised it aptly when he wrote: "The State dominates the church, but in the state the church dominates."[3] The Belgian constitution was a construction set up by an alliance of Catholics and liberals to oust Dutch King Willem I. After all, between 1814 and 1830, what is now Belgium belonged to the United Kingdom of the Netherlands and was governed from The Hague. The freedom of religion guaranteed by the new constitution came mainly down to Catholic freedoms. The main Protestant presence during the period of the United Kingdom were Dutch soldiers, merchants, and civil servants. Most of them disappeared after the proclamation of independent Belgium. Nevertheless, the small Protestant denomination obtained recognition, beside the even smaller Jewish and Anglican parishes, and could enjoy the established basic rights. This has since changed over the last 200 years. At present (2021), there are seven recognised cults, six of which are denominations (Catholic, Protestant Evangelical, Orthodox,

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[2] Schumpeter, Joseph, *Capitalism, socialism and democracy*, New York: Harper & Brothers, 1942, 336-337.

[3] Gauchet, Marcel, *La religion dans la démocratie. Parcours de la laïcité (Nederlandse vertaling 'Religie in de democratie')*, Amsterdam: SUN, 1998, 59.

Anglican, Jewish and Muslim) and organised atheism. Procedures are underway to also recognise Buddhism in the future.

These formal and constitutionally entrenched freedoms do not follow the daily rapid changes. The reality of religious shifts has changed profoundly under the pressure of globalisation and migration. The sociocultural changes during the past decades show an extremely diffuse picture on religion. Migration fuels the attachment to traditional forms of religion. In Europe, 9 out of 10 migrants are religious. More than half (56%) are Christian, 27% are Muslim. The others call themselves Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist or Jewish. Only 1 in 10 is a non-believer. These usually migrate to Europe from Russia or China.[4] But religion is also increasing globally. During the Cold War, for example, Russia was proud of its atheism, while today the country explicitly presents itself as Orthodox, President Putin leading the way. In Turkey, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan is playing the Islamic card. In the Middle East, Southeast Asia, India, Myanmar and many other regions of the world, religion is growing. Extrapolation and projection of recent shifts in the global religious landscape predict a significant increase in major religions by 2060, while the number of unaffiliated will remain more or less stable. The primary reason is birth.[5] Religion is back. Globally, religion has re-entered the political scene. It is not expected to decline in the coming decades.

In Belgium specifically, these developments are evident. Changes are taking place in many areas and mainly have to do with increasing diversity. More than ever, we are confronted with countless expressions

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[4] Pew Research Center, "Faith on the move: The Religious Affiliation of International Migrants – Fact Sheet: European Union", https://assets.pewre search.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/11/2012/03/europe-fact-sheet.pdf (accessed 13 July 2022).

[5] Pew Research Center (2017), "The Changing Global Religious Landscape", https://www.pewforum.org/2017/04/05/the-changing-global-religious-landscape/ (accessed 13 July 2022)

of religious reality that coexist. There are 183 nationalities in Brussels.[6] On the religious map, the enormous increase in African churches stands out. The Islamic share of the religious market is also increasing. In Brussels, this rises to 30%, as does the Christian share. The remaining percentages concern all kinds of indigenous cults, alternative spirituality, and atheism. This increasing diversity, on the one hand, highlights the content dissonance and, on the other hand, underlines the fact that, in many cultures, religion is seamlessly linked with identity. These two components of the late modern religious landscape are closely linked. However, the philosophical landscape in the globalised world, whose metropoles and Brussels especially are more frequently becoming microcosms and culturally complex, presents a curious paradox. The internal contradiction is expressed in the observation that the presence and confrontation of religions and cultures simultaneously stimulate an intensification and adherence to one's own tradition. The more traditions and cultures live together, the stronger the concentration of the self and family. A particular observation in this respect in Belgium is that, among young people between 14 and 25 years of age, the pronounced ideological orientation in large cities is significantly higher than in the rest of the country. This is especially true for Muslims and atheists, while young people in cities refer to themselves as less Catholic or indifferent.[7] What is remarkable is that young people in metropolitan areas identify more strongly with religion or atheism than they do elsewhere. According to the researchers, this has to do with a symbolic value, whereby one honours standards and traditions without

[6] Bruzz, "JOUW VRAAG. Welke nationaliteiten zijn niet of nauwelijks vertegenwoordigd in Brussel?", https://www.bruzz.be/samenleving/jouw-vraag-welke-nationaliteiten-zijn-niet-nauwelijks-vertegenwoordigd-brussel-2019-05 (accessed 13 July 2022)

[7] Jeugd Onderzoeks Platform, "Facts & Figures: Religie bij Vlaamse jongeren", https://www.jeugdonderzoeksplatform.be/files/Facts_and_Figures__ religie.pdf (accessed 13 July 2022)

practicing religion as such. Formal rather than lived. This also applies to the number of young people who call themselves 'Christian'. What is remarkable and not surprising is that children of migrants of all backgrounds attach more importance to religion than natives. These figures and observations underline what I call the philosophical paradox of globalisation: the more diverse the multitude, the more intense the singular.

Religion and Populism

The paradox reported above results in religion and traditions being reduced to markers of identity on the one hand, and a radicalisation trend occurring within religious experience on the other. Identity and radicalisation are two elements that link contemporary religion with populism. Most researchers of late modern populism agree that the inequality created by neoliberal capitalism generates an anti-elitist attitude. Researchers use an ideational approach to political positioning that pinpoint the dysfunction of representative democracy. This is how one distinguishes populists from genuine politicians. The empirical investigation of contemporary populism conducted by Cas Mudde sets the tone. He defines populism as:

> "A thin-centered ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic camps, 'the pure people' versus 'the corrupt elite', and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* of the people."[8]

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[8] Mudde, C. and Kaltwasser, C.R., "Populism and (Liberal) Democracy: A Framework for Analysis" in: Mudde, C. and Kaltwasser, R.C. (ed.), *Populism in Europe and the Americas: Threat or Corrective for Democracy?,* Cambridge University Press, 2012, 25.

Populists claim only they represent the people, thus appealing to the symbolic representation of the general will. This is particularly important in assessing the connection between religion and populism. Axel Mueller and others emphasise in this regard that the anti-elite stance is, therefore, always linked to an anti-pluralistic connotation: we and only we are the people.[9] This positioning uses religious traditions to denote the identity that characterises the true people. Oliver Roy points out the ambivalence that characterises the use of religion in populist movements. As an example, he examined the French *Front National*, the extreme-right party of Marine Le Pen. She uses Christianity to oppose Islam, but at the same time criticises the institutional churches of being too liberal, especially on migration issues. She also denounces conservative church morality in terms of family and sexuality. This ambivalent attitude allows the *Front National* to simultaneously denounce the French political elite while relying on the distinctive French identity of anticlerical *laïcité*. Roy concludes that in populist parties:

> "Religion matters first and foremost as a marker of identity, enabling them to distinguish between the good 'us' and the bad 'them'."[10]

Christianity as a national identity, Roy said, is so thin-centred that it can be easily hijacked. The same is true of Islam, but in reverse. Populist parties oppose migration and use a barbaric image of what Islam is, according to their rhetoric. They say that European Christian culture is civilised, while Islam has not experienced an Enlightenment and

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[9] Mueller, A., "The meaning of 'populism'" in *Philosophy and Social Criticism 45(9-10)*, 2019, 1029, https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0191453719872277 (accessed 13 July 2022)

[10] Roy, O., "The French National Front: From Christian Identity to Laicité", in Marzouki, N., McDonnell, D. and Roy, O. (ed.), *Saving the People: How Populists Hijack Religion*, London: Hurst and Publishers, 2016, 79-93.

consequently has remained stuck in a precivilisation phase. This gives rise to a form of Christianism, as in the US after 9/11 and in the Netherlands after the murders of Pim Fortuyn and Theo van Gogh, one that mainly floats on strong fears channelled into an anti-Islam discourse.[11] These studies show that religion plays an identitarian and negative role in the current populist political climate. One is only Christian to the extent that one is opposed to Islam.

In a survey article on the recent growth of populism in the perspective of religion, Daniel Nilsson DaHanas and Marat Shterin see a remarkable connection with the pioneering sociology of Emile Durkheim. Starting with the ambiguity outlined above with which populists use religion, they point to the notion of the 'sacred people.' In populist discourse, their own people are 'sacred' and their cultural values superior to those of others. In the Durkheimian perspective, in which the religion of a people symbolises its organisation and resulting identity, populists name the thoughts and feelings of the people as absolute beyond temporal reality, elevated as the norm of society.[12] These lofty values allow for the uncritical dissemination of false news and the targeting of people for self-interest in the name of the general popular will, as the election of Trump and the Brexit referendum in 2016 illustrate. In this regard, it is particularly interesting to note the extent to which the Christian religion contributed to both populist trends. In the U.S., it was clear that the politically active right-wing Evangelical movement was a strong support for Donald Trump during his campaign, whereas this was not the case in England. In the UK, traditional Anglicanism was a strong supporter of Brexit, while British

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[11] Brubacker, R., "Between Nationalism and Civilization: The European Populist Movement in Comparative Perspective" in *Ethnic and Racial Studies 40(8),* 2017, 1191-1226.

[12] Nilsson, Daniel / Shterin, Marat, "Religion and the rise of populism" in *Religion, State & Society 46(3)*, 2018, 177-185.

Evangelicalism had a pro-European profile.[13] Consequently, the notion of sacred people and values makes it possible for populist movements to turn against two enemies at the same time: against the elite and against the other, this is against mainstream politicians and migrants. Both threaten the 'sacred' values of the people. Religion, both in its original dynamic (Durkheim) and in its substantive dogmatic form, facilitates political populism. These lines of connection between religion and populism should alert theologians and church leaders not to allow themselves to be taken for a ride. Religious traditions have multiple facets and faces. The political significance of religion - already present in its most elementary forms - prompts us to leave behind the naive assumption that religion and traditions are purely an empowering force. The connection between religion and populism also inspires us to thoroughly consider the meaning of the 'sacred' in light of the changing world.

Populism and Self-governance

Let us return to Belgium. Belgium's curious situation has historical and social roots. At its foundation and for the first 100 years, Belgium was run by the French-speaking elite. Wallonia was more prosperous than Flanders, which lived largely from agriculture. A growing industrialisation and the presence of the ports of Antwerp and Zeebrugge, along with the phasing out of the mining industry in Wallonia, caused a reversal of the social landscape. Flanders took the lead, with attention to language and self-government, establishing a disempowered political class. Religious legitimacy was provided by a conservative Catholicism that was ubiquitous in Flanders before World War II. But this Flemish Movement became compromised during the 20th century by outspoken sympathies for, and in some cases

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[13] Nilsson, Daniel / Shterin, Marat, ibid.180.

collaboration with, the German occupiers during 1940-45. This period, in which economic revival was accompanied by strong pillarisation and rigid religious Catholicism was aptly described by Flemish novelist Hugo Claus in *The Sorrow of Belgium* (1983).[14] At the end of the 20th century, a renewed democratic form of nationalism emerged in Flanders. This tendency is completely absent in the French-speaking part of the country, where a strong 'Belgicist' policy sets the tone. This puts communities in Belgian under constant political pressure, with one region striving for self-government and another region particularly wanting to preserve and strengthen the unitary structure.[15] Underlying this peculiar situation is a shift in the social map, with Flanders initially needing Walloon support when the French language dominated the administration in Belgium, while the situation was completely reversed after World War II, with a Walloon region needing the unitary state in terms of social services.

In terms of religion, no less drastic shifts occurred. First, there is the fact that secularisation has been proceeding at an unprecedented rate since the 1970s. The Catholic Church in Belgium has suffered from ongoing scandals surrounding child abuse. In addition, Belgium, like the rest of the Western world, experienced a sharp increase in migrant churches at the beginning of the 21st century. The traditional religious institutions are under pressure and can maintain themselves through the state support that is still in place. The value of cultural heritage plays an important role in this regard. But at the same time, the law of the free market also dictates the religious 'economy'. It is in this area that religion once again threatens to fall into the troubled waters of political populism. In the 19th century, Catholic identity played an important role

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[14] Claus, Hugo, *The Sorrow of Belgium*, New York: Abrams Books, 2019.

[15] Following the 2012 local elections, political scientist Cas Mudde analysed the peculiar and complex political situation in Belgium: https://www.open democracy.net/en/flemish-nationalism-new-landscape/.

in the emancipation of the predominantly Flemish and poor agricultural and working-class population. The actions of priest Deans (1839-1907), who fought against child labour and for equal rights, and as a result clashed with the Church authorities in Rome, forms the backbone of the Catholic labour movement to this day. Another famous novelist, Louis-Paul Boon, described the life of Deans and did the same for the struggles in the 16th century, when Flanders was the scene of religious developments that led to Protestantism.[16] But completely intertwined with these social struggles, in both the 16th and 19th centuries, was the commitment to emancipation. The use of the vernacular provided a lever to create its own level of government. It is noteworthy that the Protestant tradition, which received a strong impetus from the liberal party in the 19th century, was not unaffected either. Here too religion was used to underscore the identity of the people. The movement of liberal Protestantism was famous in this respect, which arose around figures such as Emile De Laveleye, Goblet D'Aviella and Paul Fredericq. In the Flemish part of the country, this movement supported the so-called 'orangism', which advocated the restoration of unity with the Netherlands. This political struggle was fully democratic. It changed when, first during World War I and then from the 1930s onwards, part of this movement saw an opportunity to install self-government with the help of the German occupiers. This resulted in an extreme Front movement and collaboration. Political populism gained religious legitimacy in these groups. However, this trend has completely disappeared, merged into the far-right populist party *Vlaams Belang* (Flemish Interest) on the one hand and the democratic nationalist party *N-VA* (New Flemish Alliance) on the other. Politically, both parties

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[16] The life of priest Deans was described in: Boon, Louis-Paul, *Priester Deans of hoe in de negentiende eeuw de arbeiders van Aalst vochten tegen armoede en onrecht*, Amsterdam: De Arbeiderspers, 1992. The 16th century is covered in: Boon, Louis-Paul, *Het Geuzenboek*, Amsterdam: DE Arbeiderspers, 2013.

advocate subordinating religion to the common values, which are grounded in the Enlightenment and linked by language and constitution. This puts them on the same line of all parties in Belgium. Contemporary political populism manifests itself mainly in the area of migration policy. And religion plays an important role in this.

Politics of Fear

The peculiarity of the Belgian situation with regard to religion and politics comes to the fore in the relationship between the recognised religious cults and the 'free' churches. The relationship touches on the foundations of what religion means socially. As I described above, the recognised religions can lean on a longstanding political goodwill. Despite the various historical and moral debacles that have taken place over the past 200 years, freedom of religion remains an unshakeable constitutional right. This includes financial support. However, in two different waves after both World Wars and due to recent migration, the share of free and indigenous churches and religions have grown significantly. The recognised institutions have had to give up considerable ground. An important recruiting argument of these free churches, besides the ethnically determined sociality, is the reproach that traditional churches compromise with political and moral liberalism. Even though the church leadership in Rome disapproves of women in the ministry or of homosexual relations, the local bishops' rush to report time and again that the soup is not eaten as hot as it is served.[17]

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[17] The most recent controversy arose in March 2021 when the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith in Rome issued a document that a blessing of homosexual couples is not permitted, to which the Bishop of Antwerp Bishop Bonny promptly responded, expressing "deep sorrow and embarrassment for his church. Published in the main newspapers De Morgen and De Standaard of March 17, 2012: https://www.demorgen.be/nieuws/ik-voel-plaatsvervangende-

Likewise, evangelical tendencies within Protestantism, injected in Flanders mainly by missionaries from the U.S. and the Netherlands and in Wallonia from France and Switzerland, employ a rigid Biblical literacy when it comes to morality and human rights. Add to this the most recent growth of radicalisation within Islam, with the proportion of Belgian youth involved in terror attacks and the war in Syria being significant, and it is not surprising that the image of religion in Belgium is highly charged, if not very negative. The recruiting power emanating from these new churches and faith communities is usually linked to an anti-modernist and anti-scientific attitude, which often takes on 'sectarian' allure. In Christian circles, this tracks with an anti-Islam discourse, which links these movements with political populism. That is why I speak of 'religious populism' in this context. It is grounded in the literal interpretation of the Bible, the superiority of Christianity, and a moral avoidance of the world. The theological distinction between 'good' or 'real' believers and between 'lukewarm' or 'liberal' believers feed the distinction between 'us' and 'them'.

The Austrian theologian Wolfgang Palaver speaks in this context of inner group solidarity and calibrates the term "parochial altruism".[18] Anthropologists have already pointed to the ethnocentric confinement of humanity within the boundaries of the tribe, village, or language community. Economists also point out that this ingroup solidarity influences political decision-making in modernity. The basic pattern of parochial altruism reinforces the internal cohesion with an external enemy. Hence, political populist movements can mobilise on a large scale. In a recent article, Palaver points out that this mobilisation

schaamte-bisschop-bonny-excuseert-zich-voor-vaticaan-standpunt-over-homoseksualiteit~bded456a/

[18] Palaver, Wolfgang, "Parochial altruism and Christian universalism: On the deep difficulties of creating solidarity without outside enemies" in: Dumouchel, P. and Gotoh, R (eds.), *Social bonds as freedom: Rivisiting the dichotomy of the universal and the particular,* New York: Berghahn Books, 2015, 153-173.

contributes to a social climate in which fear rules. Religious violence legitimises populist fearmongering. In order to overcome this current problem, religious communities will have to become aware of the mechanism of parochial altruism in order to extend it to civil society in a pre-political realm.[19] In doing so, Palaver appeals to the distinction made by Henri Bergson (1859-1941) in *The Two Sources of Morality* (1935), where he distinguishes a closed society with a static religion from an open society with a dynamic religion. The latter has roots in a mystical experience of religion, which also characterised the Hebrew prophets and Jesus. The major obstacle to static religion in today's globalised world is religious pluralism. Consequently, political populism and static religion both float on a social climate of fear. There are, however, tendencies and movements within all religious traditions that stimulate an open and pluralistic view of the religion in question, in Judaism, Christianity and Islam.[20] The issue for Palaver and others is to provide for a "monotheistic pluralism" that offers religious security without reserving it for a single tradition.

Interreligious Dialogue

More than 84% of the world's population calls itself a 'believer'.[21] There are about 4300 different belief systems whose adherents use the

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[19] Palaver, Wolfgang, "Populism and religion: On the politics of fear" in *Dialog 58(1)22-29*, 2019, 26.

[20] We can refer to: Sacks, Jonathan, *Not in God's Name: Confronting Religious Violence*, New York: Schocken Books, 2015; Aslan, Reza, *No God but God: The origins, evolution, and future of Islam*, New York: Random House; Moyaert, Marianne, *Leven in Babelse tijden. De noodzaak van een interreligieuze dialoog*, Antwerpen/Utrecht: Pelckmans/Klement, 2011.

[21] A comprehensive demographic study in over 230 countries conducted by Pew Research Centre's Forum on Religion & Public Life estimates that about 5.8 billion people in the world are religiously oriented, which is 84% of 6.9 billion.

term 'religion'. The global reality that religion is more than ever present is the cause of constant confrontation and dialogue. Given the multiplicity, it is becoming increasingly difficult to defend the view that only one religion expresses the full truth. In this respect, religious populism is polarising and misleading. But globalisation also poses challenges to established religious institutions. From the end of the 19th century, awareness grew of the need for dialogue. The 1893 World's Parliament of Religions is generally recognised as the beginning of organised interreligious dialogue. The first meeting took place in Chicago. From then on inter-religious dialogue gained in importance, especially after the Second World War. At the beginning of the 1960s, the awareness that cultures other than Western Christianity were of great value in religious terms grew. Both the World Council of Churches and the Roman Catholic Church showed an increasing interest in other religions from this period onwards.[22] Meanwhile, interreligious dialogue has become established in the institutional religions. The 'free churches' keep their distance from these initiatives.

Sallie King sees seven platforms or phenomena of interreligious dialogue: (1) diplomacy between institutions, (2) parliamentary monologue in which religious leaders present their program, (3) verbal exchange between theologians/experts, (4) grassroots intervisitation, (5)

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https://www.pewforum.org/2012/12/18/global-religious-landscape-exec/ (accessed 20 April2021)

[22] The Second Vatican Council, held in Rome between 1962 and 1965, issued a document called *Nostra Aetate* ('In our time'), which addressed the value of other traditions. Although the Catholic tradition remained the ultimate expression of truth, the document confirmed that other traditions equally contained elements of truth. This made the inter-religious dynamic possible for Catholics. In 1971, the World Council of Churches (WCC) issued its own guidelines for 'dialogue with people of living faith and ideology'. King, Sallie B., "Interreligious Dialogue" in: Meister, Chad (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Religious Diversity,* Oxford University Press, 2011, 101-114.

spiritual dialogue or ritual exchange, (6) joint practical initiatives and (7) internal dialogue.[23] These different levels are well established in the Western world. In Belgium, too, there are numerous inter-religious initiatives in connection with organised atheism. What is special is that these initiatives are often organised by the various governments. For example, Belgium has a Council of Interfaith Dialogue (FILD), in both national languages. But there is also a Flemish Interfaith Dialogue (VILD) and a 'Kreis' in East Belgium for the German-speaking community. Ecumenical and interreligious platforms also exist between the religious institutions themselves, such as the Belgian Council of Religious Leaders, the Consultation of Christian Churches and a Consultation on Christian-Jewish Relations (OCJB).[24] At the grassroots level in local faith communities belonging to recognised institutions, there are numerous initiatives that bring religions closer together. Organising joint celebrations, sharing buildings with each other and mutual solidarity have been very scarce up to now. Religious dialogue is extremely useful but threatens to remain as just words if there is no concrete rapprochement in terms of content. This brings us to the problem of religious pluralism.

Religious Pluralism

The main obstacle to interreligious dialogue is the perception that the participants are bowing to a far-reaching relativisation of the religion itself. This religious relativism is expressed in a dialogue in which everyone sticks to their faith. Then, people exchange friendly opinions, but do not move an inch from their own position, let alone closer to the

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[23] King, ibidem., 101-102.

[24] With thanks to the president of the United Protestant Church in Belgium (VPKB/EPUB) Rev. Steven Fuite and academic researcher Practical Theology drs. Edwin Delen for the information.

other. The interreligious dialogue, however necessary, addresses only one side of religion, namely that of subjective signification. Everyone believes in his or her own. But religion also has another side, for the specific signification is also presented. Religious representations, precepts, and obligations, as well as customs and culture, differ profoundly in the various religions, as well as in denominations and strains within each tradition. Add to this the modernist world view in which science sets the tone when it comes to the origin of the universe and life on earth. In globalised secular societies, it is impossible to reach a moral consensus on religious grounds. Science and human rights demand a pluralistic approach and, consequently, a relativisation of religious representations. The specific expression of religious truth is different in each religion. As a result, during interreligious dialogue, people do not talk about what divides them but what unites them. Underlying this connection is the philosophy that all religions are essentially grounded in the same core idea. Religious pluralism then boils down to the 'golden rule', which is also contained in universal human rights. An additional problem faced by religious leaders and experts committed to interreligious dialogue is what anthropologist Pascal Boyer calls the 'tragedy of the theologian',[25] whereby often inspiring and charismatic figures from the faith community or tradition proclaim messages that contradict routinised versions of religious authorities. The theologian is expected to proclaim what people want to hear, rather than what his expertise implies.

Besides this religious relativism and pluralism, a third non-exclusive tendency can be distinguished, namely that of *henofideism*. Religious fideism reinforces the choice of one's own tradition and, at the same time, allows one's own representations to converge with other traditional

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[25] Boyer, Pascal, *Religion Explained. The Evolutionary Origins of Religious Thought*, New York: Basis Books, 2001, 283-285.

representations.[26] Here the well-known image of the elephant applies, whereby one tradition feels the trunk and another the leg or the tail. Every tradition has a different idea of what the elephant looks like. In *henofideism*, therefore, there is an epistemological plurality. No religion has direct access to the complete truth, and its representations depend on the worldview and context in which one lives. This third view is closely aligned with religious pluralism and also allows for local differences within each tradition.

Conclusion

In this contribution, I argue that trust in religious traditions can overcome the paradox of modern populism. To do so, it is necessary to loosen the exclusivism towards religious representations. Religious pluralism is a fact. The illiberal tendencies of political populism, in reaction against non-democratic liberalism, threaten the use of religions as identity markers. Religious populism follows the same methodology and applies a separation between dissenters on the outside and 'false' (cultural) believers on the inside. The paradox lies in the appeal that exclusive beliefs make to the universalism of their representations, while the same universalism is rejected when it comes to meaning.

It will be up to theologians and other experts in the future to develop a constructive vision and to think through their own tradition in an inclusive way.

To this end, I offer *henofideism* as a third way between religious relativism and pluralism. Deepening one's own tradition may call for an inward-looking form of 'recognition' of connectedness as a fundamental expression of the divine. But to remove the risk of a mystifying faith, a

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[26] For an overview of the different forms and problems of religious pluralism: Runzo, Joseph , "Pluralis mand Relativism" in Meister, Chad (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Religious Diversity*, Oxford University Press, 2011, 61-76.

resolute horizontalisation of God's will in the world must flank this focus on one's own tradition. The global reality of religious diversity obliges every tradition to rethink itself in the context of greater coherence and equality, sustainability, and human rights, if institutions for survival are not to be bogged down in religious populism. Herein also lies the relevance of religious traditions in a globalised secular society.

NATIONALIST POPULISM IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

SERBIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH'S PERSPECTIVE

Vedran Golijanin, Saša Šoljević, Olivera Jovanović[*]

Understanding the social, political and religious context of Bosnia and Herzegovina is not an easy task, not only due to differences between the three dominant ethnic groups (Serbs, Croats and Bosniaks) but also due to their staggering similarities. While Yugoslavia was drawing its dying breath, war broke out between these three peoples who share quite similar (or almost identical) languages and cultures - a fact that begs the question: what pushed these similar peoples into such an atrocious conflict? The answers are many, and most of them reflect various political goals of both local and international importance. One of these answers is reminiscent of Huntington's idea of a "clash of civilizations": Serbs are mostly Orthodox, Croats are mostly Catholic, and Bosniaks are mostly Muslim; therefore, it was religion that motivated these peoples to engage in mortal combat. This explanation might also be

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reinforced by a dominant trait of Bosnian populism since the breakup of Yugoslavia, and that is strong reliance on national and religious identity of Bosnia's ethnicities. However, a careful and objective observer of Bosnian political and religious life would probably not draw such a simplistic conclusion. There is indeed an obvious connection between three peoples and their respective religions, but there is also a fact, often overlooked by authors who study Bosnian political-religious dynamics, that these three religions are universal and not merely national. That puts Orthodoxy, Catholicism, and Islam at odds with political ideologies and methodologies that try to reduce them to tribal cults, which means that they are fundamentally opposed to nationalist populism. Nevertheless, nationalist politicians in Bosnia and Herzegovina, while formally embracing secular values, rarely miss a chance to point out, directly or indirectly, that their politics are in harmony with the religious identity of their people. That means that the understanding of Bosnian populism is conditioned by the understanding of Bosnian religions and nationalisms.

The populist reduction of religion to a political tool in Bosnia and Herzegovina did receive some scholarly attention, mostly in the fields of sociology and peace studies. Theological interpretations (especially those of Orthodox Christian theologians) on the same issue, however, are quite rare. Thus, our paper is an attempt to review and interpret, from an Orthodox point of view, several major themes related to populism in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Some of these issues, such as finding the best definition for Bosnian populism, or interpreting the connection between the Serbian Orthodox Church and populist nationalism, have already been touched upon by both domestic and foreign experts. Other issues, most notably the effect of populist discourse of right-wing parties in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina on the Serbian Orthodox Church, did not receive much attention, neither in domestic nor in foreign studies of Bosnian populism. This is somewhat surprising, since the (continually

obstructed) process of restitution of Church property in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, seized by the communist regime and currently denied to the Church by Bosniak authorities, is a prime example of religious discrimination fueled and justified by nationalist populist discourse. Drawing attention to the problem of restitution of Church property in Bosnia and presenting the Orthodox Christian view of populism, in general, and Bosnian populism, in particular, is, therefore, intended to be our small contribution to an ongoing global debate on this issue.

Peculiarity of Bosnian Populism

Bosnia and Herzegovina is a post-socialist, post-war country with a complex political system, consisting of two entities with a certain degree of autonomy, as well as common tripartite Presidency with Serbian, Croatian and Bosniak members. Political complexity and deeply rooted ethnic divisions, combined with domestic and foreign political interests that deepen these divisions even further, create a perfect environment for the thriving of populism. Indeed, populist discourse in Bosnia dominates political life and there is an "impending sense of political crisis that is omnipresent among ordinary citizens". [1] Since religious identities obviously play a certain role in generating this continuous, "omnipresent" crisis, it is necessary to describe Bosnian populism in order to understand what makes it so dependent on religion.

One often quoted definition of populism, originally proposed by Dutch political scientist Cas Mudde, states that populism is a "thin-centred ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogenous and antagonistic camps, 'the pure people' versus 'the

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[1] Bojanić, Maja Savić / Nikšić, Valida Repovac, "How We Understand Populism? Popular Responses to Populist Politics in Bosnia and Herzegovina"', in: *Sociological Problems 51 (Special Issue)*, 2019, 300.

corrupt elite', and which argues that politics should be an expression of the volonté générale (general will) of the people". [2] Although many authors have noted that Mudde's definition does not completely correspond to Bosnian reality, e.g. Savić Bojanić and Repovac Nikšić, [3] one can still recognise this kind of populism in the discourse of opposition parties: ruling politicians comprise of corrupt elite that essentially work against the (economic) wellbeing of the people. However, this populism is trumped by another kind of populist discourse that is utilised by the ruling elite in Bosnia, and it is precisely this kind of populism that cannot be contained by Mudde's definition. The problem is not so much in the notions of "pure people" and "general will" as it is in the notion of the "corrupt elite", which is practically absent from ruling parties' populist vocabulary; yet, in spite of the absence of this crucial element, their political discourse is obviously populist. Mudde's definition assumes that in a certain society a strong feeling of enmity should exist between two different social groups in order for populism to arise and thrive. Since all societies are different, one can assume, along with Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, that "both 'the corrupt elite' and 'the pure people' are essentially empty vessels which are framed in very different ways in past and present manifestations of populism". [4] In the Bosnian context, two opposing sides might be termed as "good people" and "bad people", and since there is not some corrupt elite but only the entire people, that should be opposed, Bosnian populism naturally allies itself with nationalism. Ernesto Laclau sees this as a typical trait of Eastern European politics in

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[2] Mudde, Cas/ Kaltwasser, Critobál Rovira, *Populism: A Very Short Introduction* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017, 6.

[3] Bojanić, Maja Savić / Nikšić, Valida Repovac, op.cit., 292.

[4] Kaltwasser, Cristóbal Rovira, "Reflections on a Contested Concept and its (Mis)Use in the Social Sciences", in: Fitzi, Gregor/ Mackert, Jürgen / Turner, Bryan S. (eds.): *Populism and the Crisis of Democracy, Volume 1: Concepts and Theory,* London, New York: Routledge, 2019, 66.

a post-communist era, and thus terms it "ethnic populism": it is a "specificity of a locally defined cultural group, which tends to exclude or drastically diminish the rights of other ethnic minorities". [5] Similarly, Savić Bojanić and Repovac Nikšić define Bosnian populism as "ethno-nationalist". [6]

Mudde states that "the core goal of the nationalist is to achieve a monocultural state". [7] If one understands that, for the people of former Yugoslavia, culture is rooted in religion, it becomes clear why the Bosnian conflict had such a strong religious undertone. National and religious identities were repressed under communist regime, so it is not surprising that the fall of communism and their reemergence coincided. However, this "new" nationalism quickly transformed into what Mudde calls "nativism". According to his definition, nativism is "an ideology, which holds that states should be inhabited exclusively by members of the native group ('the nation') and that non-native elements (persons and ideas) are fundamentally threatening to the homogenous nation-state". [8] Even after the war, politicians with nativist agendas continued their divisive populist rhetoric in order to retain power. Bakir Izetbegović, leader of a right-wing Bosniak SDA (Stranka demokratske akcije, Party of Democratic Action) and the most vocal 'prophet' of a new war in Bosnia, usually equates the Serbian nation with genocide, [9] and has

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[5] Laclau, Ernesto, *On Populist Reason,* London, New York: Verso, 2005, 193.

[6] Bojanić, Maja Savić / Nikšić, Valida Repovac, op. cit., 293.

[7] Mudde, Cas, *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, 16.

[8] Mudde, Cas, op. cit., 19.

[9] Nezavisne novine (2021) ,"Izetbegović: Radije bih umro nego dopustio da genocidaši zavladaju dijelom BiH", https://www.nezavisne.com/novosti/bih/Izetbegovic-Radije-bih-umro-nego-dopustio-da-genocidasi-zavladaju-dijelom-BiH/657686 (accessed 16 June 2021). This Izetbegović's statement resembles a similar statement by Husein Kavazović, leader of the Islamic Community in Bosnia and Herzegovina, who in 2016 visited Bosniaks in Switzerland and urged them to vote in the elections in

recently called Serbs "bad people" and Serbian priests "primitive" for consecrating school buildings in Republika Srpska. [10] This kind of rhetoric achieves the two goals of populism as described by Paul Taggart: "Firstly, it rallies support for those sharing a grievance against the demonized groups. In other words, it brings more support to the populist fold. Secondly, it reinforces (or even creates) a sense of solidarity among those who demonize the groups." [11] Since the Serbian Orthodox Church is a single canonical religious institution that unifies all Orthodox Serbs and other Orthodox people on the territory of former Yugoslavia, the populists' claims that it serves as an organ of Serbian political influence are not surprising. [12]

order to prevent "Vlah" from ruling Srebrenica. This was shocking, not just because *Vlah* is an offensive term for Orthodox Serbs, but also because one of the highest ranking leaders of Islamic Community was openly engaged in a political campaign. RTS (2016), "Kavazović: Ne dopustite da 'Vlah' vlada Srebrenicom", https://www.rts.rs/page/stories/sr/story/11/region/2329403/kavazovic-ne-dopustite-da-vlah-vlada-srebrenicom.html (accessed 16 June 2021).

[10] FTV (2021), "Dnevnik D, 21. 01. 2021", https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1bQKaqjveJI (accessed 26 June 2021).

[11] Taggart, Paul, *Populism,* Buckingham, Philadelphia: Open University Press, 2000, 94.

[12] SOC has received a lot of (negative) media attention in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina for standing up against the attempts of Montenegrin President Milo Đukanović to, against the will of the Church and the vast majority of Orthodox believers in Montenegro, confiscate Church's property. Peaceful prayer walks or processions (*litije*) were organized by the Church in 2019 and 2020, with massive attendance of both Serbian and Montenegrin believers. Nevertheless, a group of politicians and public figures from Bosnia and several other former Yugoslav states had signed the petition of support for Đukanović, dismissing Church's protests as a "mantra about the endangerment of Serbian people". Komarčević, Dužan / Karabegović, Dženana / Loxha, Amra Zejneli / Zebić, Enis (2019)"Potpisnici o apelu podrške Crnoj Gori"', https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/zasto-smo-potpisali-apel-podrske-crnoj-gori/30354028.html, (accessed 23 June 2021).

Of course, it is not only Bosniak, but also Croatian and Serbian politics in Bosnia and Herzegovina that are dominated by populism. Mudde puts all nationalist parties in Bosnia, i.e. SDA, HDZ (Hrvatska demokratska zajednica, Croatian Democratic Union) and SDS (Srpska demokratska stranka, Serbian Democratic Party), in the same populist radical right group. [13] While SDS lost parliamentary majority in Republika Srpska in 2006, SDA and HDZ are still in power in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. SNSD (Stranka nezavisnih socijaldemokrata, Alliance of Independent Social Democrats), a party that currently enjoys the greatest popular support in Republika Srpska, was quite moderate at first, but has since adopted nationalist and populist traits. The leader of SNSD, and current Serbian member of tripartite Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Milorad Dodik, is usually criticized for his populist discourse, e.g. in the survey of Bosnian populism by Nedžma Džananović and Mia Karamehić. According to these authors, Dodik and Fahrudin Radončić (leader of SBB – Savez za bolju budućnost BiH, Union for a Better Future of BiH) are prime examples of nationalist populism in Bosnia and Herzegovina; however, they are not so critical of the populist politics of HDZ and SDA, and only mention that SDA based their campaign in 2014 on the "personal charisma" of Bakir Izetbegović.[14] Mudde, on the other hand, claims that HDZ was a populist right-wing party from the beginning, and that the Bosnian branch of the party is even more radical than the one in Croatia.[15] Franjo Tuđman, founder of HDZ, attempted to rehabilitate the Ustaše – Croatian fascists who, in the Second World War, committed

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[13] Mudde, Cas, op. cit., 305.

[14] Džananović, Nedžma /Karamehić, Mia, "Bosnia and Herzegovina: Populism in Transition"', in: Aalberg, Tori / Esser, Frank / Reinemann, Carsten / Strömbäck, Jesper / Vreese, Claaes H. de (eds.), *Populist Political Communication in Europe,* New York, London: Routledge, 2017, 270–271.

[15] Mudde, Cas, op. cit., 54–55.

genocide against Orthodox Serbs in the Independent State of Croatia. [16] This tendency was never abandoned by Croatian nationalists. The SDA has, since 1990, split ways with its secular and liberal members who then founded MBO (Muslimanska bošnjačka organizacija, Muslim Bosniak Organization), while the majority supported the openly religious and nationalist agenda of Alija Izetbegović.[17] It is very important to acknowledge these facts in order to fully comprehend the political situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina: all three peoples, and not just one, lean toward nationalism and religious exclusivity, and all three nationalist ideologies are inclined towards the majority religions of their respective peoples.

Another important trait of Bosnian populism is clientelism. According to Herbert Kitschelt and Steven Wilkinson, clientelism denotes "a transaction, the direct exchange of a citizen's vote in return for direct payments or continuing access to employment, goods and services".[18] We might safely assume that it is precisely clientelism, and not merely nationalism, that is the most effective tool of the ruling parties for retaining power. Since clientelism is usually associated with Latin American politics, there were not many non-Bosnian authors who paid enough attention to its manifestations in Bosnia. On the other hand, some objective analyses by local researchers point at the devastating effect of ruling parties' clientelism on Bosnian society: "By plundering and destroying public goods belonging to the citizens of our country, by

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[16] Sofos, Spyros A. "Culture, Politics and Identity in Former Yugoslavia", in: Jenkins, Brian/ Sofos, Spyros A. (eds.), *Nation & Identity in Contemporary Europe,* London, New York: Routledge, 1996, 250–251.

[17] Sofos, Spyros A., op. cit., 254–255.

[18] Kitschelt, Herbert / Wilkinson, Steven, "Citizen-Politician Linkages: An Introduction"' in: Kitschelt, Herbert / Wilinson, Steven (eds.), *Patrons, Clients, and Policies: Patterns of Democratic Accountability and Political Competition,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, 2. See Mudde, Cas / Kaltwasser, Cristóbal, *op. cit.*, 8.

degrading and undoing the inherited system of social values, they grew into something that can easily be called 'political cartels'."[19] Ruling parties are usually against all concrete attempts to prevent clientelism and nepotism in Bosnia and Herzegovina, [20] which is mostly why up to 40% of highly educated people and 57% of young people under the age of 30 want to leave the country.[21] These alarming facts are usually pushed aside by causing new tensions among ethnic groups, which is why one might conclude that politicians' nationalist rhetoric is actually a cover for much bigger problems in Bosnian society.

In the interviews conducted by Savić Bojanić & Repovac Nikšić, one correspondent described Bosnian populism in the following words: "In these societies, societies with unconsolidated democracy, politicians often engage in populist behavior and voters are still not politically mature to recognize the damage caused by their political favorites, be it because of emotional ties due to lack of education, lack of information, or simple ignorance… experienced democratic societies recognize populism and very easily overcome it." [22] The fact is that the people of former Yugoslavia have never had real democracy. Communist political cadres have simply changed their designations from communist to

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[19] Bojanić, Maja Savić / Nikšić, Valida Repovac, op.cit., 295.

[20] Some recent attempts at passing laws against clientelism in both entities of Bosnia and Herzegovina were either opposed or strongly criticized by ruling parties. BUKA magazine (2021), "'Traže da se usvoji zakon koji bi zaustavio stranačko zapošljavanje! Vlada stopirala process'", https://www.6yka.com/novosti/traze-da-se-usvoji-zakon-koji-bi-zaustavio-stranacko-zaposljavanje-vlada-stopirala-proces (accessed 25 June 2021). Bahtanović, Berina (2021), "Šta donosi Nacrt zakona protiv nepotizma i stranačkog zapošljavanja u Sarajevu",   https://ba.n1info.com/vijesti/sta-donosi-nacrt-zakona-protiv-nepotizma-i-stranackog-zaposljavanja-u-sarajevu/(accessed 25 June 2021).

[21] Sarajevo Times (2020), "Alarming Number of People Leaving Bosnia and Herzegovina Every Day", https://www.sarajevotimes.com/alarming-number-of-people-leaving-bosnia-and-herzegovina-every-day/ (accessed 25 June 2021).

[22] Bojanić, Maja Savić / Nikšić, Valida Repovac, op. cit., 306–307.

democrat, while the overall mentality of both politicians and people have remained unchanged. In communist Yugoslavia, one had to be a member of the Communist Party in order to find decent employment or to progress in a career. In post-communist Bosnia, the situation is still the same: employment mostly depends on belonging to one of the powerful political parties. In that situation, people who are still unfamiliar with the ways of democracy tend to believe in eschatological promises of populist rulers that life will somehow be better if the other is silenced, removed, or converted.

Serbian Orthodox Church and Serbian Nationalism

In the previous section, we showed that Bosnian populism is inseparable from both nationalism and clientelism, and that the prominent religious trait of the former Yugoslav peoples' cultures also gave a religious undertone to the Bosnian conflict. That is why the religions of Bosnia's people are sometimes accused of fuelling, or even causing, the 1992–1995 war. However, a conclusion that is, in our opinion, much closer to the truth is simply that religions were used by political leaders during the war to emphasise separate national identities, similar to how populist politicians use religion today. Janine Natalya Clark rightfully states: "It was a politically motivated conflict fought to gain control of territory."[23] Religion was, and still is, the populists' tool for appealing to the deepest feelings of the people, and then using those feelings not to reconcile but to divide. Savić Bojanić and Repovac Nikšić describe this strategy of Bosnian populists as the "misuse of

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[23] Clark, Janine Natalya, "The Cross, the Crescent, and the War in Bosnia: The Legacy of Religious Involvement", in: Ramet, Sabrina (ed.), *Religion and Politics in Post-Socialist Central and Southeastern Europe,* London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, 156.

religion and of the religious sentiments", [24] and most Orthodox believers in Bosnia see the populist flirting with religion precisely in those terms.

The question of the supposed nationalism of the Serbian Orthodox Church is often raised in discussions about Yugoslav wars, including the Bosnian war. The common assumption that the Serbian Orthodox Church is nationalist by its very nature[25] might lead to a wrong conclusion that it is natural for the Orthodox to ally themselves with nationalist populists. This assumption, however, contradicts the teachings of the Orthodox Church, e.g. the New Testament teaching on the primacy of Christian universality over nationhood (Galatians 3:28). It also contradicts the Church's condemnation of ethnophyletism (identification of Church and nationality) as heresy. As for Serbian right-wing populist parties and organisations, the Serbian Orthodox Church has never officially sided with any of them, even though individual priests and even some bishops occasionally expressed sympathies towards them. Some of these Church officials were retired and relieved of their ecclesiastical duties, while the radical factions separated from the Church because of its presumed ecumenist (i.e. non-nationalist) stances, such as artemijevci or starokalendarci. On the other hand, the Serbian Orthodox Church preaches Gospel and insists on the purity of faith, untainted by all worldly ideologies (including nationalism). Rosario Forlenza noted that, for the right-wing populists and nationalists, religion is more about belonging than about believing,[26] which is identical to the Orthodox view on the same issue. That is why

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[24] Bojanić, Maja Savić / Nikšić, Valida Repovac, op. cit., 296.

[25] Sabrina Ramet states that Serbian Orthodox Church is "nationalist institution". Ramet, Sabrina, *Balkan Babel: The Disintegration of Yugoslavia from the Death of Tito to the Fall of Milošević,* Boulder: Westview Press, 2002, 112.

[26] Forlenza, Rosario, "'Abendland in Christian Hands': Religion and Populism in Contemporary European Politics'", in: Fitzi, Gregor / Mackert, Jürgen/ Turner, Bryan S. (eds.), *Populism and the Crisis of Democracy, Volume 3: Migration, Gender and Religion,* London, New York: Routledge, 2019, 142.

the Serbian Orthodox Church, by its very nature, cannot support nationalism, nativism, and especially not populism.

Nevertheless, there are authors who perceive the Serbian Orthodox Church as extremely nationalist. For Sabrina Ramet, the Serbian Orthodox Church is a "nationalist institution"[27] that "views itself as identical with the Serbian nation, since it considers that religion is the foundation of nationality".[28] If one takes this caricature of the Church and of its theology of culture seriously, then one might also conclude that the Church did not merely support nationalist populists but that its preaching and pastoral activity are themselves essentially nationalist and populist. In other words, it turns out that the Church is the main carrier of nationalist populist discourse that politicians merely adopt. Ramet certainly embraces this idea when stating that, "in the case of Yugoslavia, the Serbian Orthodox Church certainly deserves credit for having done much to embitter Serbs against Albanians, and subsequently against Croats".[29] It is curious that the author draws such a conclusion after admitting that great atrocities were committed against Orthodox Serbs and the Serbian Orthodox Church in Second World War.

Evidence for the Church's apparent nationalism and hatred toward other Yugoslav peoples are, nonetheless, not so convincing. In the collection Orthodox Churches and Politics in Southeastern Europe edited by Ramet (with the telling subtitle Nationalism, Conservativism, and Intolerance), Jelena Subotić mentions an article from the journal Glas Crkve, published in 1991, which apparently states that one cannot be Serbian without being Orthodox.[30] Even though Subotić claims that

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[27] Ramet, Sabrina, op. cit., 112.

[28] Ramet, Sabrina, op. cit.,114.

[29] Ramet, Sabrina, op. cit., 203.

[30] J Subotić, Jelena, "The Church, the Nation, and the State: The Serbian Orthodox Church after Communism", in: Ramet, Sabrina (ed.), *Orthodox*

Glas Crkve is an official Church's publication, it was actually a journal of Bishopric of Šabac, i.e. not an official publication of the entire Serbian Orthodox Church, and thus not a platform for publishing official Church's stances on important issues. The author of said article criticised the communist repression of national and religious identities, claiming that Serbs need to go back to their "Byzantine and Russian sources of civilization and spirituality".[31] Subotić also claims that in 1996 the Holy Synod of the Serbian Orthodox Church "asserted its authority over all Serbs", which she interprets in following words: "The SOC clearly understood its role to extend far beyond the pastoral care of the Orthodox population within Serbia."[32] Subotić's understanding that this was somehow invasive or expansive clearly indicates the lack of knowledge of history, canon law and organisation of the Orthodox Church. The actual text of the Synod's declaration reads: "Regardless of the breakup of Versailles Treaty Yugoslavia, i.e. Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia, jurisdiction of Serbian Orthodox Church still encompasses all Orthodox believers on that territory."[33] Therefore, it was not the assertion of authority over all Serbs but a confirmation of an already existing jurisdiction over all Orthodox believers in former Yugoslavia.

Churches and Politics in Southeastern Europe: Nationalism, Conservativism, and Intolerance, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019, 88.

[31] М. Радовановић, 'О потреби моралне и духовне обнове', *Глас Цркве*, бр. 1–4 (1991), 46. The author was not a cleric and was merely individual expressing opinions that were not rare at the time, e.g. that the Vatican was a mastermind behind the destruction of Serbian national identity. Surely, this was never an official stance of SOC, which means that the opinion of this author should be treated precisely as such – the opinion of an individual.

[32] Subotić, Jelena, op. cit., 89.

[33] 'Одлука Светог Архијерејског Синода Српске Православне Цркве' (Син. бр. 1121/зап. 726 од 6. јула 1996), *Гласник, службени лист Српске Православне Цркве*, година LXXVII, бр. 6 (јун 1996), 87.

These arguments that supposedly prove the Church's nationalism and, therefore, its support for populism, are gross misrepresentations of the being and message. None of these authors cite relevant pastoral theologians who are actual theorists of the Church's pastoral activity, e.g. Radovan Bigović and Ljubivoje Stojanović. On the contrary, they somehow deduce that opinions of individual authors and citations from very contextual Church documents somehow definitively prove that the Serbian Orthodox Church is a purely nationalist institution. While it is true that Serbian people do view Orthodoxy as an integral part of its identity, this connection would be better understood if interpreted according to relevant theological studies of Christianity and culture, e.g. Tillich's Theology of Culture or Florovsky's Christianity and Culture. Without considering the Church's own understanding of its relationship with culture, researchers simply cannot remain objective.

Restitution of Church Property in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina

As a consequence of nationalist populist discourse in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Serbian Orthodox Church experiences true systemic discrimination. This discrimination, however, is not new; its origins can be traced back to periods of the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian occupation, but it was during the communist regime that it received full ideological justification. As the late philosopher Zagorka Golubović noticed, the Socialist Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina was a great example of an authoritarian-bureaucratic political system: a level of political culture was very low, freedom of expression was non-existent, and the bureaucratisation had a devastating effect on societal conscience.[34] In communist Bosnia, the Serbian Orthodox Church was

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[34] Golubović, Zagorka, *Kriza identiteta u savremenom jugoslovenskom društvu,* Beograd: Filip Višnjić, 1988, 290.

the only religious institution whose nationalised school buildings were not returned, and it received far smaller financial aid from the Republic's budget than the Catholic Church and Islamic Community.[35] Nationalist Marxists of the Muslim (Bosniak) origin have played a very important role in the discrimination against the Orthodox Church in Bosnia. Their goal was to attribute the entire cultural and historical tradition of Bosnia and Herzegovina exclusively to Muslims (Bosniaks), supposed sole descendants of medieval Bosnian Bogomil heretics. Muhamed Filipović, high ranking communist official who later became one of the main ideologues of nationalist SDA, claimed that both Serbian and Croatian culture and literature in Bosnia were actually factors that broke supposed single Bosnian identity into separate national identities.[36] Communist authorities were actively propagating theories of "Bosnian spirit" and of Bosniaks as a single autochthonic element and carriers of Bosnia's statehood, thus strengthening animosities and divisions among peoples. At the same time, nationalist Marxists in Sarajevo put great efforts into diminishing the role of Orthodox Serbs in the history of Bosnia and Herzegovina and ignored the fact that the dioceses of Archbishopric of Žiča (later Patriarchate of Peć and now Serbian Orthodox Church) have existed on the territory of Bosnia since 1219.[37]

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[35] In 1975, Islamic Community in Bosnia and Herzegovina received 2000000 dinars; Catholic Church received 1610000, while SOC received only 800000 dinars. 'Izvještaj Komisije za odnose sa vjerskim zajednicama od 15. januara 1976. godine', *ABiH*, 1975, KVP, Sjednice, izvještaji.

[36] Тутњевић, Станиша, *Размеђа књижевних токова на словенском југу*, Београрд: Службени гласник, 2011, 454. For more information, see English translation of Filipović's article, originally published in journal *Život* in 1967: Filipović, Muhamed, "The Bosnian Spirit in Literature – What is it?"', *Spirit of Bosnia 1 (1), 2006*, http://www.spiritofbosnia.org/volume-1-no-1-2006-january/the-bosnian-spirit-in-literature-what-is-it/ (accessed 27 June 2021).

[37] Even some Croatian Catholic theologians in Bosnia adopt similar ideas. Bishop Tomo Vukšić claims that Orthodoxy did not exist on the territory of

One of the best examples of communist discrimination against Serbian Orthodox Church in Bosnia was the confiscation of its property, namely the building of the Orthodox Seminary in downtown Sarajevo. This building was damaged during the Second World War and the Church that suffered great losses did not have enough resources for renovation. According to the contract that was signed with People's Committee of Sarajevo, the building was given to the City for the period of fifteen years without rent, on the condition that People's Committee should renovate the building.[38] However, the law on nationalisation was soon implemented and, in January 1960, the Seminary building was nationalised. Authorities formally decided to compensate the Church with 3,258,000 dinars in the following fifty years, which they did not do. The Church's complaints were dismissed because, as the authorities declared, it was not religious but a "business building".[39] New Metropolitan of Dabar-Bosnia Vladislav Mitrović contacted the Republic Commission for religious matters in 1970 and pleaded for the return of the confiscated building, since the buildings of Gazi Husrev-beg Madrasa and Vrhbosna Seminary in Sarajevo were, at that time, returned to the Islamic Community and Catholic Church respectively. The president of the Commission declared that "it would not be fitting to associate the opening of Orthodox Seminary in Bosnia and Herzegovina

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Bosnia before the coming of Ottomans, and probably not before 1557.Vukšić, Tomo, *Mi i oni: Siguran identitet pretpostavka susretanja,* Sarajevo: Vrhbosanska katolička teologija, 2000, 31–32. These ideas are not based on serious historical research, or on archaeological evidence, but on nationalist propaganda of controversial Franciscan author Dominik Mandić whose goal was to represent Bosnia as a traditionally Catholic and Croatian land.

[38] 'Уговор између Српске православне црквене општине у Сарајеву и Градског народног одбора у Сарајеву о закупу зграде у улици Васе Мискина бр. 1', 29. мај 1948. године, *Архив Црквене општине у Сарајеву*.

[39] 'Rješenje Komisije za nacionalizaciju Narodnog odbora Opštine Stari Grad', br. 182/13, 21. januar 1960. godine.

with the solution for Gazi Husrev-beg Madrasa or with opening of Catholic seminaries, for it might reflect negatively on relations among religions and peoples in Bosnia and Herzegovina".[40] In May 1977, the Bishops' Council of the Serbian Orthodox Church declared that the Theological Academy should be opened in Sarajevo as a successor to the Sarajevo Seminary (1882–1941), so Metropolitan Vladislav once again contacted the authorities regarding the return of the old Seminary building. In 1977, the Bosnian communist authorities helped the Islamic Community open the Faculty of Islamic Sciences in the building of Gazi Husrev-beg Madrasa, while the Catholic Archdiocese of Vrhbosna reopened the Catholic Theology in a non-nationalised part of its building in downtown Sarajevo in 1969 and was soon allowed to buy a nationalised part of the same building. After the initial decision of the Republic Executive Council that the Serbian Orthodox Church should also get appropriate space in Sarajevo for education purposes, it was finally decided that the return of a part of nationalised Seminary building to the Church was not acceptable for Republic authorities, since the construction of a new building for the Faculty of Economy, which was and still is occupying the Church's building, was not planned at that time.[41] It was not before 1990 that the Executive Council decided that the building of Seminary in Sarajevo should be returned to the SOC in a way similar to the return of nationalised objects to the Catholic Church and Islamic Community.[42] In January 1992, the Faculty of Economy was willing to return a part of the old Seminary building that included

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[40] 'Informacija Republičke komisije za vjerska pitanja', br. 1, februar 1970. godine, *ABiH*, KVP, 1970, Š-25.

[41] 'Informacija o nekim pitanjima vezanim za rad škola za pripremanje vjerskih službenika u SR BiH', Str. pov. Br. 612-33/78, 23. jun 1978. godine, *ABiH*, KVP, K. 1978 – Informacije, zapisnici.

[42] В. Јовановић, 'Сарајевска богословија – Кратак преглед догађаја' (Архив Митрополије дабробосанске, 2004), 7.

classrooms, offices and some additional rooms, but this process came to complete halt when the war broke out.

The Orthodox theological institution of higher learning was finally opened on the territory of Bosnia in 1994, albeit not in Sarajevo but in a small town of Foča in eastern Republika Srpska. The efforts to move the Theological Academy of Saint Vasilije Ostroški (now Faculty of Orthodox Theology) to Sarajevo were not successful, and the Serbian Orthodox Church remains the only religious institution in Bosnia that does not have its schools in the state's capital. The late Metropolitan Nikolaj Mrdja had three meetings in September and October of 2001 with representatives of the Faculty of Economy and Municipality of Stari Grad (part of Sarajevo where the Seminary building is located), and also with representatives of the OHR (Office of the High Representative) Anvar Azimov and Morris Power. The city's representatives claimed that the Municipality owns neither the building of Faculty of Economy, nor the business premises on the ground floor, while representatives of the Faculty denied possession of the business premises in question. When asked to show documentation that would clarify the issue of right of disposition, both representatives of Municipality and Faculty refused, claiming that the Metropolitanate of Dabar-Bosnia does not have legal rights to ask for such documents. It was only when the Metropolitanate brought in its lawyer that necessary documents were provided, and they revealed that in February of 1992 the Municipality of Stari Grad became the holder of the right of disposition for the building of the Faculty of Economy. However, a contract was signed on 25 March 1998 between the Municipality and Faculty of Economy, according to which the Faculty became the holder of the right of disposition, under the condition that the premises can only be used for education purposes. Despite this condition, the ground floor was rented to a third person who used it for private business. The Metropolitanate of Dabar-Bosnia requested that the transfer of the right

of disposal be annulled and that the Metropolitanate be informed when, by what decision, and to whom the approval for private business was given. This question has not been answered.[43]

In June of 2013, the Faculty of Economy decided to return one part of the old Seminary building to SOC, i.e. to the Faculty of Orthodox Theology, so that planned Institute for the Study of Interreligious Dialogue might be placed there. Even the U.S. Ambassador Patrick Moon was advocating for the return of the Church's property.[44] It is very important to emphasise that even this process, initiated through the American Embassy, was absolutely inexplicable from the point of view of property rights. It was agreed that a hundred square meters on the ground floor of the building should be returned, but only for the needs of the planned Institute, the establishment of which was signed by the deans of the theological faculties – Faculty of Islamic Sciences, Faculty of Catholic Theology from Sarajevo and Faculty of Orthodox Theology from Foča. As expected, after Patrick Moon left Bosnia, the decision of Faculty of Economy was not implemented. Following contacts between the administrations of Faculty of Economy and Faculty of Orthodox Theology regarding the return of at least one part of the Seminary building were futile.

Discrimination against the Serbian Orthodox Church in Bosnia and Herzegovina, or at least in one of its entities, is as real today as it was during the communist regime. All former Yugoslav republics have passed the laws on restitution of nationalised property except for Bosnia and Herzegovina, even though the implementation of that law is one of the conditions for joining the European Union. The law on the freedom of religion and the legal position of churches and religious communities,

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[43] Јовановић, 'Сарајевска богословија', 9-11.

[44] Telegraph (2013), "Istorijski: SPC vraćen deo imovine u Sarajevu",, https://www.telegraf.rs/vesti/778756-istorijski-spc-vracen-deo-imovine-u-sarajevu (accessed 28 June 2021).

passed in 2004, implies the restitution of religious institutions' property in the whole of Bosnia and Herzegovina, without discrimination. However, the property of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, including the Seminary building, residential and business buildings (more than ten buildings in downtown Sarajevo) is still unreturned. In Sarajevo, the Council of Ministers building, Parliamentary Assembly building, Zetra Olympic Hall, Koševo City Stadium, as well as many private and commercial buildings, were built on land that belongs to the Serbian Orthodox Church. Only a couple of business premises that were nationalised were given to the Church for use but under the condition of payment of rent to the Municipality of Stari Grad. This situation is a clear violation of Article 10 of the fundamental agreement between Bosnia and Herzegovina and the SOC from 2008. While state and local authorities continually refuse or obstruct the return of property to the Serbian Orthodox Church, with the case of Seminary building as the obvious example of violation of rights, the Islamic Community and Catholic Church in Sarajevo have a normal process of education in their returned buildings. These facts indicate that the Serbian Orthodox Church in Bosnia and Herzegovina experiences true religious discrimination.

Conclusion

Decades long discrimination against SOC in Sarajevo and other parts of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, illustrated by just one example of intentionally obstructed restitution of Church property, indicates the existence of a particularly malignant nationalism that is usually overlooked or toned down in most studies on the Bosnian political situation. Based on the idea that Bosniaks are the only autochthonic people in Bosnia, this nationalism naturally tends to negate not only the importance but also the very existence of Serbs and Orthodox Christians in Bosnia until very recent times. Thus, Serbian and

Orthodox elements are understood as something foreign and invasive, which is why the Bosnian War is usually termed "Serbian aggression" and not "civil war" in the public discourse of Sarajevo-based nationalist populists. While the negation of the historical presence of Orthodox Serbs in Bosnia is by itself very offensive, the frequent dehumanisation of Serbian victims in the Bosnian War[45] brings the very future of Bosnian society into question. There also lies a reason for preventing the Serbian Orthodox Church to return its most important school in Bosnia to Sarajevo, for such an event would mean that Bosnian society admits equal status to the Orthodox Church, the Catholic Church, and the Islamic Community. In reality, the rights of the Serbian Orthodox Church are constantly violated and it is clearly not considered equal to the other two religious communities, a conclusion based on both the theory and practice of Bosniak nationalist ideology. The role of enemy and invader, imposed upon Serbs and the Serbian Orthodox Church, fits perfectly into a greater picture painted by populist politicians from Sarajevo.

One recent example proves this point, namely the demolition of the Serbian church in Konjević Polje, Republika Srpska, which was partially built on the land of a Bosniak woman named Fata Orlović. This event was celebrated as a victory of justice, since the church was nicknamed

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[45] When Janine Natalya Clark was conducting interviews with clerics of Bosnia's religious communities, several Muslim imams stated that Serbian victims cannot be considered equal to Bosniak victims. Clark, Natalya, op. cit., 167. This kind of attitude, which became a necessary part of Bosniak nationalism and the right-wing ideology of SDA, is usually followed by attempts to reduce the number of murdered Serbian civilians. Bakir Izetbegović has recently stated that the number of killed Serbs during the entire war is far less than the number of Bosniaks killed in Srebrenica in only one day. N1 (2020), "Izetbegović: Tokom rata u BiH nije bilo masovnih zločina nad Srbima",https://rs.n1info.com/region/a563224-izetbegovic-tokom-rata-u-bih-nije-bilo-masovnih-zlocina-nad-srbima/ (accessed 28 June 2021).

"the church of injustice", [46] and the lawyer of Fata Orlović optimistically concluded that now "there is a possibility for citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina to truly believe in the legal protection that the state should guarantee". [47] Of course, one can easily see the irony of this statement when considering the injustice that the Serbian Orthodox Church suffers in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. In addition to the controversy over the Seminary building, there are almost regular desecrations of churches in Sarajevo and surrounding areas that are rarely processed as hate crimes, as well as many cases of Muslim mosques built on the lands of Serbian families, e.g. in Zdena near Sanski Most, in the village Križevići near Olovo, in the village of Noćajevci near Kladanj, in Rakovica near Sarajevo, as well as in Alipašino Polje in Sarajevo, where two mosques and one Catholic cathedral were built on the land that belonged to Serbian family Mlađen.[48] One can only hope that the words of Fata Orlović's lawyer will come true and that Bosnia and Herzegovina will provide legal protection and equal rights to all its citizens and religions, without discrimination.

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[46]   Sekulić, Marinko (2021), "Konačno srušena crkva nepravde", https://www.dw.com/hr/kona%C4%8Dno-sru%C5%A1ena-crkva-nepravde/a-57791523 (accessed 28 June 2021).

[47]   Al Jazeera (2021) "Video: Srušena crkva u dvorištu Fate Orlović"', https://balkans.aljazeera.net/news/balkan/2021/6/5/pocelo-uklanjanje-crkve-iz-dvorista-fate-orlovic(accessed 28 June 2021).

[48]   Момић, Дарко (2021), "Џамије на српској земљи нико неће да руши",,https://www.glassrpske.com/cir/plus/teme/dzamije-na-srpskoj-zemlji-niko-nece-da-rusi/365081(accessed 28 June 2021).

POPULISM AND PANDEMIC IN ITALY

*Paolo Emilio Landi**

Salvini, from Sweatshirt to Spectacles

In August 2019 at Papeete Beach in Riccione, Matteo Salvini, surrounded by semi-dressed, sweaty youngsters, asked for "full powers". This sounded like a possible authoritarian turn in Italian democracy.

His party was at that time, according to the polls, the most popular in Italy by far, hitting 36% popularity. This was due to extremely aggressive propaganda. As Minister of the Interior, he travelled the country while always combining official meetings with political rallies. The preferred targets in his speeches were immigrants, NGOs helping migrants on the Mediterranean (those he calls 'Sea Taxis') or those asking for policies to regulate migration and the labour market. In this field, his trademark slogan was: "Closed ports! Italians first!".

With the help of his aggressive propaganda team 'The Beast', paid for by the Ministry, he flooded social and traditional media with images of himself wearing sweatshirts with logos or slogans. Each rally a new sweatshirt or uniform would appear: that of a fireman, a worker, a

policeman, etc. This imitated the technique Berlusconi employed in the '90s where, instead of sweatshirts, the Forza Italia leader wore hats. On Twitter, Salvini would share images of his Nutella breakfast with his fans, or post a photo of his relaxed, post-coital expression as he lazed on a bed with his girlfriend. His message was clear: I am one of you.

On international matters, he was (and is) a convinced Eurosceptic, probably because he almost never attended a committee during his years as a European parliamentarian. His slogan was: "Europe is useless".

This mechanism, exhausting for us journalists and, I guess, for him as well, did pay a huge dividend. But when his popularity was at its peak, his own hubris punished him. After his call for "full powers", his fictional character met reality on 20 August, the day that Prime Minister Conte resigned. Within a few weeks, Movimento 5 Stelle (M5S), the other populist group that was losing favour, formed a coalition government with Partito Democratico (centre-left) and Liberi e Uguali (left). In a typical Italian twist, the Prime Minister was once again Giuseppe Conte. Historically, Italians are individualists and anarchists. Allergic to the rule of the law, they are also allergic to anyone who claims full power. This paradox rescues our democracy.

With less funds and less power and less visibility, Salvini tried to keep up his aggressive propaganda on migration but new events followed.

The fascist party of Fratelli d'Italia (FdI, named after the first words of the national anthem), led by Giorgia Meloni received funds and advice from the international sovereigntist network guided by Steve Bannon. FdI, started to erode the power of 'The Captain' (Salvini's nickname among his fans) from the right side of parliament. The two joined forces but tried to maintain a distinct identity. Salvini is a federalist, Meloni a nationalist.

Then came COVID-19. While Salvini was buzzing doorbells at the homes of immigrants, asking why they sell dope (this actually happened

and was documented on film), the virus spread in Lombardy and Veneto, the two wealthiest regions of Italy, both guided by presidents belonging to his party (Lega – Salvini Premier), but with different economic visions, especially on the European Union.

The populist movement, based on the channelled and often induced aggressive sentiment towards an enemy (immigrants for Salvini, the elite for MS5), found itself deprived of its usual targets.

The issue of immigration disappeared from the front page, overwhelmed by news of the number of those infected and dying. Some seasonal immigrants, mainly deployed in agriculture, did not arrive in Italy to help with the harvests, while some others decided to flee the infection by going back home to Romania, for example.

The other populist party, MS5, diminished in visibility during the common government with Lega per Salvini Presidente. Overwhelmed by their ubiquitous partner, they lost most of their appeal. Ideologically-based on an opposition attitude epitomised by the slogan 'Vaffanculo', they found themselves in a difficult position when they entered the decision room. Their leader - the young, poorly educated, and inexperienced Di Maio - claimed to have "abolished poverty". He said these exact words from the balcony (!) of Palazzo Chigi, the residence of the Prime Minister, when he introduced the reddito di cittadinanza (minimum salary), a distribution of cash that did not produce the expected results: abolishing poverty and creating jobs. Their slogan 'Uno vale Uno' ('One equals One'), their idol, (direct democracy through the web), was clearly rendered useless when faced with complex decisions. In addition, switching partners in the government (while cashing in the dividends of some important ministries, like the Foreign Office) harmed the pure image of the movement that purported not to care about power. Di Maio was forced to leave the movement leadership in January 2020, replaced by a lesser-known character.

COVID-19 affected MS5 as well. The despised "elite of the professors and specialists" became the oracle from whose lips all Italians expected information, warnings, and reassurance. And this is somewhat logical: when you have cancer you trust a specialist, not information gathered on Facebook. During the last years, the anti-vax movement, supported by Movimento 5 Stelle, claimed that vaccines would cause autism (based on a false report found on the web). During the pandemic, they briefly went silent. Yet, during phase 2, from beginning of May, they joined the delirious international conspiracy movement.

The European Union is usually targeted by populists with a view to justifying our national faults. On this occasion, it helped those countries harshly hit by the pandemic. The European Central Bank has put means to face the economic crisis on the table. The same can be said about the European Commission. It is true, in this tragic time, that the critical difficulties in the Union's decision-making system have been revealed more than ever, yet it's hard to say that Italy has been abandoned by the EU, as populists claim. This was another weapon taken from the populist arsenal.

In an attempt to maintain a Eurosceptic attitude, both Salvini and M5S claimed that Italy should refuse the ESM (European Stability Mechanism) funds, 35 billion euros to be spent on the health system, with no other conditions, and at an extremely low rate. The question is still open as MS5 blocks the government's resolution.

In time of emergency, especially in Phase 1, a leadership is much needed and well accepted by the population. Italy being the first in line to face the unknown, Giuseppe Conte made difficult decisions that probably saved many lives. His popularity increased, with Italy having seen his resilient and responsible side. Other than some isolated cases, people did respond maturely to the lockdown and the infection curve did decrease.

All these factors also meant a significant decrease of consent for the populist parties: according to pools, at the end of May, Lega was at 26%, M5S at 16% and FdI at 15%.

But, they still have more than half of the popular vote and we are now approaching to Phase 2.

Glasses and Rosary

Religion and popular superstition played a great role during the first part of the pandemic.

During the state of emergency, Italian TV Day was punctuated by morning mass with Pope Francis at 7:00 am and the COVID-19 press conference at 6:00 pm.

One of the most iconic images from this pandemic is the one of the Palm Mass celebrated by Pope Francis in the empty St. Peter's square. Over 6,380,000 people witnessed the mass virtually, while, in comparison, the 2019 Easter Mass was seen by only 2,300,000 people. The same happened the following week when, for the first time, the Via Crucis was not celebrated near the Coliseum. In addition, Pope Francis's early mass was broadcast every day by RAIUNO, the state's own broadcasting company. TV2000, the Vatican television station, saw a huge increase in audience. Once again, the same occurred with radio broadcasting prayers and rosaries. Paradoxically, a largely secularised country found itself in need of Christian reassurance: Church closed – TV on. Religion took the stage, and it came to the attention of the sovereigntists.

The Roman-Catholic Church, on this occasion, conscious of its pivotal role, used all its means to meet the needs of believers, also indulging in those celebrations which are less digestible to the rest of the Oikumene: in Turin the ostension of Sindon was promoted on TV, and in Rome Pope Francis restored the Indulgentia Plenaria Urbi et Orbi (Plenary Indulgence for All).

On 19 April 2020, Father Lino Viola, a catholic priest, was celebrating mass in his little church of Gallignano, a small village 70km east of Milan, when the carabinieri entered the building. There were some 13 people in the church. Asked to stop the mass, the priest refused from the pulpit. When the carabinieri kindly tried to convince him to talk to the local mayor over the mobile phone, Father Lino went on with the service after stating "This is an abuse".

This scene, filmed by one of the believers, went viral. For having infringed the DPCM (prime minister decree), the carabinieri fined the priest 680 euro and each attendee 280 euro. The faith community sympathetically decided to contribute to the payment, while the local bishop reproached the priest for breaking the rules imposed by the law and shared by the Catholic Church. Matteo Salvini commented asking for the reopening of churches at Easter (as did Trump). Luckily, no one agreed.

Although all faiths agreed to oblige the request to stop any public religious celebrations, Father Lino had touched a nerve: can a State, in the case of an emergency, limit the religious freedom of its citizens? Is there a scale of value between the Constitutional Rights? Is a community's right to physical health contingent on its spiritual health, and the right to worship and attend a mass?

The answer to these questions is yes, according to the Constitutional Court. But this limitation must be temporary and proportional to the emergency, say the judges. The policy targeted to limit the spread of the pandemic is not a violation of the Constitutional Right stated in Art.19, where the freedom of belief is limited only by the "buon costume" (morality).

Yet, this issue of liberty of religion and its supposed infringement became a new battlefield for the populist. As Mussolini knew perfectly, one doesn't achieve any power in Italy if one does not have an agreement with the Catholic Church, or at least with its people. This is

why, in 1929, Mussolini agreed to make the Catholic Creed the State religion almost 60 years after the Pope excommunication from the Italian Kingdom.

There is no room for such a pact with a pope such as Francis, he is too liberal and ecumenical. Salvini therefore decided to join the more fundamentalist part of the Roman-Catholic Church by holding and kissing the rosary during public rallies and speeches, claiming to rely on the help of the Holy Virgin for himself, his party, and the nation.

The Vatican supported the lockdown as a necessity. Most protestant and evangelical churches switched to streaming worship, conducting bible studies and radio meditations via Zoom. Notably, the Baptist churches of Lombardy (the region more affected by the pandemic) recorded worship with the participation of pastors and believers from different communities of the region. The edited versions broadcast via the Web on Sundays reached large audiences and gave a vibrant image of a church in prayer, notwithstanding the imposed social distancing and the tragic events in hospitals.

To regain popularity, the Lega party leader tried to ride the spiritual and emotional wave during the first part of the lockdown, even reciting the 'Eternal Rest' prayer on television during a talk show. On this occasion, Salvini changed his previous style, discarding the sweatshirt and donning eyeglasses to give him a more educated and professional look. This 'conversion' in both religion and personal style is part of a wider plan.

There is a transnational, conservative, Catholic network working against Pope Francis based in the US. The same group which claims that the pandemic is a divine punishment, claims that the Pope's actions and beliefs are a betrayal of the real faith. It pours dollars into European right-wing parties, as proven in a journalistic investigation by Report on RaiTre. Matteo Salvini and Giorgia Meloni are also funded by this movement. Their aim now is to look more reliable.

In early May, the Conferenza Episcopale Italiana (CEI) strongly suggested the reopening of churches and allowing of funerals. Prime Minister Conte agreed to a protocol with the Roman-Catholic Church and with the other faiths. From 18 May 2020, churches have been unlocked under strict rules, just as in the majority of other European countries. And just as the issue of the so-called infringement of the right to the Freedom of Religion and Belief, the war to defend the Italian faith did not last for long.

NHS, the Battle of Federalism

Resilience, solidarity, unity. Italy, for a brief moment, seemed to find a way of facing the emergency by dropping the usual political fight. Commentators praised the population for its sense of responsibility, and national pride and mourning went hand in hand. But it was a short honeymoon.

The National Health Service in Italy is managed by the regional governments and by their presidents. Italy is composed of 20 regions, with a few holding a special status. The NHS accounts for a considerable chunk of their budget and, during the last 20 years, both left and right-wing parties, despite having different management approaches, cut down their funding. In Lombardy in particular, regional presidents have granted hospitals and private clinics huge resources, underfunding the smaller local and public forms of assistance, favouring big hospitals versus family doctors and big cities versus small towns. Over the years, many local hospitals have closed their doors. Consequently, when faced with the pandemic, Lombardy could not rely upon an efficient network to prevent the infection from spreading, nor could it share vital info. It became the region with highest number of infected and deaths. In addition, not knowing where to place those infected, they were sent to RSAs (residences for the elderly) with the result of spreading the infection among the most vulnerable.

The tension between central and regional government has been an historic one. As a peninsula, a composition of small entities with very different historical and cultural backgrounds, and having been conquered and occupied throughout the centuries by armies from all over Europe, it's clear that localism and small identities play a great role in Italy's self-understanding (unification is as recent as 1861). For example, most Italians speak both the national language and their dialect. Linguistically, being Sicilian or Venetian makes a great difference. This has a huge relevance in time of fluid identity. For example, the Lega Party was founded as a Liga Veneta (Venetian League), advocating for the secession. Although this regionalism has been disregarded by Salvini (who, in fact, changed the name of his party), it is still central to the political struggle.

Each region president (13 right-wing and 6 left-wing) initially faced the crisis with different approaches based on heterogeneous factors: number of infected, the advice of local groups of experts, or even for reasons of political convenience in view of forthcoming elections. When it came to reopening - partially or entirely - economic and social activities, most of the so-called Governors took individual decisions. Some opened bars but not churches, some even threatened to close the "borders of their region to people coming from the north". A mayor of a small village took advantage of the fact that there is only one road in and out by organising a "blockade" with huge stones, preventing non-residents from entering.

The government in Rome tried to formulate a common policy. The irony of the DPCM allowing people to meet congiunti (relatives) but not friends and lovers did not go unnoticed. The word congiunti is not a legal one, so it needed to be explained in detail. On the other hand, southern regions claimed that with little numbers of infected there was no reason to lockdown all the economy. In conclusion, each part of the country took different measures. What was permitted in Lombardy was

not allowed in Tuscany. This situation lasted till 18 May 2020 when Conte officially ended the lockdown (with some exclusions like schools and sports) but granted the regions the possibility of deciding otherwise. This implied that governors will also have to take on the responsibility of the re-emergence of infections. At this point, some of them who had earlier protested for a quick reopening started to look more cautious.

This scenario might help populism return.

Lega has always been on the side of federalism, which means, from an economic standpoint, that the wealthy regions like Lombardy and Veneto will hold onto their region's taxes, limiting their contribution to the central government and the poorer regions of the south. Lockdown, restriction of contacts and travel will reinforce localism.

Looking at the big picture, other elements will play in favour of a comeback of populist parties: the conflict with northern European countries (the Netherlands, Sweden, and Denmark) will strengthen Euro-scepticism.

As the economic crisis increases social conflict, the solidarity and unity we witnessed during these terrible months will disintegrate. Populism will then be a relief valve. And eventually, we will switch from 'Italians first!' to 'Every man for himself!'.

Some say that the lesson learned from the pandemic is that we cannot save ourselves individually, at the expense of our neighbours. We must seek a common, global approach. Will the Italians remember the lesson?

KOSOVO*, SERBIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH, AND POPULISM

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The situation in Kosovo[2*] is not new, nor it is without its complications. These complications need to be understood before delving deeper into this specific topic. In addition to that, the term 'populism' needs to be addressed before moving further, to avoid the same understanding as that of the 'Polish horse',[3] as the term 'populism' is used for various purposes, and often in complete contradiction.

Therefore, we need to find a definition for populism, as well become acquainted with a very brief history of relations in post–war Kosovo*, so that one might understand better the matter at hand.

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[2] [*] As described by Security Council Resolution 1244 and ICJ opinion

[3] In 1746 Polish dictionary, definition for a horse is "Everyone knows what a horse is".

Populism with Regard to Kosovo* and the Serbian Orthodox Church

As is already stated in various publications, 'populism' has become a catch-all term in recent years[4]. Although it can have various meanings, depending on the actors in question, one could always be certain that, within populism, there exist at least two groups with conflicting interests, whether those interests are real or misrepresented for certain purposes. We could say that a populist agenda always creates a divide between *us* and *them* in order to use that divide for its own purposes.

The *us* in populist terminology refers to those who are usually morally superior and made to suffer by *them*, whether *them* are the ones in power or protected by norms that are not in the interests of *us*. The *us* are therefore suffering to please *them*. However, *they* are never satisfied and always want more from *us*: more of *our* jobs, *our* rights, *our* money, etc.

With that in mind, a conclusion that need not be stipulated is that the *us* need to do something to protect *us* from *them* before it is too late and *they* get *their* way. Once that effect is etched in the minds of people, a representative of *us* needs only keep the flames of the conflict alive, and steer that conflict in a certain direction.

Regarding some other definitions of populism, we feel that it does not matter who has the power and who does not. For populists to succeed, they do not need to be in any kind of opposition. They only need to create a permanent threat to the interests of *us,* coming from *them*.

Finally, the divide created between *us* and *them* in almost all cases serves a particular purpose.

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[4] Canovan, Margaret, *Populism*, New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovuch, 1981, 3.

For this article, the relation that is important is the relation between the Kosovo* Albanian stakeholders and institutions, and the Serbian Orthodox Church.[5] With that in mind, we can define populism as an act or verbal expression of an individual or of a group, with an intention to create and sustain a divide against targeted individual or a group, with a desire to achieve certain goals, at the expense of a targeted individual or a group.

Kosovo – a Brief History

After the war in 1999, the Serbian population in Kosovo, as well as the Serbian Orthodox Church, faced a massive wave of violence. Over 210,000 Serbs were forced out of their homes,[6] 35 churches and other religious objects of the highest cultural value were demolished,[7] while almost double that number in the second and third category were destroyed, and in that wave of violence and terror all kinds of atrocities happened. In Devič Monastery, nuns were held captive for days by a local warlord and his company, where they were raped and molested repeatedly until help finally arrived.[8] Two of the Serbian Orthodox

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[5] The term "Serbian Orthodox Church" refers more specifically to the Diocese of Raška and Prizren, which has canonical jurisdiction in Kosovo*, as well as in a part of territory outside of Kosovo*. But, to avoid any confusion, the term that we will be using here will be *Serbian Orthodox Church* or simply *The Church.*

[6] Commissariat for Refugees and Migration of the Republic of Serbia (2018), "Situation and needs of internally displaced persons", https://www.unhcr.org/see/wp-content/uploads/sites/57/2018/12/Situation_and_Needs_of_IDPs_2018_ENG.pdf, 12 (accessed in 15 July 2022).

[7] Media Srbjia (2005) "The fate of cultural heritage in Kosovo and Metohija", https://media.srbija.gov.rs/medeng/documents/fate_of_cult_heritage.pdf, 19 (accessed in 15 July 2022).

[8] Glas Javnosti archive in Serbian (1999), "OVK" pljačka i siluje, http://arhiva.glas-javnosti.rs/arhiva/1999/06/18/najnovije-vesti-0617.html (accessed in 15 July 2022).

Church monks were kidnapped and had their heads ritually sawn off after being tortured.[9] There was the presence of the international community with a UN mandate, according to Security Council Resolution 1244[10], with a military presence KFOR.[11] but they did little in those post-war days to protect the minority population.

After the initial chaos, crimes - although not on the same previous scale - did not stop, and were both brutal and numerous at times.[12] [13] The goal of the stakeholders behind those crimes was to drive out the remaining Serbian population through intimidation. Serbian Orthodox Church clergy and staff could not move freely without an international military escort, except in a small number of Serb settlements.

Supervised by the international community, Kosovo* had gotten its government with a UN high representative having final and unlimited executive power, superseding all other institutions, including judicial and legislative institutions. In the elections, parties mostly nominated their candidates parties around former warlords who held actual control over certain areas in Kosovo*.

Tensions had been building for several years, and on 17 March 2004, there was yet another wave of organised violence against the Serbian population and Serbian Orthodox Church. The official narrative, proven

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[9] "New Martyrs of our times, Fr Chariton Lukić", http://www.kosovo.net/ hariton.html (accessed in 15 July 2022).

[10] United Nations (1999), "Resolution 1244", https://unmik.unmissions.org/ united-nations-resolution-1244 (accessed in 15 July 2022).

[11] Kosovo Force, an international military presence in Kosovo*, according to UN SC Resolution 1244.

[12] KoSSev (2021), "Staro Gracko: There will not be justice for the victims and the kidnapped until the perpetrators are found, https://kossev.info/staro-gracko-there-will-not-be-justice-for-the-victims-and-the-kidnapped-until-the-perpetrators-are-found/ (accessed in 15 July 2022)

[13] Voice of America in Serbian (2020), "Kosovo: 17 godina od ubistva srpske dece u Goraždevcu", https://www.glasamerike.net/a/kosovo-17-godina-od-ubistva-dece-u-gora%C5%BEdevcu/5542325.html (accessed in 15 July 2022)

to be false, was that two Albanian children had been chased into the local river by Serbs with their dogs and drowned.[14] During those three days of massive, organised violence, 23 people lost their lives, 954 people were injured, about 4000 Serbs were driven from their homes, and 36 religious objects were burned or destroyed.[15] Unlike previous instances, the international community finally put up a response to this situation, especially the US KFOR contingent and, after three days, violence was finally contained.[16] However, none of the organisers of that violence have been brought to justice to this day.

In 2008, peace talks began in Vienna with representatives of Serbia and representatives from Kosovo*. The outcome was the self-proclaimed independence of Kosovo*, which remains a point of conflict between governments in Belgrade and Priština. The independence of Kosovo* is limited, even in circles of those who recognised it. There was still a strong international presence, embodied in the office of International Civilian Representative (ICO), and the International Steering Group (ISG). Their task was, in effect, to help transition Kosovo* into a democratic civil society.

The Church also participated in those discussions and gained certain rights for itself. The Church was exempt from taxes or custom duties, it had the rights to build or reconstruct its objects without permission from the authorities, it was protected from any unauthorised or unallowed entrance in its premises by officials, from central or other levels, and special protective zones were established around the most important churches or monasteries. Within special protective zones, nothing could be built without the permission of the Serbian Orthodox Church, and

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[14] Humanitarian Law Center (2021), "The March violence in Kosovo, a reminder of the facts", http://www.hlc-rdc.org/?p=37934&lang=de#_ftn1 (accessed 15 July 2022).

[15] Humanitarian Law Center, Ibid.

[16] In Serbia and within Kosovo* Serb population, this event is referred to as 'the March pogrom'.

certain activities, such as highways or large-scale projects were banned completely. Finally, a special body was established, the Implementation and Monitoring Council (the IMC), to watch over the implementation, and to solve all disputes between the Serbian Orthodox Church and any branches of government.[17]

These mechanisms of protection for the Serbian Orthodox Church were established due to the hostility shown previously by the Albanian authorities towards the Church, with an emphasis on the March 2004 pogrom. Also, a large part of the Ahtisaari Plan (official name: the Comprehensive Proposal for the Kosovo Status Settlement)[18] dealt with matters of land restitution. Being the largest individual landowner in Kosovo before communist expropriation in 1945, the Church was also interested in this part of the Ahtisaari Plan. However, this part was never implemented, nor were there even any formal attempts to implement it, as everyone knew who would get most of its land returned.

In 2012, the set of laws was established and Kosovo's* constitution was changed to end the supervised independence. This was done in coordination with the international community. The Ahtisaari Plan had been abolished, together with the ICO and ISG. In laws governing the transition,[19] certain of the rights of the Serbian Orthodox Church were confirmed but them all. The Church had lost any rights relating to undisturbed reconstruction and rebuilding, some of the rights relating to freedom of movement, and rights relating to the presentation of cultural

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[17] Law No. 03/L-039 on special protective zones, https://gzk.rks-gov.net/ActDocumentDetail.aspx?ActID=2529 (accessed on 15 July 2022).

[18] 2007, "The Comprehensive Proposal for the Kosovo Status Settlement", http://pbosnia.kentlaw.edu/Comprehensive%20Proposal%20for%20the%20Kosovo%20Settlement.pdf (accessed 15 July 2022).

[19] Law no. 04/L-115 on Ammending and Supplementing the Laws Related to the Ending of International Supervision of Independence of Kosovo, https://gzk.rks-gov.net/ActDocumentDetail.aspx?ActID=2840 (accessed 15 July 2022).

heritage;[20] the guarantees for documents did not get any sub-legal acts and are often ignored, etc. The laws that relate to Church rights did get a special status in the Constitution, and there is a set of laws that cannot be changed without the explicit approval of a Serbian parliamentary group in Kosovo's* parliament.

Almost immediately after the transfer process was complete, problems for the Serbian Orthodox Church began. In 2015, the Government of Kosovo* (GoK) tried to pass a law on cultural heritage which would effectively take all the cultural heritage from the Church. GoK also tried to institute 'cultural inspectors' into the churches and monasteries, even with the special provision banning the entrance of official organs. Through intentional sabotage, the IMC was rendered impotent, and had become little more than a debate club, solving no problems save those that happen to be in the interest of GoK or persons connected to them. The identity of the Serbian Orthodox Church was denigrated everywhere and a new pseudo history movement got far larger media support, with attempts to present the Serbian Orthodox Church, an institution with eight centuries of continuous presence in Kosovo*, as an intruder, and an institution whose sole purpose is to serve the whims of politicians from Serbia.

Finally, in the February 2021 elections, the movement called Self-Determination took absolute power. It is a political movement advocating for 'Natural Albania',[21] while fiercely against the rights of communities, and a movement that is a strong proponent of pseudo historical rhetoric, etc. Immediately after taking power, and needing legitimacy in the eyes of the international community, the Prime

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[20] This is a large problem, as the Serbian Orthodox Church in Kosovo is facing cultural appropriation.

[21] This is, in fact, the recycled idea of the 'Greater Albania', a state that encompassed parts of Serbia, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Greece, that existed in WWII as an ally of the Axis powers.

Minister, Mr Albin Kurti, wrote to the Church, wishing to meet, but never once mentioned it by its full name - Serbian Orthodox Church - but rather 'Orthodox Church in Kosovo'.[22] Certain ministers in the Assembly said that upholding the Law on Special Protected Zones would be treasonous, that Serbian Orthodox Church cultural monuments are again being proclaimed as Albanian heritage,[23] and the Church was again marked as first and foremost a servant of the Milosević regime, and later of every other Serbian regime. In a brief time, the number of ethnically or religiously motivated incidents rose considerably. All of this has had the effect of further distancing the Church from the GoK, and representatives from the Church will not meet with Kosovo* officials until certain long standing issues are finally resolved, as they do not want to participate in showing an image of Kosovo* as an entity that is committed to preserving or promoting the religious and human rights of Serbs or the Serbian Orthodox Church.

Taking into account what has been said about populism, Kosovo's* economy is in extremely bad condition. Unemployment is high, especially among the young population.[24] The rate of childbirth, for which Albanians have been known throughout the 1980s and 1990s, has greatly declined,[25] and the numbers of people that are leaving are

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[22] KoSSev (2021), "'Congratulations' of Albin Kurti", https://kossev.info/congratulations-of-albin-kurti/ (accessed 15 July 2022).

[23] Capussela, Andrea Lorenzo (2020), "Are 'Serb' churches Serb? Critique of an unwise choice", https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2020/09/28/are-serb-churches-serb-critique-of-an-unwise-choice/ (accessed 15 July 2022).

[24] Kosovo Agency of Statistics (2021), "Unemployment Rate in Kosovo decreased to 25.80 percent in the first quarter of 2021 from 27 percent in the fourth quarter of 2020", https://tradingeconomics.com/kosovo/unemployment-rate (accessed 15 July 2022).

[25] The World Bank (2020), "Fertility rate, total (births per women) – Kosovo", https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.DYN.TFRT.IN?locations=XK (accessed 15 July 2022).

staggering for such a small society.[26] The corruption rate is very high[27] and, as a society, Kosovo* is surviving in large part from money transfers from emigrants. Therefore, there are a huge number of problems, even without the traditional hostility towards the Serbian Orthodox Church, or the question of the status of Kosovo*.

Populism in Kosovo* and Its Consequences

After this brief introduction to the history and current situation of Kosovo*, one could be safely conclude that there was, and still is, huge hostility towards the Serbian Orthodox Church in Kosovo. Part of that hostility lies in the history of Kosovo* Albanians and Serbs. Nevertheless, as we shall see from the examples below, the Church is purposely falsely portrayed as a problematic institution, and that it wants rights that conflict with the rights of the majority of the population.

Whenever the Serbian Orthodox Church stands firm in upholding its legal rights, laws guaranteeing those rights are marked as oppressive towards Kosovo Albanians and against the interests of Kosovo*. When it calls upon the verdict of a Constitutional Court of Kosovo*, the verdict, as well as the Constitutional Court, are marked as *w*orking against the interest of people of Kosovo*. When the Serbian Orthodox Church held a liturgy in its temple after twenty years, it was accused of being a 'political' liturgy, and the temple itself was proclaimed to be a 'Milosevich' church. The Serbian Orthodox Church is often portrayed as 'using its power' to work against the 'interests of Kosovo's* people'.

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[26] Balkan Insight (2019), "Leaving Kosovo: Legal Migration Upsurge Causes Depopulation Fears", https://balkaninsight.com/2019/04/25/leaving-kosovo-legal-migration-upsurge-causes-depopulation-fears/ (accessed 15 July 2022).

[27] Transparency International (2021), "Kosovo is the 87 least corrupt nation out of 180 countries, according to the 2021 Corruption Perceptions Index reported by Transparency International", https://tradingeconomics.com/kosovo/corruption-rank (accessed 15 July 2022).

If we call upon our definition of populism, we clearly have an *us* (the interests of people of Kosovo* or of Kosovo* itself) and a *them* (the Serbian Orthodox Church, purposefully damaging the interests of Kosovo* and its people). In that situation, only a small spark is needed to cause damage. As we shall see, that spark is ever looming and, if something does not change, that spark shall be ignited, as it has been so many times before.

Monastery, Rule of Law and the Interests of *the People*

The Visoki Dečani monastery is a fourteenth century monastery, one of the most beautiful in this part of the world, unique in its mix of Serbian Orthodox and Romanesque styles. It exists for almost seven centuries and has continuously had services in all that time; its icons and the building itself are preserved and in excellent shape. It is a considered a UNESCO world heritage site.

During the post-war period, the monastery was bombed by mortar shells on two occasions. The monastery was also a target of ISIS graffiti back in 2014[28] and, although the monks housed and protected a large number of local Albanians from harm during the war,[29] monks have often had the most horrible accusations thrown at them.[30] The monastery

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[28] Diocese of Raška – Prizren (2014), "Terrorist graffiti appeared overnight in the vicinity of Dečani Monastery",https://eparhija-prizren.com/en/news/terrorist-graffiti-appeared-overnight-vicinity-decani-monastery/ (accessed 15 July 2022).

[29] Booth, Rod (2000), "Dateline ACT Monastery became a sanctuary - 80 Orthodox churches and shrines in Kosovo have been attacked and demolished", https://reliefweb.int/report/serbia/dateline-act-monastery-became-sanctuary-80-orthodox-churches-and-shrines-kosovo-have (accessed 15 July 2022).

[30] KoSSev (2021), "CDHRF from the „burning" of Albanians in Trepca in 1999, through to 17 March, to Fr. Sava as a "possible war criminal", https://kossev.info/cdhrf-from-the-burning-of-albanians-in-trepca-in-1999-through-to-march-17th-to-fr-sava-as-a-possible-war-criminal/ (accessed 15 July 2022).

tried to open to the local community, and the international community even established an outreach program with a local school where students would visit the monastery, spend some time with monks and have their questions answered, but the local authorities cancelled it without explanation after a while.

Shortly after the war, an unknown individual changed the cadastral records of around 24 hectares of monastic land around the monastery, and registered them to a previously bankrupt, socially-owned enterprise (SOE). After that decision was annulled by the Special Representative of the Secretary General for Kosovo (SRSG) in 2000, the monastery was sued and a lengthy court proceeding followed. However, the land in the local cadastral office was still registered to the non-existing SOEs. In 2016, after sixteen years of litigation, the monastery got the final verdict from the Constitutional Court of Kosovo*, stating that the land belongs to the monastery and that this decision is final, self-executable and binding for all persons and institutions in Kosovo*.[31]

This caused outrage. The monastery was labelled as an entity working 'against the interests of citizens of Dečani municipality', and local informal stakeholders organised a series of demonstrations not only against the monastery but also against the Constitutional Court (CC), putting posters with images of the CC judges everywhere,[32] and going so far as to threaten the judges of the CC. To ease the situation, representatives of the international community went to the local assembly, offering projects to develop local economic activities, but the reply they received was that the land in question "is our land, and we need it to develop our municipality".

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[31] Constitutional Court (2016), "Case no. KI132/15", https://gjk-ks.org/wp-content/uploads/vendimet/KI132_15_ANG.pdf (accessed 15 July 2022).

[32] Nikci, Skodran (2016), "Kosovo Albanians Protest Against Court Ruling on Decani", https://balkaninsight.com/2016/05/26/protest-against-court-s-ruling-on-land-case-in-decani-05-26-2016/ (accessed 15 July 2022).

After the international attempts failed, the monastery submitted a request to the local municipality to register its land. It received its answer from the mayor on 26 May 2017. Included in the answer, among other things, was that the Assembly of Dečani had voted for a ruling not to enforce the CC decision. After that, the Church went to the Kosovo Cadastral Agency, which has supreme authority in these matters within Kosovo's* system. It never received an answer. Unofficially, the Cadastral Agency is waiting for an 'approval' from local stakeholders. With that in mind, we renewed our request in 2020, only to have the same occur again. The request remains open and unanswered at the Kosovo Cadastral Agency.

On 27 May 2019, the municipality of Dečani again had an extraordinary session, only to issue a declaration that it stands against the implementation of the CC verdict, as the CC did not account for the 'interests of the local population'. Also: "We believe that no one in this State, either local or international institutions, nor the monastery, invest in creating situations 'where we will be faced with civic disobedience of whatever nature'".

Along with the local institutions, there is a local pseudo historical society, which has, as one of its main goals, to spread pseudo historical narratives and threaten the monastery.[33] No one has been held accountable for all those threats.

The CC verdict, despite the law and requests made by the Church, and all the efforts of the highest authorities of the international community, is still to be implemented five years after it has was ruled.

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[33] Koha, Izvor (2019), "Albanian historians: 'Abbot of Visoki Decani to apologize for genocide of the Serbian state and people. The monastery is Albanian'", https://kossev.info/albanian-historians-abbot-of-visoki-decani-to-apologize-for-genocide-of-the-serbian-state-and-people-the-monastery-is-albanian/ (accessed 15 July 2022).

In the meantime, local stakeholders are fuelling hatred against the monastery, without any consequences.

Temple, Liturgy and Graffiti

Temple of Christ the Saviour in Priština (the Temple) began being built in 1993. At the time, there were more than 40,000 Serbs living in Priština, and they demanded a cathedral temple, as there was only one small church in the entire city. The municipality donated some of the unused University land and the Church began the construction with all the necessary paperwork in hand. At the start of the war, the temple itself had been consecrated and the rough exterior finished but not the interior. After the war, the municipality of Priština attempted, as in Dečani, to change the cadastral records but the decision was annulled by the SRSG. The University filed a lawsuit requesting the Church demolish its temple and give the land back to the University but was rejected in 2017, and it filed another in 2019, which is pending.

The primary motive is clear, there cannot be big temple representing the Serbian Orthodox Church in the centre of Priština. However, there is also a more lucrative motive: The land around the temple, large in surface, is in the centre of a city, and potentially very valuable to investors.

During the post–war years, the temple was intentionally desecrated, its surroundings used as a garbage dump, and there were mountain climbers climbing to the top of the temple, stating that they had "conquered the Church" and it went without saying that the Church staff and clergy were forbidden to enter it. The temple was proclaimed to be 'a Milosevich church', 'a symbol of Serbian oppression', etc., and there were many suggestions about what to do with the temple. Suggestions went from simply taking the land from the Church and demolishing the temple, to the more creative – to take the temple from the Church and

turn it into a museum of 'Genocide against Kosovan Albanians'.[34] After the Church went public with all the proper documentation, the temple started being perceived as 'a symbol of discrimination against Albanians which cannot be allowed to be finished'.

After the Church cleaned the temple and its surroundings in 2017, an action which caused trouble with the Kosovo police,[35] the keys from the temple remained in the possession of the Church. On 10 June 2021, the Diocesan Bishop held a liturgy in the temple for the first time since the war. Neither during the liturgy or after it were there any incidents or provocations, nobody from Kosovo's* public life was mentioned, and there were no interactions with anyone outside the Church regarding the liturgy. After the Church had posted news about it on its website, there was a hate campaign all over Kosovo's* media, calling the liturgy an "incident", a "provocation", etc.[36] In the evening of 10 June, graffiti appeared on the doors of our temple, stating, in English "Jesus hates Serbs".[37] The following day, 11 June, a student group affiliated with a local political party held protests were they again shouted anti-Church slogans and, in the presence of Kosovo police, wrote graffiti on the

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[34] Koha Ditore (2021), "Bezeraj: Church on UP campus to be turned into a museum of Genocide", https://www.koha.net/arberi/277784/bezeraj-kisha-ne-kampusin-e-up-se-te-shnderrohet-ne-muze-te-gjenocidit/ (accessed 15 July 2022).

[35] After this action, the Secretary of the Diocese was brought to a police station, where he was held for several hours and received *a serious warning* to stay out of the Temple. He did not receive any official document that would forbid any such activities, however, because the Church is the owner of the temple and surrounding land, and that document would be subject to legal remedies.

[36] KoSSev (2021), "Reactions from Pristina to the liturgy in the Church of Christ the Savior: Provocations will not be tolerated, protest to be held today", https://kossev.info/reactions-from-pristina-to-the-liturgy-in-the-church-of-christ-the-savior-provocations-will-not-be-tolerated-protest-to-be-held-today/ (accessed 15 July 2022).

[37] KoSSev (2021), Ibid.

temple doors that stated, in Albanian, "The symbol of chauvinism is becoming a holy site, with the blessing of Albin Kurti."[38] The Church did not report this incident to Kosovo police, as their members were present during the second desecration, securing the protestors while in the act of desecrating the Temple.

Serbian Pilgrims Poisoning the Water

This incident happened in the town of Dečani, near the Dečani monastery (previously mentioned with the land issue case). There was a health emergency, with around 1200 citizens falling sick, the cause of which remained as the investigation was still underway. With previous experiences, Serbian Orthodox Church had sent warnings to the international representatives (US, OSCE, EU representatives) that this might be a prelude to blame the situation on Serbs and create a reason for another wave of violence, just like in 2004 pogrom. On 13-14 July, there was an article in Bota Sot, an Albanian newspaper, that two Serbs were in the proximity of the waterworks, with Novi Sad registration plates (city in northern Serbia) asking around for directions to Dečani monastery, and that they were suspected of poisoning the water supply.[39]

As this had the potential of inflaming the situation, and was clearly premeditated, the Church immediately addressed the matter to the international organisations. Just before the news escalated beyond the possibility of damage control, the US Embassy issued a tweet about the importance of not spreading such rumours. There was also other work

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[38] KoSSev (2021), "Protest against yesterday's liturgy in the Church of Christ the Savior", https://kossev.info/protest-against-yesterdays-liturgy-in-the-church-of-christ-the-savior-symbol-of-chauvinism-is-becoming-a-holy-site-with-the-blessing-of-albin-kurti/ (accessed 15 July 2022).

[39] Bota Press (2021), "Uninsured wells and 'two suspicious Serbs who visited Decani before poisoning'", https://botapress.info/pusetat-e-pasiguruara-dhe-dy-serbet-e-dyshimte-qe-vizituan-decanin-para-helmimit/ (accessed 15 July 2022).

on alleviating the situation. The media stories on the 'Serb pilgrims poisoning the water' had ceased, and a few days later, official sources confirmed that the source of the water poisoning was E coli bacteria. The prosecutor in the area, however, remained adamant that he would investigate the story about "suspicious Serbs" around the water supply.

Kosovo* Police and Justice System

To conclude, one of the key pillars for this treatment of the Serbian Orthodox Church is the Kosovo* justice system. Almost no perpetrator ever gets caught. Even if a perpetrator gets caught, they can count on a charge that does not include inter-ethnic or inter-religious hatred, even when those things are obvious. Offenses are most often given light charges, or charges for 'damage against property'. And sentences are either lacking because the case goes into prescription or because there is pressure from the international community, or, more frequently, they are suspended sentences.

If one were to read police or court statistics, one would think that Kosovo* is a society with a history of ethnic or religious hatred that is free of violence, which is far from the truth. When speaking about populism as defined above, we must be aware that this is a subtle policy, not only designed to hide the true state of affairs, but also to justify the current state of affairs. If one would call out Kosovo* as a society hostile to the Serbian Orthodox Church, or a society with constant and rising inter-ethnic and inter-religious incidents, officials could show police statistics that prove hate crimes are almost non-existent, and the person speaking about the true state of affairs could be labelled as an 'enemy of Kosovo*, a Serbian mercenary, an enemy of Albanian people', or similar names used in populist rhetoric when confronted with reality.

Populism and Its Consequences

As seen from these few examples, populist rhetoric could lead to serious consequences over the period of time. In a span of one month only, the Serbian Orthodox Church has had its temple doors sprayed with chauvinistic slurs in the presence of police, and people associated with the Serbian Orthodox Church have been accused of poisoning the water in the media. It would be hard, and it would take too much space, to illustrate how guaranteed rights and freedoms of the Serbian Orthodox Church have degraded over the years because the same institutions that are responsible for punishing such behaviours have ignored them.

And although populist rhetoric aimed at the Church is not the only factor in the treatment of Serbian Orthodox Church in Kosovo*, it is the one that binds everything together. Through populist rhetoric, people are rallied, their enemy is pointed at over and over again, so they do not forget and, through populist rhetoric, every act of vandalism or human and religious rights depravation or diminishment is justified as a defence.

In this atmosphere, three solutions for the future are possible. The first would be that Albanian media and politicians stop using inflammable rhetoric and start respecting the rights and freedoms, as well as property, of the Serbian Orthodox Church. The second would be to make a new arrangement, together with the international community, with far better and stronger guarantees for the Church, as the system which depends on Kosovo* institutions has had a decade to prove itself, and it keeps generating problems almost daily. The third solution would be to leave the things just as they are, and in couple of decades, to have the Serbian Orthodox Church leave Kosovo*, or have the objects of the Serbian Orthodox Church taken away in favour of a religious institution that would best serve the needs of Kosovo's* Albanian elite.

As the first solution is unrealistic, and the third solution would be tragic, it is the job of all stakeholders, with the international community at the helm, to find a viable and permanent solution that would replace an unsuccessful, decade-long experiment with something more viable and permanent that would not depend on the whims of Albanian politicians.

NATIONALISM AND POPULISM
IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE[*]

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Preliminary Remarks

We are 'living in an age of populist democracies'[1] claims Márton Gulyás - Hungarian artist, political activist and co-founder of the Human Platform on the Austrian website *Der Standard* in July last year. The cause lies in the spectacular failure of the 'Wende' (the political events of 1989/1990), i.e. a failure of the transition processes from a socialist central administration and planned economy to a free democracy, or to a Western-style prosperity secured by a free market economy in Central-Eastern European societies. Populism is, according to Gulyás, a necessity, and only left-wing populism can lead to the revival of democracies in Hungary and the EU.

These and similar assertions are astonishing. Yet, quite a few scientific studies and analyses seriously ask the question: "Is populism a

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[1] Gulyás, Márton (2018), "Mit linkem Populismus gegen Orbán", https://derstandard.at/2000084426797/Mit-linkem-Populismus-gegen-Orban (accessed on 15 November 2022)

force that endangers democracy or a force that revitalises it?"[2], as does H. R. Reuter, for example. Likewise, in a study by sociologist Karin Priester, she considers whether populism could indeed fulfil a positive function as a "useful corrective", as populists often "take up taboo, unpopular or neglected topics"[3], criticise the extent, dysfunctionality, and opacity of political institutions[4] and point to (Reuter again) disappointed expectations of democratic participation and involvement. And this brings me to my first preliminary remark: populism does not arise from nowhere, but always in the wake of a social crisis. The resurgence of populism over the past decades signals a crisis of representative democracy that shows many facets.

My second preliminary remark concerns the concept of nationalism. On the occasion of his farewell lectures in Budapest five years ago, and regarding the history and present of Hungary in Europe, the American historian John Lukács – a Hungarian who recently died aged 95 in May 2019, said, "Neither communism nor socialism nor liberalism could cause such profound changes in the history of European societies in the 20th century as nationalism. Nationalism triggered the most successful revolution and even today - especially in economic crisis situations - is readily claimed as a mobilising force; but a sober differentiation between nationalism and national-cultural identity would be appropriate."

Question: To what extent does this problem, to which the two above preliminary remarks refer, apply to the societal developments in Hungary and Central Eastern Europe, to the diverse church life in these countries, to the cultivation of the heritage of a practised Christianity,

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[2] Reuter, Hans-Richard, "Die populistische Revolte - vier Anmerkungen", in: *ZEE* 62 (3), 2018, 165.

[3] Priester, Karin, "Wesensmerkmale des Populismus", in: *APuZ* 62 (5-6), 2012, 7.

[4] Hartleb, Florian, "Populismus als Totengräber oder mögliches Korrektiv der Demokratie?", in: *APuZ* 62 (5-6), 2012, 26.

and to the creative potential of Protestant theology and Church? And if our Protestant churches want to take seriously the fears and concerns caused by these symptoms of crisis and/or by nationalist or right-wing populist political forces, then their mission - beyond preaching, education, *diaconia* and pastoral care - also includes a sober analysis of this reality. Moral indignation or moralising appeals cannot replace political-ethical judgement.

Characteristics of Populism

The first characteristic is directly related to the literal meaning of 'populism'. Populism is characterised by the allegedly legitimisation of the invocation of 'the people' as the 'true and authentic sovereignty',[5] and is accompanied by the claim that we are the authentic representatives of this democratic sovereignty. Here, not only is a rhetorical formula filled with pathos - 'we are the people' – repeatedly invoked; rather the exclusive representation of a common sense is also suggested by all means: common sense and the views of the people are superior to the reflective knowledge of the scholars, the academics and the intellectuals. These views - according to populist rhetoric - are based on concrete life experiences, are unadulterated, healthy and free from the scepticism of intellectualism. "Scholars, arrogant bureaucrats, cold-hearted technocrats, uncomprehending centralists, avant-garde thinkers, worshippers of big money" ignore the views of the people;[6] they believe that the people are stupid, and wisdom lies only with experts. Instead, "average workers" or "the man in the street" are instinctively superior to the functional elite. Populism thus feeds on an existing or fomented

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[5] Polke, Christian, "Populismus als Herausförderung für die demokratische Zivilgesellschaft. Eine ethisch-theologische Perspektive", in: *ZEE* 62 (3), 2018, 203.

[6] Referenced in Priester, ibid., 4

aversion to paternalism from outside or from above, and is directed against the so-called "false" and "treacherous" representatives of the people.

This is immediately followed by the second characteristic: *elite hostility*. The contempt is directed against the power of those who allegedly and wrongly held, or still wrongly hold, themselves as representatives of the people or who hold important positions in social, economic and cultural life. This aversion is occasionally also directed against the legislative and executive instances of the state, parliament and government, and can lead to criticism of the significance and existing forms of representative democracy.[7] (Here cf. with hostility against institutions). Populism, however, is by no means merely a revaluation of the people, but a reversal of relations. Its hostility to the elite is anti-elitist only in an instrumental sense. Rather, it seeks the rise of a new elite that suits its own purposes.

This results in a certain anti-pluralism and claim to social homogeneity. This anti-pluralism is even programmatic, because pluralism is seen as the cause and decisive reason for the failure of social transition situations and longed-for prosperity in the long run. Since the (alleged) will of the majority is always seen as endangered by competing particular interests and special rights of influential groups, propagating and awakening a longing for homogeneity[8] is an obvious way to create images of the enemy. This was already the case in the era of real-life socialism before the fall of communism. For left-wing populism of the socialist kind, the enemies were always the others, the imperialists and capitalists out there who, with the help of their accomplices (internal enemies), endangered the majestic goals of a more just, egalitarian and classless socialist society. For the right-wing populism of our time, the defence of the identity of the indigenous

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[7] See Polke, ibid., 204.

[8] See Reuter, ibid., 164, Polke, ibid., 204.

population against the threat from above and from outside is declared to be the highest goal; the fear of being overrun by (im)migrants and refugees becomes a mobilising force in various strata of society (not only in poorly educated circles, but even and often among academics). It is also significant that when populist forces acquire political mandates through democratic elections, or even form the government, the distinction between politics, state and society become erased (both in left and right populism). In this case, actors of populist forces will use state organs or intervention measures (e.g. subsidies) to act as identity builders and identity promoters. Although openly racist or anti-Semitic nationalist patterns of thought are excluded, it is not the case for the plea against an alleged constant danger from outside. Since no state of our time and geopolitical space can do without a certain plurality of ethno-cultural and spiritual character resulting from the cultural sphere,[9] a limited internal pluralism is acknowledged, but an attempt is made to preserve the common good of the "authentic nation",[10] and the preservation of the identity of the people "in its ancestral place and without a blending of cultures through immigration".[11]

A certain "backward-looking utopia" is closely interwoven with this claim to collective identity and "we-feeling" - as Karin Priester rightly points out on the basis of international comparisons.[12] What is meant by this is the commitment to a romanticised, unhistorical, ideal world, indeed to a "space of the people" that once guaranteed protection and comfort, to which one has a right and which should be maintained as a heritage, especially since one once made many sacrifices for it. Even if this supposed lifeworld cannot be expressed as a social category and

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[9] For example, the plea is not against democracy but against political liberalism, not against confessional diversity and the cultural imprint of Christianity but against Islam.

[10] Referenced in Polke, 204.

[11] Reuter, 165.

[12] Priester, 5-6.

does not function, populists regard this space as a "universe of self-evident things"[13] that must not be abandoned or fragmented. The insistence on continuity with this ideal state and the search for correspondences with this world leads to a backward-looking, defensive, reactive attitude, according to which any questioning of such self-evident facts or the claim to analyse current, socio-cultural or economic conditions is considered as treasonous or stigmatically regarded as fouling one's own nest. In times of growing economic inequalities and rapid processes of change, the preservation of familiar ways of life gains plausibility, which populists like to instrumentalise.

These characteristics of populism are by no means complete and could be discussed further in detail. But I wanted to make my perspective transparent for my further presentation, so as to be able to describe and examine the development of East Central Europe, and especially Hungarian society, in more detail with the help of this interpretative framework.

The Specific Nature of the Development of Modernity in Central and Eastern Europe - Historical, Social and Economic Framework Condition

After the political transition in 1989/1990, Hungary, just like most other states in Eastern Europe, was faced with a protracted process of change by which the country was to transform itself on an economic, social and political level from an authoritarian-totalitarian system to a liberal democracy. However, this was not a uniform process in all the countries of this region: experiences with democratic awakenings from their own history (for example, the 1956 popular uprising in Hungary, the Prague Spring in 1968, Solidarność from 1980 in Poland), the degree

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[13] Husserl, Edmund G., *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendentale Phänomenologie*, Den Haag, 1954, 183. Referenced in Priester, 5.

of human rights violations and repression in the former regimes, cultural legacies of the socialist systems, reminiscence of the old and dissatisfaction with the newly acquired socio-political structures influenced the speed and depth of the transformation processes in the individual states.[14]

The transition from a totalitarian system to a liberal democracy can be characterised, both in Hungary and in other Central Eastern European societies, by several features.[15] I would like to highlight or briefly describe only two aspects, namely a component of a more economic nature and a political one:

- Economically, the transition can be characterised by the opening of a strong almost unfounded future perspective for citizens;

- Politically, society's path evolves from a consolidated democracy around the 'Wende' (i.e. the transition of 1989/1990) to today's hybrid system.

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[14] See Fazakas, Sándor, "Protestantische Identität und gesellschaftliche Gestaltungsaufgabe. Europäische Integration und ›soziales Europa‹ als Herausforderungen des ungarischen Protestantismus", in: Traugott Jähnichen / Torsten Meireis et al. (eds.), *Soziales Europa? Jahrbuch Sozialer Protestantismus*, Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2014, 227−245. See also Pickel, Gert, „Nostalgie oder Problembewusstsein? Demokratisierungs-hindernisse aus der Bewältigung der Vergangenheit in Osteuropa", in; Siegmar Schmidt / Gert Pickel / Susanne Pickel, *Amnesie, Amnestie oder Aufarbeitung? Zum Umgang mit autoritären Vergangenheiten und Menschenrechts verletzungen,* Wiesbaden, 2009, 129−158.

[15] See Fazakas, op. cit., 230ff; See Pickel, Gert / Pollack, Detlef et al. (eds.), *Osteuropas Bevölkerung auf dem Weg in die Demokratie. Repräsentative Untersuchungen in Ostdeutschland und zehn osteuropäischen Transformations-staaten*, Wiesbaden 2006.

Introduction of Market Economy

With the introduction of market economy, many citizens hoped to improve their own material situation to the level of Western-style prosperity. Within a few years, however, these expectations proved untenable. The side effects of economic upheavals (such as unemployment, cost explosion, inflation, corruption), the continuing economic disparity between the eastern and western parts of Europe, the newly created mass social misery and the more recent wave of emigration (due to freedom of movement within the EU) towards wealthier societies, have led to bitter disappointment and often to nostalgia and longing for the old social security of the socialist era. Apparently, the experiences in a post-1989 world are far behind the hoped for expectations.

The formation of a new social order for the country proved difficult. Social science studies and further analyses indicate that Hungary is currently experiencing its third attempt at modernisation.[16] The first attempt was made by the enlightened propertied aristocracy in the mid-19th century in order to avoid the misery of the European cities as a side effect of the capitalism of the time. The formation of the supporting class necessary for this project, the bourgeoisie, was just gaining momentum when the armies of the Austrian Emperor and the Russian Tsar and the subsequent wave of terror and retribution after the March Revolution of 1848 put an end to these reform efforts. The second attempt at modernisation began with the Austro-Hungarian dual monarchy, i.e. with the Compromise of 1867 and with realism in political thinking. The development was breath-taking - by the turn of the millennium, Budapest's infrastructure was on a par with Berlin. However, the defeat in the First World War and the years that followed

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[16] See more Nádas, Péter, "Der Stand der Dinge. Warum der Versuch einer dritten Modernisierung Ungarns nicht gelungen ist", in: *Lettre International 95*, 2011, 39−49.

led to a complete collapse. After the Second World War, the Soviets imposed their political, social and economic structure on Hungary (and on the surrounding societies in the region). During the decades of the Kádár regime, modest prosperity set in, but the price was catastrophic public debt and a flourishing shadow economy as a survival strategy for the population. The third attempt at modernisation, which began with the transition of 1989/1990, suffered and still suffers from the heavy legacy of earlier decades: survival strategies, the search for loopholes in the law, mutual distrust, secrets regarding the former cooperation with the communist state power, the separation of public and private spheres. As for the country's economic performance: a viable bourgeois middle-class has not yet been fully formed and the heavily indebted country, lacking a capital-strong entrepreneurial class, has not been able to hold its own in competition with Western large corporations and investors. Only very few succeeded in gaining a foothold in the new capitalist economic order - above all the former political elite, which had converted its ideological political power into economic power, a fact that has had an extremely irritating effect on the country up to now.

And another remark: the South-Central-Eastern European countries of today's Europe never had the opportunity to achieve the status of a welfare society and a nation state as a result of the development of modernity because of their geopolitical position and historical events. The countries of Western Europe were historically able - as historians and sociologists rightly note - to structure their social life through a relative balance of social security, the rule of law, economic interests and morality. In Central and Eastern Europe, this process was precisely the opposite: it is part of the difficult legacy of the brown and not least the red dictatorships. The memory of the time of humiliation and degradation, or the internal and external disruption left by these regimes, lingers on. And this negative development is now complemented by a resentment towards 'more Europe'. From the perspective of South-

Central-Eastern European societies, it is further deepened by the so-called centre-periphery syndrome (cf. Wallerstein theory[17]): that is, the strong states in the centre of Europe are characterised by an incredibly strong nation-state identity that is hardly perceptible on the surface, they act with a self-confident economic interest, while the countries on the periphery are allowed to continue to function as a cheap labour market and at the same time as an expensive sales market. This prosperity gap between centre and periphery is to be cemented because of the monopolising interests at the core - an explanation for the growing wave of migration in recent years from the new EU member states towards the West...

Developments almost three decades ago have shown that the initial enthusiastic conviction that an authoritarian political system like communism was finally a thing of the past has given way to sober pragmatism. Central-Eastern European societies are thus in a state between continuity and discontinuity. According to statistics, development in terms of poverty reduction is more effective than during the years immediately after the fall of communism. But social questions, economic philosophies, debates about the role of the state are carried out like 'religious wars' instead of sober, technical discussions.

Political Development in Hungary

The political development in Hungary since the fall of communism in 1989/1990 can be described in three phases according to the social scientist András Körösényi:

First period

He calls the first period between 1989-1998 the *phase of transition*. This period is the time of bloodless transition that was to transform society from an authoritarian-totalitarian system into a liberal

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[17] See more Nádas, op. cit., 39−49.

democracy. The system of public law institutions and political institutions could be re-established and further developed. These institutions have been allowed to survive to the present day and continue to function - even though their political vulnerability is strongly criticised today. The period of transition was marked by:

- a pluralistic party landscape,
- public political debates,
- conflicts that have been fought out.

However, the initial "moment of liberal consensus" that came about in the wake of the fall of communism was soon replaced by left-liberal hegemony.[18] Like this very consensus, the results of the negotiated revolution were soon destroyed by the post-communist government majority, left-liberal rhetoric and by the massive mutual trust deficit of the former negotiating partners of 1989. Apparently, the elites saw the results of the initial transition negotiations as provisional only. Soon, the lack of trust led to a differentiation of political-ideological positions and the political actors questioned each other's legitimacy. Substantive issues (such as the questions of power, justice, reparations, the understanding of liberalism, etc.) could not be clarified and negotiated, even though an increase in civil society initiatives and interest in politics was clearly felt in the favourable liberal climate.

Second phase

According to Köröskényi's assessment, the second phase between 1998-2006 is considered the phase of *consolidated democracy*. According to political science analyses, a democracy is then considered consolidated:

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[18] Körösényi, András, *A magyar politikai rendszer – negyedszázad után [The Hungarian political system - after a quarter of a century]*, Budapest, 2015, 403.

- when there are no separatist forces,
- when the majority of citizens think and act within this democratic framework even in the case of serious economic and social crises, and

In this respect, Hungary enjoyed a solid and consolidated democracy in the years between 1998-2006, accompanied by the stability of public law institutions. In parallel, however, another tendency slowly spread during this period: an initially pluralistic political landscape was replaced by a bipolar political camp with strong loyalty expectations and party preferences. This led to the credibility crisis of public institutions and interest groups. They lost political weight, while the influence of political parties increased vis-à-vis civil society organisations, interest groups and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). In addition, another significant phenomenon emerged: a kind of 'leader principle' spread at the top of the respective political camps. This means that, within a political party and vis-à-vis its internal autonomy and leadership organisation, a leader who is considered charismatic gains power. This leader was not supposed to simply manage the party organisation professionally but to mobilise further followers, integrate internal but possibly diverging forces, as well as create visions. Such a tendency was already evident between 2004-2009 in both political blocs in the rivalry of two personalities (Gyurcsány and Orbán) and continues to this day. At present, it seems that a charismatic leader can assert himself on one side only, while the opposition remains fragmented and cannot find an integrating leader.

Crisis and regime change phase

In the phase of *crisis and regime change* (since 2006), thanks to the confrontational style of the political leaders and as a result of the events during the autumn days of 2006, the polarisation of the bipolar political landscape continued (see protests and demonstrations over Prime Minister Gyurcsány's confession of lies, as well as the escalation of the

situation and brutal dispersal of the demonstrations).[19] The period of consolidated democracy came to an end, the crisis of the legitimacy of political forces spread. Citizens' trust in the government and parliament were shaken and it was not until the 2010 elections that an increased interest in politics returned, resulting in a two-thirds majority for the Fidesz party in parliament and the complete fragmentation of the opposition or left political camp. The radical right Jobbik party became the second strongest political force in the country. The former 'elite' arrangements were completely terminated, most political rules, behaviours and norms that characterised the first two phases were abandoned piece by piece. A "central political force field" took the place of a bipolar political power relationship with the dominance of the Fidesz party, which calls itself the Christian-Conservative People's Party. In Hungary, democracy as a form of society remained but the nature of politics was substantially changed. Although the government's rhetoric (based on a revolution by democratic means, or a "revolution from the voting booths") announced a new systemic change, authoritative political science and social science analyses assess what has been happening on the Hungarian political stage since 2010 differently: it is less of a systemic change (compared to 1989/1990) than a constitutional or governmental reform.[20] That is why experts refer to this upheaval with the term: 'regime change'. In a regime change, the institutions of public law remain intact, but significant changes take place:

- in the system of separation of powers,
- in the party system,

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[19] Schwabe, Alexander, "Notwendige Standpauke für Ungarn. Lügen-Bekenntnis und Demonstrationen", in: *Spiegel-online* 20.09.2006, http://www.spiegel.de/politik/ausland/luegen-bekenntnis-und-demonstrationen-notwendige-standpauke-fuer-ungarn-a-438209.html (accessed 15 November 2022).

[20] Körösényi, ibid., 409−410.

- in the configuration of elites, and
- in the preferences and behaviour of voters.

With the regime change, political thinking changed radically: the political forces that came to power now understand and interpret their mandate differently than before, and their ideas about the ideal relationship between state and society take on new accents. A whole range of authoritarian methods have now become part of the style of government and the exercise of power. Populist tones are part of the rhetoric of everyday life, political visions with anti-communist and anti-pluralist elements are being drafted. These symptoms lead the harshest critics of the Orbán regime to speak of a "democrature", a mixture of democracy and dictatorship.[21] Although such claims may seem exaggerated, comparative politics teaches us that there are so-called "hybrid systems" or "intermediate systems" in which parliamentary democratic forms of government and authoritarian tendencies in the exercise of power can get along or need not exclude each other.[22]

Körösényi's periodisation stimulates further thinking in the sense that he does not link the fault lines and transitions between the respective phases to the changes of power or government among the political forces, nor does he make them dependent on parliamentary elections. Rather, he expresses that what is at stake here are tendencies that spread, grow or die over the course of years and parliamentary cycles beyond the rivalry of political forces. A process of change in which so-called

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[21] Bruck, András (2013), "Buslinie Sehnsucht: Die Demokratur in Ungarn", in: *Blätter für deutsche und internationale Politik*, November 2013, https://www.blaetter.de/archiv/jahrgaenge/2013/november/buslinie-sehnsucht-die-demokratur-in-ungarn (accessed 15 November 2022).

[22] Levitsky, Steven / Way, Lucan Ahmad, "Elections Without Democracy. The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism", in: *Journal of Democracy 13* (2), 2002, 51−65. ; Diamond, Larry, "Elections Without Democracy. Thinking about hybrid regimes", in: *Journal of Democracy 13* (2), 2002, 21−35.

"obstacles to democratisation"[23] arise as unavoidable by-products of such a transformation due to cultural legacies of the former system, reminiscent of the old and dissatisfaction with the newly acquired socio-political structures, which are comparable to experiences of other Central-Eastern European societies or former socialist countries.

Susceptibility to Populism as a Challenge for Society and Church

Historically, since the time of the Reformation, a popular piety or a pronounced people's awareness of God developed in Hungary, which, in the political upheavals, reckoned with trust in God's justice in history and, at the same time, with a certainty of faith in being hidden in God's hand. This attitude of faith was fed by the activities of Reformed preachers and teachers in the countryside and in the market towns, but also by education in church-run schools. In the culture of remembrance of the Reformed, for example, a past that "refers less to glorious historical events than to the miracle of survival, of continued existence despite historical tragedies" lives on to this day. Therefore, a consciousness of suffering is characteristic of the Reformed. With the thought figures of the Deuteronomistic interpretation of history, or with the biblical and historical parallels between the fate of the Old Testament people and the current historical situation of the country, the meaning of historical experiences was to be interpreted again and again. The events regarded as national catastrophes, such as the defeat by the Turks in 1526 and the subsequent and much suffered 150-year Ottoman rule, the collapse after the two world wars, the territorial losses due to the Paris Peace Talks, the Trianon trauma, the more than 40-year communist dictatorship, etc., were often interpreted in the scheme of sin-punishment-repentance or compared with the exile and desert

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[23] Pickel, ibid.

wandering of the chosen people in the Old Testament. As a result of this historical view and these analogies, a special interest in participating in public life arose in the Protestant churches. The overall view of society, nation and church and a very strong claim to sovereignty would have moved the Reformed to bear a special responsibility for the country.

But, recently, in the midst of the described symptoms of crisis in a transitional society, another challenge, a danger even, for the Protestant Christians and churches in Hungary has emerged: the claim to strengthen certain group identity(ies) in society, which mostly draws on cultural-ethnic elements and historical experiences. This is not surprising, because it is precisely in this geopolitical space that a collective sees itself as a historical community of experience, and it is precisely the Protestant churches - especially during the decades of oppression - that were considered the guardians of these fundamental rights. Today, when quite broad sections of the population or groups perceive the economic and socio-cultural upheavals as a threat, and perceive themselves again as powerless objects of global economic interests, many look back with longing to times when they enjoyed social security and social respect. This is mostly the interwar period, which was first interrupted by the war, then by the socialist social system and not restored after the fall of communism. Representatives of this era, which is considered the 'good old days', are revered or invoked as reference authorities or historical personalities for one's own identity. And since, in the eyes of these groups, the Church embodies continuity with this history, some such groups, which are not numerous, but considered radical right-wing, strive to articulate their identity in the Church or through the Church. If the official Church leadership tries to keep its distance from such claims on the grounds that the church is not a place for day-to-day politics or for the spirit of exclusion, it faces the accusation that, in the exercise of community and social services, it is

itself an ally of another political force that was democratically elected but now forms the government.

In order to preserve the Protestant identity and the Protestant task of shaping society, the churches are more than ever dependent on clear-sightedness and sobriety in today's crisis situation. To put it simply: theology and the Church are advised to respond critically/self-critically to certain questions and symptoms of crisis and to reflect on them theologically.

It is therefore necessary….

…to avoid political appropriation!

Even if politics wants to consider the historical churches as allies and treats them as partners in certain areas (e.g. in the social service sector, in the teaching of ethical competences, etc.), and remunerates their service in society, the question must not be ignored: how Christian are country and society? If a political party or the government calls itself Christian and sees itself in the historical role of 'defender of the Christian occident', defender of a Christian culture and society in Hungary and Europe, and if this collective self-assertion meets with acceptance in broad ranks of society, this observation must not obscure the fact that this is a matter of ideological resentment. Both in the imagination of the political elite claiming to be Christian and among their potential voters, the Christian worldview is still perceived as opposed to an allegedly liberal, secular, socialist-communist ideology. Even the churches tend to be sympathetic, but also rather uncritical of the Christian identity claimed by the respective rulers or political elite. They forget that there is more at stake here than a metaphysically-based ideology. They are quick to forget that faith in God is different and more than a commitment to a religious worldview, that God in Jesus Christ has a special, personal and unique history with each individual, that this history or God's turning to human beings does not merely establish a

moral world order but demands very personal devotion and responsibility from people.

...to disclose ideological critique!

Churches have a clear theological view on the origin and task of the state, on power and the exercise of power. Therefore, it is unacceptable to call on Christian (political) ethic when politicians try to redefine their mandate with constant references to the crisis by invoking the will of the people. A permanent crisis policy or alleged crisis management opens the door to authoritarian tendencies and does not tolerate pluralism, differences of opinion, or otherwise the danger inherent in the crisis - so the argument of the alleged crisis managers - would potentially be even higher. Unfortunately, however, the crisis has become an "instrument of power" in our time, and not only at the national level, but also in European politics (cf. Agamben, 2013, 44). The ongoing crisis of European institutions, which can be captured in many ways - e.g. as a euro crisis, as a debt crisis, more recently as a refugee crisis - gives the impression that the reference to the crisis and the promise of crisis management serves to compromise identity.

At the national level, the strengthening of the nation-state idea seems to be virulent again, and it is understood by many as a possible way out of the current crisis - no wonder, since the EU enlargement to the East could not solve this problem. After all, these countries (e.g. the Visegrad countries) were historically never able to freely develop their nation-statehood as a result of the development of modernity; after the fall of communism, they found themselves once again thrown back on their own capabilities in dealing with social and economic problems. However, caution is needed in evaluating this area, especially with regard to judging too quickly. After all, historical experience has shown that in crisis situations especially, it is not the utilitarian interests but the emotional elements that are important for the constitution of a community in the political sense. The shared history, culture, language,

religious conviction and its symbols and the shared destiny are supposed to ensure the cohesion of a collective. Therefore, churches are particularly needed in this context, both in Hungary and in the region as a whole. They should not only:

- carefully differentiate between real crises and crisis narratives and demystify the narratives, but
- present themselves as organisations that preserve the national heritage on the basis of their mission in history,
- carefully relativising it with an eschatological reservation,
- but at the same time remain on a transnational level.

Of course, this tension cannot simply be resolved according to the motto "reconciled diversities", because the interlocking of national and confessional identity remains on the agenda from Poland to Spain, from Ireland to Orthodox Greece. The idea that socio-cultural differences can simply be levelled out over time and through modernisation is absurd. All that remains is the task of a reflected theological approach to the questions of people, nation and culture for the pan-European context.

…to go beyond anti-communism.

It has already been pointed out that the endeavour of politics is to enforce its own decisions and goals in a collectively binding way or - as Eilert Herms aptly puts it - to form "social ethos" so as to be able to maintain its legal order in the long run.[24] In Hungary, this is happening in the current crisis under the flag of anti-communism. Anti-communism has become a constant element in the desired formation of political identity - not only in the rhetoric of the currently strongest political force at the top, but everywhere where it is a matter of questioning the legitimacy of political opponents. In this discourse, the image of the enemy is always maintained, whereby the former communists can be

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[24] Herms, Eilert, "Das Konzept 'Zivilreligion" aus systematisch-theologischer Sicht", in: Rolf Schieder (ed.), *Religionspolitik und Zivilreligion*, Baden-Baden, 2001, 93−94.

replaced in each case by the figure of the current opponent. Left-oriented entrepreneurs, multinationals, banks or international monetary funds, etc. - all those who act against the interests of the people - are supposed to find themselves in this enemy image as the descendants of the communists. From the point of view of the anti-communist argument, everything that may appear as evil and misery in the life of society is due to the political and economic influence of the post-communists and the left-liberals allied with them. Therefore, a sober analysis of forces controlling society does not come into view. Instead, elite hostility and disenchantment are stirred up and a new alliance between the alleged will of the people and national-conservative identity formation is announced. However, many believe that Hungary cannot become a prosperous country so long as the political elite does not move beyond anti-communist ideology (Mike, 2013). This is supported by two other arguments:

- On the one hand, there is no evidence that anti-communism is actually a consistent ideology or a guiding principle of social and economic policy (such as conservatism, social market economy or Christian democracy) with founders, programmes, goals or international networking.
- On the other hand, it should also not be concealed that there will be anti-communist hostilities and suspicions so long as there is no adequate legal and political coming to terms with the communist dictatorship and its legacy.

Conclusion

- To all appearances, the rapid economic and socio-cultural upheavals and the pluralisation of lifestyles in the societies of Hungary and the Central Eastern European countries (but often also among their own church people) were perceived as a threat and a burden. The current refugee crisis and the defensive reactions to the proposed solution methods confirm, and even

deepen, fears that have grown over the course of history and continue to exist.

- Politics reacts to this with the endeavour of unifying identity contents in order to make the burdens resulting from the structural changes bearable for the collective and for the citizens, and to further their own existing or aspired power. It tries to offer an alternative solution against the real or even fomented feelings of threat, and to form collective identities from which it hopes to achieve high stability values.
- The Protestant churches, on the other hand, are faced with the task of assessing the processes based on the biblical and theological potential for reflection. Only a thorough and informed analysis of political-economic processes and a deep knowledge of biblical contents of faith would build up competence to critically examine time-bound patterns of identity and to offer alternative ways of shaping social coexistence.

POPULISM IN PORTUGAL –
HOW THE EXTREME-RIGHT IS GROWING THROUGH POPULIST DISCOURSE

Sofia Caseiro[*]

Introductory Notes

Populism has been posing a threat since the very birth of democracy. However, it is not easy to find a definition for populism amongst scholars and political scientists. Cas Mudde[1] defines populism as a "thin ideology" consisting of a few core beliefs and therefore flexible to either wing of the spectrum – left or right. It is more than a discourse characterised as highly emotional and simplistic, and more than one that leverages "opportunistic policies" to gather support from voters. For populists, the most important confrontation to promote in society is the division between "the people" and "the elite".

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[1] Cas Mudde is the author of "The Populist Zeitgeist" see Baker, Peter C. (2019), "'We the people': the battle to define populism", https://www.theguardian.com/news/2019/jan/10/we-the-people-the-battle-to-define-populism (accessed 30 December 2021).

The rise of the extreme-right populist party Chega has been a concern to democracy defenders in Portugal, and human rights activists and civil society in general. The party's programme and its leader's discourse tend to create the referred separation between "the people" – whom they understand as the average Portuguese citizen: a good Catholic, a good person – and "the elite" – that the party associates with the political class in general. This vision can quickly turn into an "us" versus "them" discourse, targeting minorities such as migrants and Roma communities as the source of all problems.

Chega was founded in 2019, and originated from its leader's intention to create an antisystem response to the Portuguese political landscape. André Ventura, Chega's leader, is now the party's only representative in Portuguese parliament and a candidate for President of the Republic in the 2021 elections. His profile is relevant for our analysis, as it is possible to identify characteristics connected to populist behaviour.

Portugal lived under a fascist regime until 1974. In 1974, a National Salvation Board was created to temporarily rule the country until the process of democratisation had been completed. The militaries were great protagonists, both in the revolution and in the lead towards democracy. One year after the Revolution, on 25 April 1974, the Constituent Assembly was elected with the first universal election ever in Portugal. There was a turnout of over 90%, with over 6 million people registering to vote in 2 months.[2] Two hundred and fifty representatives were elected to the assembly that would write and approve the Constitution in 1976, which is still in force today.

The first election resulted in 7 parties being represented in this Constituent Assembly, amongst them the Socialist Party (Partido

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[2] Rodrigues, Ana Luísa, Ribeiro, André (2015), "Preparar um país para eleições" https://ensina.rtp.pt/artigo/preparar-pais-para-eleicoes/ (accessed 30 December 2021).

Socialista – PS), the Popular Democratic Party (Partido Popular Democrático – PPD); the Communist Party (Partido Comunista Português – PCP); the Centre Democratic and Social Party (Partido do Centro Democrático e Social - CDS); the Portuguese Democratic Movement (MDP/CDE); Democratic Popular Union (UDP), and the Association for the Defence of Macau's Interests (Associação de Defesa dos Interesses de Macau – ADIM).[3] Overall, the socialist ideology was defended by the majority of members in this Constitutional Assembly. The preamble of the Portuguese Constitution demonstrates this:

> 'On 25 April 1974, the Armed Forces Movement crowned the long resistance and reflected the deepest feelings of the Portuguese people by overthrowing the fascist regime.
> Freeing Portugal from dictatorship, oppression and colonialism represented a revolutionary change and the beginning of an historic turning point for Portuguese society.
> The Revolution restored their fundamental rights and freedoms to the people of Portugal. In exercising those rights and freedoms, the people's legitimate representatives are gathered to draw up a Constitution that matches the country's aspirations.
> The Constituent Assembly affirms the Portuguese people's decision to defend national independence, guarantee citizens' fundamental rights, establish the basic principles of democracy, ensure the primacy of a democratic state based on the rule of law, and open up a path towards a *socialist society*, with respect for the will of the Portuguese people and with a view to the

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[3] Reis, António et al (2012), "Abril, o mês da liberdade", https://ensina.rtp.pt/artigo/abril-o-mes-da-liberdade/ (accessed 30 December 2021).

construction of a country that is freer, more just and more fraternal.'[4]

There was an agreement to create a new political system away from fascism, guaranteeing fundamental rights and establishing a democracy based on the rule of law and a socialist society. Since 1976, Portugal's government has been led by an alternation between the Socialist Party (PS) and the Social Democratic Party (PSD), sometimes with a coalition with the Centre Democratic and Social Party (CDS).

The 2008 economic recession was followed by austerity. These measures hit Portugal hard. Unemployment rates were up, and the intervention of the International Monetary Fund did not help the sentiment of trust in the political class. The disillusion and estrangement between political class and voters created a fertile ground for the growth of the "us v. them" discourse, which we can identify as the basis of populist campaigns.[5]

Adding to this sentiment, public opinion was also influenced by the rise of populist parties in Europe, joined by the arguments against the reception of refugees and migrants and the demonisation of Muslims, riding on the wave of terrorist attacks seen throughout Europe.

Although recent,[6] populist discourse associated with an extreme-right party in the Portuguese political panorama is now a reality. Since its creation in 2019, Chega has won a seat in the Portuguese parliament

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[4] Portuguese Constitution of 1976, https://dre.pt/constitution-of-the-portuguese-republic, our highlight.

[5] Bellamy, Richard/ Merkel, Wolfgang, "Chapter 14 – Inequality as a Challenge to Democracy", in: Bhargava, Rajeev (et. al) (ed.), Report of the International Panel on Social Progress, Paris, 2018, §200-211.

[6] Magalhães, Pedro (2019), "Populismo em Portugal: um gigante adormecido", https://expresso.pt/sondagens/2019-06-01-Populismo-em-Portugal-um-gigante-adormecido (accessed 30 December 2021).

with 1,29% of votes (67 826 votes).[7] The party also won 19 new Town Hall members, 173 City Council members, and 205 Civil Parish Assembly members.[8]

Characterisation, Mission and View of CHEGA

André Ventura is a lawyer and a law professor. In 2001, he joined the Social-Democratic Youth Party (Juventude Social-Democrata - JSD). He started its political project in mass media defending a right-wing model that strained from the classical right. His various participations went on to boost his political career as a media commentator in several topics such as security, justice, politics, and sports. He then used his popularity as a mediatic football commentator on behalf of Benfica to promote his position as a political leader.

In 2017, he was the candidate for the Social-Democratic Party (PSD) to the mayor's office in the local elections in Loures (a municipality adjacent to Lisbon, Portugal's capital city). During the campaign, he quickly started to divert from his party's programme and views, receiving media attention and criticism from within the party.[9] At this time, the candidate also expressed his views on reducing the presence of Islamic people in Europe, affirming to be neither a racist nor a

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[7] Global Results for the 2019 Legislative Elections, https://www.eleicoes.mai.gov.pt/legislativas2019/resultados-globais.html (accessed 30 December 2021).

[8] 19 City Council Members, out of 2074 candidates; 173 Municipality assembly members, out of 6461 candidates and 205 civil parish council members out of 27019 candidates.

[9] Sapage, Sónia (2017), "André Ventura, o candidato 'inaceitável' que continua a sê-lo", https://www.publico.pt/2017/08/30/politica/noticia/andre-ventura-o-candidato-inaceitavel-que-continua-a-selo-1783762 (accessed 30 December 2021).

xenophobe.[10] He turned himself into news in an interview at that time, declaring that most Roma people are dependent on subsidies from the State, especially from the Social Insertion Income (Rendimento Social de Inserção – RSI).[11] Later, Social Security - the State's institution responsible for the attribution of these subsidies - revealed that only between 3% and 6% of people receiving this income are from Roma communities.[12] Ventura did not win the election in 2017 but secured a seat in Loures' City Council.

One year after his election to Loures' City Council and the growth of the incompatibility with his party's leadership, Ventura proposed an in-house movement to depose its leader, Rui Rio. He defended a new leadership for the party that could place it on the "ideological spectre of the Portuguese centre-right". He also defended that this new path for PSD should feature ideological neutrality on minority issues, gay marriage, and euthanasia.[13]

The failure of this campaign led him to resign his position in the City Council and disaffiliate from PSD to start a new political project – Chega. In a first interview announcing the creation of this political project, André Ventura mentioned the core values of this project

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[10] Lopes, Maria João (2017), "Há um ano André Ventura já dizia não ser racista, mas…", https://www.publico.pt/2017/07/21/politica/noticia/ha-ja-algum-tempo-que-andre-ventura-diz-nao-ser-racista-mas-1779830 (accessed 30 December 2021).

[11] Sampaio, Gustavo (2017), "Quem é André Ventura, o polémico candidato do PSD à Câmara Municipal de Loures", https://jornaleconomico.sapo.pt/noticias/perfil-de-andre-ventura-o-polemico-candidato-do-psd-e-cds-a-camara-de-loures-186168 (accessed 30 December 2021).

[12] Sampaio, Gustavo (2019), "Apenas 3,8% dos beneficiários de RSI são de etnia cigana?", https://poligrafo.sapo.pt/fact-check/apenas-38-dos-beneficiarios-de-rsi-sao-de-etnia-cigana (accessed 30 December 2021).

[13] Lusa (2018), "André Ventura lança movimento para destituir Rui Rio", https://www.publico.pt/2018/09/22/politica/noticia/andre-ventura-lanca-movimento-para-destituir-rui-rio-1844970 (accessed 30 December 2021).

highlighting "a political-ideological basis based on an economic and political liberalism of a personalist nature", "the return from life imprisonment for murderers and rapists", "chemical castration for paedophiles and the immediate introduction of the crime of illicit enrichment". He also declared his intention to reduce the current 230 members of parliament to 100 and to advocate for "ethic activism" on subjects such as euthanasia and gay marriage – issues that he diverted from PSD in his campaign towards leadership.[14]

The creation of Chega was proposed to the Constitutional Court in 2019. From the required 7500 signatures, 8312 signatures were delivered, out of which 1813 of which were refused by the Court.[15] Later, the Public Ministry noted around 2600 invalid signatures from minors and previously deceased citizens on two phases of the registration process.[16]

From the beginning, Chega has affirmed itself as an anti-system party.[17] Its name translates to the command word "Enough!" or "Stop!", a meaning significant to the party's positioning against the organisation

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[14] Lusa (2018), "Ventura deixará de ser militante do PSD para criar novo partido", https://www.publico.pt/2018/10/09/politica/noticia/ventura-encerra-recolha-de-assinaturas-e-deixara-de-ser-militante-do-psd-para-criar-novo-partido-1846765 (accessed 30 December 2021).

[15] Constitutional Court's decision 218/2019, from 9 April 2019, http://www.tribunalconstitucional.pt/tc/acordaos/20190218.html?impressao=1 (accessed 30 December 2021).

[16] Mendes, Filipa Almeida/Martins, Ruben (2019), "MP investiga 2600 assinaturas irregulares para a criação do Chega", https://www.publico.pt/2019/04/26/politica/noticia/chega-apresenta-2600-assinaturas-irregulares-criacao-partido-1870574 (accessed 30 December 2021).

[17] This denomination is preferred by the party, rather than the extreme-right-wing characterization the society categorizes it in. Campos, Adriano et al, "Contra a higienização académica do racismo e fascismo do Chega", https://www.publico.pt/2020/07/11/politica/noticia/higienizacao-academica-racismo-fascismo-chega-1923953 (accessed 30 December 2021).

of the State and which represents the populist facet of the party. It is hard to say if the party's name was inspired by the populist discourse or the other way around. In their internal speeches and communication with the press, there is nothing that they would not change if they were in power, even the hard-worked-for constitution. Various party figures have been in the news praising António Salazar, Portugal's fascist dictator and/or his policies.

Various journalists and academic researchers identified the type of profile of those who join the party. Herein we find disappointed voters, extremists, evangelical church members, former abstentionists within the party. In 2020, the Partido Democracia e Cidadania Cristã (Christian Democracy and Citizenship Party) - an ally of André Ventura in the European Parliament elections of 2019 - asked the Constitutional Court to merge with Chega.[18] This merge was not authorised as Portuguese law does not establish it. The Partido Democracia e Cidadania Cristã asked for its extinction in November of 2020 and advised its members to join Chega.[19] Leaders of both political parties agreed that this desired merge aimed for the defence of family, the fight against gender ideology, and Cultural Marxism's defeat.[20]

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[18] Rodrigues, Sofia (2020), "Partido Pró-Vida vai fundir-se com o Chega em Setembro", https://www.publico.pt/2020/08/26/politica/noticia/partido-providavai-fundirse-chega-setembro-1929348 (accessed 30 December 2021).

[19] Constitutional Court's decision 596/2020, from 16 of December 2020, https://dre.pt/dre/detalhe/acordao-extrato/596-2020-151322791 (accessed 30 December 2021).

[20] Miranda, Tiago (2020), "Partido Pró-Vida vai fundir-se com o Chega", https://expresso.pt/politica/2020-08-27-Partido-Pro-Vida-vai-fundir-se-com-o-Chega (accessed 30 December 2021).

The Rise of CHEGA

After its approval in April 2019, Chega had the opportunity to run for the European Parliament elections, scheduled for 26 May of that year. The party aimed to start its activity with a coalition with Partido Popular Monárquico (Monarchy Party) and Partido Democracia e Cidadania Cristã (Citizenship and Christian Democracy Party).[21] The Constitutional Court did not authorise this coalition – Chega was already a party, but it lacked the formal procedures before entering an election. Chega was officially dropped from the coalition, which proceeded with Ventura (Chega's President) as the frontrunner of the European Parliament Election, under "Basta!".[22] [23] "Basta!" reached 9th place out of the 17 candidates with 1,49% of the vote.[24]

This first elective experience was fruitful in putting forward some of the critical issues in Chega's agenda, such as stronger and safer borders in Europe; cohesion of Europe and free and equal European nations; rejection of gender ideology and Cultural Marxism; more economic development for the southern European countries "without this economic growth, there is no need for a European Union".[25]

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[21] Both parties are categorised as defending a right-wing to extreme-right ideology and agenda.

[22] Basta, in Portuguese, is a synonym for Chega – both meaning "enough".

[23] Martins, Ruben (2019), "André Ventura vai às urnas com o nome Basta", https://www.publico.pt/2019/04/12/politica/noticia/andre-ventura-vai-urnas-nome-basta-1869056 (accessed 30 December 2021).

[24] In this election there was only attendance of 30,73% of voters. There were 4,25% of blank votes and 2,68% of null votes. The winner, the Socialist Party, elected 9 representatives for the European Party with 33,38% of the votes. In: General Results – European Election 2019, https://www.eleicoes.mai.gov.pt/europeias2019/resultados-globais.html (accessed 30 December 2021).

[25] Lusa (2019), "Coligação Basta assume que objetivo é eleger eurodeputados", https://www.cmjornal.pt/politica/detalhe/coligacao-basta-assume-que-objetivo-e-eleger-eurodeputados (accessed 30 December 2021).

Later that year, Chega ran its first legislative elections. Three new political forces entered the Portuguese Parliament in this election, including Chega. There were 48,57% of voters, 2,51% of blank votes and 2,36% of null votes.[26] Twenty-one parties were competing for the 230 seats in the Assembly of the Republic. Chega won one of those seats. Ventura was elected in Lisbon's elective circle[27] and has assumed his seating at the far-right of the Parliament. In this election, and since its initial National Congress, the party presents itself as conservative "on tradition", liberal "on the economy", nationalist in its identity and personalist. At this point, the party's programme included proposals such as the extinction of the Prime Minister's office, chemical castration for paedophiles, reduction of representatives in Parliament from 230 to 100, enabling of life imprisonment, creation of a unique IRS rate and the extinction of the Education Ministry.[28]

In 2020, Andre Ventura announced he was entering the Presidential race in January 2021. There were seven candidates, two of which were women. Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa – the President in office at the time of the election - won the race with 60,70% of the vote, deciding the election on the first round.[29] André Ventura was supported by his party,

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[26] Global Results for the 2019 Legislative Elections, https://www.eleicoes.mai.gov.pt/legislativas2019/resultados-globais.html (accessed 30 December 2021).

[27] In the Portuguese legislative elections, parties present one list of candidates by elective circle. These elective circles correspond with Portuguese districts. Each circle can elect a certain number of representatives. This number depends on the population of that geographical area.

[28] Martins, Ruben/Baptista, Sofia Correia (2019) "Extrema-direita chega ao Parlamento. Quem é e o que defende André Ventura?", https://www.publico.pt/2019/10/07/politica/perfil/andre-ventura-eleito-chega-extrema-direita-parlamento-elei%C3%A7%C3%B5es-1889055?ref=pesquisa&cx=page__content (accessed 30 December 2021).

[29] Global Results for the 2021 Presidential Elections, https://www.eleicoes.mai.gov.pt/presidenciais2021/resultados/globais (accessed 30 December 2021).

Chega, and obtained third place in the final results, with 11,90% of the vote.[30] In some municipalities in Alentejo (south of Portugal) - Beja, Évora and Portalegre - André Ventura obtained first place in the vote. This was a very interesting result considering that left-wing parties, such as the Portuguese Communist Party, traditionally get their best results in this part of the country. His discourse against the Roma communities can explain Ventura's success in these locations. Ventura worked on the perception that these communities are problematic for months before the election, although there are no particular security issue concerns related to the Roma community. However, Ventura actively worked on making it a matter for the population through mediatised visits to the municipality and inflamed speeches against the Roma community, migrants, the support of bullfighting practices and the recitation of problems without the presence of solutions.[31]

This result of the Presidential election in several municipalities in Alentejo helped define a strategy for the local elections that followed on 26 September 2021. André Ventura was the lead candidate for Chairman of the City Assembly of Moura (Alentejo).[32] As the 6th political force in the result, Chega presented candidates in all municipalities in Portugal and elected 19 City Councillors and 173 members of City Assemblies.[33]

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[30] Ibid.

[31] Valente, Liliana (2021), "O que levou 28.404 alentejanos a votar em Ventura? Abandono, protesto e perceções de realidade", https://expresso.pt/presidenciais2021/2021-01-25-O-que-levou-28.404-alentejanos-a-votar-em-Ventura--Abandono-protesto-e-percecoes-de-realidade (accessed 30 December 2021).

[32] SIC Notícias (2021), "André Ventura é candidato à Assembleia Municipal de Moura", https://sicnoticias.pt/especiais/autarquicas/2021-06-17-Andre-Ventura-e-candidato-a-Assembleia-Municipal-de-Moura-42ef25b8 (accessed 30 December 2021).

[33] Global Results for the 2021 Local Elections, https://www.autarquicas2021.mai.gov.pt/resultados/territorio-nacional?election=CM (accessed 30 December 2021).

On 27 September 2021, Portugal woke up to the realisation that the extreme-right party was scaling the political ranks at a visible and concerning speed.

As the President of the Republic dissolves the Parliament at the end of 2021, we are watchful towards the January 2022 early elections results. There is no denying Chega is gaining traction and even occupying space on the far-right of the Portuguese political spectrum.

Concerns around Democracy, Rule of Law and Human Rights

The most problematic effect of the populist discourse, in our opinion, is that it offends the fundamental human rights of people, and creates a safe space for the expression of those who disagree with the universality and equality in the exercise of these rights. A populist leader usually targets a group, such as a religious minority, ethnic community, or migrant community. In this type of discourse, there is also a tendency to make the political class and, therefore, the existing democratic party system the scapegoat for all problems. This undermines democracy and the rule of law, which are, at present time, the most effective system capable of efficiently protecting human rights.

There were several occasions in which Chega and its leader created a space of public turmoil around important human rights issues. In August 2020, amid the rise of anti-racist movements and rallies, motivated by the death of Bruno Candé – an African-descent Portuguese actor, shot to death in the street in Lisbon with six bullet wounds.[34] As a response to

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[34] Marcelino, Valentina/Câncio, Fernanda (2021), "Foi ódio raciola que matou Bruno Candé, acusa o Ministério Público",   https://www.dn.pt/sociedade/ investigacao-da-pj-provou-odio-racial-no-homicidio-de-bruno-cande-13247985. html (accessed 30 December 2021). The murderer of Bruno Candé was condemned to a prison sentence for 22 years and 9 months. During the trial, it

the public attention on structural racism issues in Portugal brought by this case and various testimonials of anti-racist NGOs, Chega organised a rally affirming that Portugal is not a racist country and that there is no systemic racism in Portugal.[35] Briefly, after this rally, an investigation was opened by the Public Prosecutor concerning threats received by anti-racist activists and three members of the Portuguese Parliament from an extreme-right group. Although there is no proof of a connection between this extreme-right group and Chega, we can observe that this discourse from a party with representation on the national parliament can open a space and pseudo-legitimacy for these actions.

More recently, André Ventura was condemned by the Portuguese Justice Supreme Court for racial segregation, following accusations of an attack on the honour of the Coxi family whom he called *gangsters* – this occurred during a debate for the Presidential Election of 2021, where he showed a photo of the family with the current (and also candidate) President of the Republic, Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa.[36] In the lower instance sentence, Ventura and his party were condemned to a written or verbal apology and public retraction of the acts committed. In this public retraction, Ventura underlined that he vehemently disagreed with the Court's decision and that he was only apologising because the

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was proved that there was racial hatred that motivated the crime. More: Cristino, Sofia (2021), "Homicida do ator Bruno Candé condenado a 22 anos e nove meses de prisão: 'Foi feita justiça, é uma decisão histórica'", https://www.jn.pt/justica/homicida-do-ator-bruno-cande-condenado-a-22-anos-e-nove-meses-de-prisao--13881720.html (accessed 30 December 2021).

[35] Lusa (2020), "Chega manifestou-se em Lisboa para dizer que 'Portugal não é racista'", https://observador.pt/2020/08/02/chega-manifestou-se-em-lisboa-para-dizer-que-portugal-nao-e-racista/ (accessed 30 December 2021).

[36] Duarte, José Carlos (2021), "Supremo Tribunal de Justiça rejeira recurso de André Ventura por insultos a família no Bairro da Jamaica", https://observador.pt/2021/12/06/supremo-tribunal-de-justica-nao-admitiu-recurso-de-andre-ventura-por-insultos-a-familia-do-bairro-da-jamaia/ (accessed 30 December 2021).

Court forced him to.[37] Now, Ventura is appealing to the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR), alleging the violation of his freedom of expression.[38]

With the launch of the campaign for the early Legislative Elections,[39] we are looking at the use of the same populist discourse that Chega and Ventura have preferred. One of Ventura's campaign slogans for the Prime Minister position is "Let's make the system shake" (Vamos fazer o sistema tremer). However, interestingly enough, this is not the first time this slogan (same meaning and similar words) has been used. In the 2021 local elections, the PSD candidate (Social Democratic Party) used this slogan in her campaign in Amadora's municipality (a suburb of Lisbon).[40] Although the populist discourse has been the main instrument – and dare we say, cause – for the rise of Chega and its leader - the reality is that it has been used by other parties that are considered as system parties, and as – until now, at least – democracy protectors. The easily used type of discourse presents simple solutions for very complex issues, in parallel with villainising the political class from which these populist leaders affirm themselves to be very different.

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[37] Figueiredo, Inês André (2021), "'Peço desculpa porque tribunais me obrigaram.' Chega perde contra família a quem Ventura chamou 'bandidos'", https://observador.pt/2021/10/29/peco-desculpa-porque-tribunais-me-obrigaram-chega-perde-contra-familia-a-quem-ventura-chamou-bandidos/ (accessed 30 December 2021).

[38] Lusa (2021), "Chega vai recorrer para o Tribunal Europeu dos Direitos Humanos após decisão do Supremo", https://sicnoticias.pt/pais/2021-12-07-Chega-vai-recorrer-para-o-Tribunal-Europeu-dos-Direitos-Humanos-apos-decisao-do-Supremo-cc472883 (accessed 30 December 2021).

[39] At the time this text was written, the official campaign period was not yet started.

[40] Santos, João Amaral (2021), "André Ventura 'copia' Suzana Garcia no novo cartaz de campanha do Chega", https://visao.sapo.pt/atualidade/politica/2021-12-13-andre-ventura-copia-suzana-garcia-no-novo-cartaz-de-campanha-do-chega/ (accessed 30 December 2021).

It is also essential to reflect upon the mediatic introduction of these arguments and discussions. In a very brief and light reference, we know that the pressure on media outlets is higher than ever. Media outlets need readers, users, viewers, and customers. We know that surprise and scandal will transform, more efficiently, into a consumer reaction – such as a 'like' on social media, a comment or even a share. The more scandalous and outrageous is the headline, the more people will consume it. It is up to us to distinguish between true and false, objective or extrapolated, a real problem or a fabricated scandal.

This is how the populist discourse spreads worldwide, and Portugal is not an exception. Knowing the symptoms, we can reflect upon a response. From our point of view, the solution is found, amongst other things, through the active political engagement of citizens, media and political counterparts, and the mediatic literacy of the voter, which can start at the youngest of ages.

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Alternatives to Populism from a Human Rights Perspective

In this book, the Conference of European Churches endeavours to look at the phenomenon of 'populism' from different angles and perspectives and shine a light on its links to religion and religious actors. It wants to offer its Member Churches and partners information about and arguments against the populist temptation. It also wants to highlight and draw attention to the many ways in which religious communities are already part of a wider alliance to combat the populist threat. The Conference of European Churches stands firmly in sharing and fostering the European dream of freedom and equality, and dignity for all and everyone.

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