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Peuple et populisme, identité et nation. Quelle contribution à la paix ? Quelles perspectives européennes ?

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Feix, Marc; Thiel, Marie-Jo; Dembinski, Paul (Eds.) : *Peuple et populisme, identité et nation. Quelle contribution à la paix ? Quelles perspectives européennes ?* Strasbourg, Presses universitaires de Strasbourg, 2019, 312 pp., ISBN: 978-2-86820-750-0.

The book under review is a collection of contributions originally delivered during two international conferences organised in 2018 by the “Association Internationale pour l’Enseignement Social Chrétien” and the Faculty of Catholic Theology of the University of Strasbourg respectively. Both events sought to address the same issue, namely the crisis of democracy in Europe in the face of growing populism. Political institutions developed over decades of patient dialogue seem to have become unable to address contemporary challenges, especially after the financial crisis of 2007-2008 and the recent migration crises, and European peoples increasingly tend to distrust the democratic model built after WWII. The book seeks to reassert a Christian approach to these problems, and more particularly the legacy of the social teaching of Christian churches, and to offer possible solutions based on this theological foundation.

It does so by providing a wide array of contributions from prominent European scholars, with no less than 19 chapters over almost 300 pages. The contributions are mostly written in French, but the book also includes a chapter in German and three in English. The academic disciplines represented are varied, ranging from theology itself to philosophy, history, sociology and political science. The book is organised in three parts, covering the four themes mentioned in the title.

The first part recapitulates a number of Christian views on the question of identity, especially in the European context. It opens on two philosophical essays by Bohdan Cywiński and Rafael Alvira which explicate this notoriously complex notion. Three case studies on national identity follow, namely Germany (Manfred Spieker), Poland (Maria Nowak) and Switzerland (Jacques Neiryneck). Manfred Spieker’s piece also offers an overview of the conceptions of the nation in Catholic social teaching. Piotr Mazurkiewicz and his team provide an in-depth quantitative sociological study of European youth and their attitude to totalitarianism and democracy, highlighting the prevalent lack of interest of young Europeans in politics which is analysed as an unfortunate premise to a possible acceptance of totalitarianism. Lastly, Luis Martínez-Saavedra offers a review of the Latin American “Theology of the people”.

The second part takes up the concepts of people and nation and analyses their respective flaws: populism and war. It begins with a thorough review of the elusive concept of populism, with two contributions by Miroslav Novák and Wiebke Keim. Valerio Alfonso Bruno then analyses populism by contrasting it with technocracy, a much less discussed notion although equally damaging to democracy. Marc Feix reviews possible solutions to combat hate speech, while Denis Fricker investigates what Matthew’s claim to love one’s enemies can teach us in analysing contemporary political issues. Finally, Marie-Jo Thiel offers a reflection on the notion of commons and how it can be used to build a common world, inspired by Christian social ethics.

The third part offers solutions to the problems discussed in the second. It encourages readers to work for peace and analyses the many meanings this idea can take in Christian theology. In their respective contributions, Pierre Coulange and Pierre de Lauzun discuss the conditions under which Christian views on peace can be applied to the current global situation. Édouard Dommen then compares the criticisms levelled at Christian anthropocentrism by Calvin and Pope Francis to address environmental concerns. Balázs M. Mezei’s piece highlights the importance of interreligious efforts for peace, while Marc Surchat provides an original

approach to digital peace. Finally, Michel Veuthey offers a comprehensive review of current Christian initiatives for peace and international cooperation.

Peuple et populisme, identité et nation is an accessible book for readers who are not specialists in Christian theology but will equally satisfy more expert scholars. One of its major strengths is the variety of approaches it includes, in disciplinary and doctrinal terms, but also with regard to the political undertones of the different contributions, which reflect the complexity and diversity of contemporary Christian thought. This strength can sometimes turn into a weakness, as it can perhaps be difficult to find coherence among the various chapters. This is especially the case of part one, which juxtaposes abstract philosophical thought with no less complex sociological numerical analysis. Part two is more consistent and offers a useful review of the latest theories of populism seen through a Christian lens. Part three is the most theological as it puts to the fore the ideal of peace that has been central to Christianity for many centuries. In that sense, it may be the most debatable but also the most helpful, as it engages with Christian solutions to the current political problems of Europe and the world.

Christian thought has been discredited in Europe, especially when it comes to its political implications. *Peuple et populisme, identité et nation* demonstrates that one should not underestimate the potential of Christian intellectuals to make a useful contribution to current social debates and to the preservation and development of European democratic institutions. While some positions might be considered slightly extreme, the book is a constructive effort to engage in dialogue and to promote ideals and values that lie at the core of European history. Some may think that Christian theology is a thing of the past, but this book proves that European churches are still a force of the present. By making a case for Christian social ethics, it draws a thin line between an attachment to tradition and a commitment to building a common world despite our differences. In that sense, it might also shed light on our future.

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