

Protestant Political Thought

Call for Papers

Reclaiming Christianity
from populism: Political
theologies of local citizenship
and inclusive sources of
belonging

14–16 April 2021

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The Protestant Political Thought Project at the University of Cambridge

Local communities are more resilient than we think. Over the past year, local networks have provided millions of people with immediate support and relief as part of the COVID-19 response. Churches can be important partners locally as well as nationally, and many churches have partnered with other organisations, often making tangible and meaningful contributions to the wellbeing of their communities and society writ large. Moreover, church buildings are important frames of reference and physical incarnations of collective ties, community and a sense of belonging. The pandemic has shown this once again when everything stopped (even services, weddings, and funerals!), but the fact that church buildings continued to be available for community is contrasted by the narrative of right-wing populist movements who have sought to re-politicise religion and to promote a culturalised ‘Christianism’ as an exclusivist marker of ethno-nationalist identity – often against the vocal opposition of churches and believers themselves. As churches are re-emerging as social key partners in local communities, a post-COVID context might create the space to challenge populists’ narrative and reclaim local relevance, and, a space to renew a commitment to local and inclusive sources of collective identity and a ministry of presence.

This international conference convenes scholars, church leaders, and other practitioners to discuss political theologies of local citizenship. How can political theologies sustain this ministry of presence and provide tangible but inclusive sources of collective belonging? How can political theologies enable churches to be reliable civil partners without politicising them? And how can inclusive approaches to local citizenship and group identities challenge populist narratives of an ethno-national ‘Christianism’?

PPT invites papers and panel proposals in three categories: ‘Political theologies of local citizenship’; ‘Local collaborations and levelling-up’; and ‘Reclaiming Christianity from populism’.

Political theologies of local citizenship

1. The place of the parish in Christian ecclesiologies
2. 'Incarnational' commitments to a local ministry of presence
3. Fostering a racially inclusive environment in the church and beyond
4. Lay leadership in church and local community

Local collaborations and levelling-up

5. Accountability and good governance in ecclesial structures
6. Engaging in interfaith initiatives and navigating deep difference
7. Building enduring partnerships with local authorities
8. Urban-rural partnerships and engagement

Reclaiming Christianity from populism

9. Local cultural liturgies: reconnecting religious belief and cultural belonging
10. A community of faith: substantial but inclusive sources of collective identity in the Church
11. Being with 'the people': a de-politicisation of 'the people'?
12. Defending the Church universal: speaking out against the politicisation of Christianity by the populist right

PPT invites proposals for papers and panels from scholars in any relevant discipline, including politics, theology, history, religious studies, anthropology, philosophy, and law. Please send a proposed paper title, short abstract (c.300 words) and short biography to ppt@ciris.org.uk by **4 February 2021**. Decisions will be released by 15 February 2021. Short conference briefs of c.2,000 words are due by 1 April 2021. The convenors intend to pursue collaborative publications after the conference. All submissions and papers should contain original work that has not been committed elsewhere.

Greener, digital, different

In the interests of everyone's health, this year's conference will be facilitated over Zoom, while funds are reserved for an in-person conference when the global health situation allows. As a gesture of care, all active participants will receive a wellbeing pack as part of the conference.

Funding and wider networks

This conference is generously funded by the Harold C. Smith Foundation. The conference is part of the project on Protestant Political Thought, now an Oxford-Cambridge collaboration. This project features reading groups (this year on race and political theologies), workshops, and conferences. For more information about the project, email Marietta van der Tol (marietta.vandertol@bsg.ox.ac.uk) or Sophia Johnson (srcj2@cam.ac.uk)