

“DOING THEOLOGY IN THE AGE OF TRUMP. A CRITICAL REPORT ON CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM”

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This collective work, edited by Jeffrey Robbins¹ and Clayton Crockett², attempts to shed light on a large number of topics related to Christian thought: cultural studies, evolution of mentalities, philosophy and theology. The epigraphs are, in most cases, communications carried out in academic seminars: “God and the Human Future,” organized by the Westar Institute³ (Joe Bessler, Karen Bray, Sarah Brubaker, John Caputo, David Galston, James Hill, Michael Hogue, Catherine Keller, Robin Meyers, Daniel Miller, Jordan Miller, Hollis Phelps, Alan Richard, Mark Taylor and Noëlle Vahanian). The different sections do not focus directly on the figure of Donald J. Trump, but rather focus on the analysis of the historical and social context in which conservative thinking spread and how the popularity of the presidential candidate multiplied. This book is a very complex work, because it is not easy to incardinate such divergent contributions and establish with them a uniform plot sequence. It was published by the Cascade Books⁴ group is composed of two thematic blocks, sixteen chapters and one hundred and fifty-five pages, (in addition to an extensive introduction and a large bibliographic section).

- 1 He completed undergraduate studies at Baylor University and postgraduate studies at Texas Christian University and Syracuse University. His research and teaching areas are usually related to the philosophy of religions, sociology of religions and the political implications of theology in the contemporary world. He has made and coordinated numerous books in the last two decades, among them stand out: *Radical Theology: A Vision for Change* (2016), *Radical Democracy and Political Theology* (2011), *In Search of a Non-Dogmatic Theology* (2004) and *Between Faith and Thought: An Essay on the Ontotheological Condition* (2003). At the present time, he teaches at Lebanon Valley College (Annville, Pennsylvania).
- 2 He has a long teaching career. He is the author of numerous publications, including: *Radical Political Theology* (2011) and *Derrida After the End of Writing: Political Theology and New Materialism* (2018). He graduated from the History and Religion program at the College of William and Mary (1991), completed a Master's degree in Religious Studies at the University of Virginia (1994) and earned a PhD from Syracuse University (1998). His research and teaching areas tend to revolve around the North American region: philosophy of religion, history of contemporary Christianity, postmodern theology and political theory and religion. He is currently a professor at the University of Central Arkansas, and directs the Department of Religious Studies.
- 3 The American institution was founded by Robert W. Funk (1985) and is not part of any ecclesiastical or confessional structure. Currently, it is based at the facilities of the Willamette University (Salem, Oregon). Since its origins, its members have shown a clear informative vocation and commitment to academic research. The two journals associated with the institution have the functions of interconnecting research projects, sheltering new research trends, regenerating Christian knowledge and promoting historical and cultural studies of the world of religions.
- 4 It is an editorial branch of the Wipf and Stock Publishers group. It is a company founded in 1995, by John Wipf and Jon Stock (Eugene, Oregon). The publisher has different collaborative links with several American Christian denominations, but is not part of any church structure or religious congregation. Among the collections and bibliographic series, topics such as history of religions, history of Christianity, theology, studies of biblical interpretation, philosophy, ethics, political history and classical literature are addressed.

The complexity of the publication is determined by the case studies and the theoretical-methodological approaches. The book tries to approach the process of knowledge generation and to penetrate the circumstances that condition the main research trends, in addition to conceptually delimiting the main research objects chosen by the academic community (in the political phase already indicated). From the different approaches raised in all its sections, we try to sketch the elements that have made a series of religious values and belief systems possible in recent years, in parallel to the conservative revisionism implemented with Trump's political project.

More specifically, it reflects on the threats of the American way of life and the American cultural essence, in addition to the perception that conservative "America" (white, Christian and nationalist) has of immigration, multiculturalism and legislative reformism. The theoretical frameworks are based on a series of adaptations of intersectionality, the cohabitation of hegemonic political and theological discourses, and also peripheral religious rhetoric of less social impact. This rhetoric is represented, in most sections of the collective work, as a multiple synergy, which springs from minority religious groups, ecclesiastical twinning movements and marginal cultural positions. Most authors often raise allegations about the need to spread critical thinking about institutional discourses, the defense of creating a cross-sectional debate on the coexistence of diverse identities and the implementation of a philosophical discourse independent of dominant political trends.

In the introductory pages, the editors raise some reflections and present their opinion on the consequences of the "Trump" or "Trumpism" effect. The election of the forty-fifth president has aroused many passions and tensions among US citizens (there are historical precedents, but they have not been very frequent in recent decades). This controversy can be transferred to communication professionals and members of the academic community. The book stands as an asset of resistance to the Trump administration, especially in everything that concerns the exclusive ideological effects and discriminatory theological sensibilities. An open commitment to Christian nationalist currents is raised, but advocates an inclusive theological thought that guarantees a free discussion of the role of religion in public spaces; the need to maintain assertive institutional leadership and permanent political responsibility is declared. The main plot developments of the two sections of the publication are also presented schematically.

The first thematic block, "History, Race, and Christian Nationalism in America," consists of the first eight chapters. Here a sequence of arguments linked to the theoretical structure of intersectionality is constructed. The different case studies are intertwined to configure a defined list of themes: religious fundamentalism and Christian nationalism, white majority and American Protestantism, white supremacy and evangelical interpretation, theological epistemology and political rhetoric, construction of the dominant discourse and instrumentalization

of new technologies of communication, conservative reaction of activist groups and ecclesiastical hierarchies in the face of legislative change, Christian conservatism and the idea of political leadership, theological divergences to the Christian nationalist model, etc. The examples and delimitation of the analysis frameworks facilitate the understanding of the contents, using historical contextualization as a frequent resource. In this sense, a synthetic and pedagogical effort is perceived in almost all contributions, to avoid the creation of philosophical devices.

"American Exceptionalism, Evangelicalism, and Trumpism" is the title of the second thematic block, ranging from the ninth chapter to the sixteenth. They are intended to address some very common issues in the American academic world, but from an empirical accumulation point of view and while keeping the latest generational reviews in mind. In this section, topics related to the present moment and Trump's political project are touched upon: the philosophical idea of daily opportunities and the culture of effort, the euphoric discourse on "American" exceptionalism, the unconditional support of evangelicals for political agendas defended by the Republican Party, the defense of a political and theological ideology in the media with Republican ties, the construction of the concept of tradition among the opinion leaders of evangelism, the American ethnonationalist vision and legislative change, the construction of messianic leadership and the popularity of the conservative candidates, the moods of the Republicans against electoralism, postmodernity and the government system and, what could well be a final conclusion for the publication, the emergence of historical-political myths through the rhetoric implemented by the different members of the Trump administration. This section is very useful to be able to understand the political intentionality of some of the argumentative transformations of the Republicans and, in short, to mark reference points when looking at the evolution of cultural identity and the collective mentality of "American" conservatives.

In general, it can be clearly perceived that the editors defend a model of biblical interpretation far from the politicized investigations of religious fact. A charismatic leader or an activist agenda cannot be above the basic principles of coexistence between Christian groups and culturally different groups. Dominant Christian nationalism cannot turn a blind eye to sociocultural reality and the intersectional problems of the United States. On the other hand, the minority voices of Protestantism, in the North American region, speak of the collapse of the Christian value system motivated by the permanent contradictions that the Christian Right has incurred, unconditionally supporting Trump.

The devotion of evangelist leaders to the Republican Party has devastating political consequences for the "American" tradition. In recent years, there has been an unambiguous contempt for internal dissent among conservative Christian groups. That lack of self-criticism has cultural and theological consequences. The denial of the plurality of thought among the Christian community, from the point of view of the managers of the publication, impoverishes the theological

debate and the American way of life. In and of themselves, the sectors closest to Christian conservatism seem to be increasingly distanced from respect for philosophical approaches outside their thought coordinates.

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