



## Nationalism, Politics and Christianity

The mass shootings on July 29 in Gilroy, CA with three people killed, on August 3 in El Paso, TX leaving 20 dead, and then a day later, on August 4, in Dayton, OH with 9 dead, provided an opportunity for progressives to denounce President Trump for allegedly encouraging white nationalism. Progressives were loud, unrestrained and uniform in directing blame for these shootings on the president. The media joined in as well.

Two of the most vociferous critics linking Trump, the shootings and white nationalism were Beto O'Rourke and Mayor Pete Buttigieg. Lagging in the polls for the Democratic presidential nomination, O'Rourke and Buttigieg sought to bolster their numbers with the left-wing base by showing they are social justice warriors out to cure what they describe as systemic racism in America.

O'Rourke's campaign for the Democratic presidential nomination had all but collapsed after his silly postings of a dental cleaning, his retreat to collect his thoughts, and his apology to his wife about not giving her enough credit for raising their children. Once favored by the media as the next John F. Kennedy, O'Rourke was desperate to reestablish himself as a serious candidate. Appearing on CNN, he was asked by Jake Tapper on the show State of the Union, "Do you think President Trump is a white nationalist?" O'Rourke did not hesitate to answer, "Yes, I do. The things he has said both as a candidate and then as president of the United States, this cannot be open to debate."<sup>1</sup>

"We have a problem with white nationalist terrorism in the United States of America today," he added. "These are white men motivated by the kind of fear that this president traffics in." Much like Cory Booker, another lagging Democratic candidate, O'Rourke presented himself as a Spartacus standing up against an oppressive regime, by asserting that it would take "all of us—Republicans, Democrats, independents alike—rising up, standing

up to be counted against what this president is doing, against this white nationalist racism, against this violence, and getting this country back."

The next day, O'Rourke took a step further at a press conference when he was asked if there was anything the president could do to improve the situation in America. He replied, "What do you think? You know the [expletive] he's been saying. He's been calling Mexican immigrants rapists and criminals. I don't know—like, members of the press, what the [expletive]?"

He proceeded to berate the press: "Hold on a second. You know, it's these questions that you know the answers to. I mean, connect the dots about what he's been doing in this country. He's not tolerating racism. He is promoting racism. He's not tolerating violence. He's inciting racism and violence in this country. I just—I don't know what kind of question that is."<sup>2</sup> O'Rourke probably thought that using profanity would appeal to young voters and show righteous anger.

### An Absurd Blame Game

It is outrageous that a presidential candidate would accuse a sitting president of inciting violence and racism. The media, however, saw O'Rourke's grandstanding as good copy.

South Bend, IN Mayor Pete Buttigieg, who has his own political problems among his black constituents for not addressing alleged racism in his city's police force, was a bit more circumspect in his remarks. The real problem is not just Trump but "systemic racism" in America today. "I think a president like this one is not even possible, unless something is already deeply wrong in our country. And I think the story—the story in my region, and the story for my generation—reflects those deeper problems growing up in an era of endless war and school shootings."<sup>3</sup> In short, Buttigieg was not blaming

President Trump per se for the shootings. Instead, he blamed the entire nation. The gist of his argument is that if the country were not already racist, Trump would not have been elected in the first place.

Not to be outdone by politicians, and eager for copy and display of virtue, media pundits joined in the charge of President Trump's complicity in promoting white nationalism. Over-the-top MSNBC anchor Nicolle Wallace falsely claimed on the air that President Trump is "talking about exterminating Latinos." NBC News's Paul Reyes added that Trump ramped up white nationalism by talking of an Hispanic "invasion, the warning of people of a caravan and words like 'infestation.' What do you do with an infestation? With an infestation, the natural conclusion is attempt an extermination. So, to me there's little distinction between his inciting violence and the fact it's now happening."<sup>4</sup> Wallace later apologized (sort of) for the accusation, although she added in her apology that she still believed President Trump to be a racist.

### Mass Shootings Are Not New

The left's willingness to politicize mass shootings tells us much about the left today. Under President Obama there were 32 mass shootings. Mass shootings occurred during the presidencies of George W. Bush and Bill Clinton. The left ignored these facts in their blame game. After the failure of the allegations of collusion with Russia, the left has seized upon the threat of white nationalism as a political tool to bring down the president. President Trump does not help his cause with his angry tweets, but this is political war at its nastiest.

The rhetoric of the left is not new. They denounced President George W. Bush as a fascist, and let's not forget that during the 2012 re-election campaign, Vice President Joe Biden warned that Republican candidate Mitt Romney wanted to put blacks back in chains. We can go even further back. Barry Goldwater, the Republican presidential nominee in 1964, was accused of encouraging far-right extremism, and Daniel Schorr, then a reporter for NBC before he went to work for National Public Radio, alleged that after the Republican Party convention, Goldwater planned to go to Bavaria to meet with neo-Nazis. Schorr conveniently did not mention that Goldwater's father was Jewish.

The left is intent on portraying the United States and Europe as standing on the verge of fascism – never mind that the left itself is far guiltier than the right of sorting Americans into racial identity groups for political pur-

poses. Leftists point with alarm to the rise of right-wing populist parties in Europe. The left contends that both American and European white nationalists are seeking to protect the white race through populist attacks on the elites, in the same ploy that brought Adolf Hitler to power.

Nationalism itself has come under attack. For the left, and some Never Trump conservatives, nationalism is just a code word for white nationalism. This rhetoric raises fundamental questions: First, what are the facts behind the El Paso shooting? That shooter clearly targeted Hispanics, but is there more to the story that the media did not widely report? Second, is there a uniform and unified right-wing movement in Europe about to bring fascism to the continent? Exactly what is nationalism? Is it really only fascism in disguise? Finally, and most importantly, what is the role of a Christian citizen living in a nation?

### What the Media Ignored

The shooter at the El Paso Walmart targeted Hispanics. The media focused on this clearly racist act. They pointed to a manifesto the shooter issued avowing that he intended to stop the Hispanic invasion of the United States. They ignored other parts of the manifesto that showed that the shooter, however deranged, was not pro-Republican, a follower of Trump, or a stereotypical white supremacist. The manifesto later appeared on the Drudge Report and other web sites.<sup>5</sup>

In the manifesto, "The Inconvenient Truth," the shooter declared that he supported the Christchurch, New Zealand shooter and the latter's manifesto. Explaining that his attack was a response to the Hispanic invasion of Texas, the shooter continued, "The inconvenient truth is that our leaders, both Democrat AND Republican, have been failing this for decades." Both parties, he charged, have been taken over by corporations. Belying allegations that he was inspired by President Trump, the writer stated that his views were formed long before 2016.

What were the shooter's views? He complained that his generation is being displaced by automation. He warned that some sources say over half of American jobs will be lost to automation. Some people might be retrained, but most will not be. Given this job loss, Americans will need to initiate "a basic income to prevent widespread poverty and civil unrest as people lose their jobs." In addition, Americans will need universal health care. An extended welfare state is necessary, and "the less dependents on a government welfare system, the better." He contended that rampant population growth

through Hispanic immigration and the high birth rate among Hispanics will increase social costs and destroy the environment.

Corporations are “shamelessly over harvesting resources,” the shooter’s manifesto states. Watersheds around the country are being depleted; oil companies are polluting the water supply; thousands of tons of plastic and electronic waste are being dumped into the environment and “recycling is almost non-existent.” Urban sprawl is evident. He concluded, “I just want to say that I love the people of this country, but [expletive] most of y’all are just too stubborn to change your lifestyle. So the next logical step is to decrease the number of people in America using resources.” He might as well as have been labeled an eco-terrorist.

The El Paso shooter favored a guaranteed universal income, universal health care, and protecting the environment. He criticized corporations and consumer culture. While blaming Democrats more, he condemned both Republicans and Democrats as controlled by corporations. He called for population restriction to ensure larger government benefits to citizens. This is hardly the stuff of Trump Republicanism—or conservatism.

The Dayton shooter was an Elizabeth Warren supporter and identified with the far-left violent Antifa movement. He self-identified as a progressive. Of course Warren should not be blamed for this shooting. Mental derangement knows no political boundaries—a point the media did not want to make.

### Is Fascism Near in Europe?

Following the 2008-09 economic downturn and the later mass migration crisis, nationalist/populist parties made significant gains throughout Europe. These parties included the Alternative for Germany (AfD), France’s Front National, the Netherlands Party for Freedom (PVV), Hungary’s Fidesz party, Poland’s Law and Justice Party, Italy’s Lega Nord party, Finland’s Finns Party and Austria’s Freedom Party. Their strength was revealed in the recent European Union Parliament elections. In the United Kingdom, hardline pro-Brexit Boris Johnson replaced Theresa May as prime minister.

A close study of these populist-nationalist political formations in Europe suggests major conclusions. First, all of these parties face internal tensions. Some are more liberal economically; others are more protectionist and social welfare-oriented. They vary in their

opposition to European Union dictates. France’s Front National opposes ending the euro, and Poland’s Law and Justice Party opposes dismantling the EU.

Second, these parties represent national self-interests. These parties share national/populist rhetoric and programs, but differing national interests make unified cooperation among the parties in the EU Parliament or in European politics generally difficult.<sup>6</sup> At this point a unified fascist threat in Europe is hyperbole. A global economic crisis might change this outlook, but right now fascism seems highly improbable. Worth noting, however, is that all these nationalist/populist parties face far-right political opposition.

### Nationalism Rightly Understood

So what does it mean to be a nationalist? Nationalism is defined in the dictionary as placing one’s nation first, and showing devotion and loyalty to one nation. In this way, nationalism is closely associated with patriotism. The creation of nation-states came late in European history, replacing the city-state and small fiefdoms. The nation-state was a political formation to bring diverse people and regions together for their own protection. Nationalism, per se, should be distinguished from ethnic nationalism (such as white or Aryan supremacy), xenophobia, nativism or imperialism. These tendencies can be found within nationalism, just as patriotism can be translated into a hyper-patriotism that does not allow dissent.

The concept of nationalism has come under attack from the left and the right. Never-Trumper Bret Stephens, one of the *New York Times* so-called conservative columnists, attacks nationalism in America, maintaining that we are a “sovereign state,” not a “nation-state.” The difference between the two, he declares, is that a nation-state superimposes “one form of identity politics over various others.”<sup>7</sup> Our state, he argues, is not about ethnic identity, but ideas. Fair enough, but the distinction between a nation-state and a sovereign state remains unclear.

More importantly, as journalist Michael Barone observes, nationalist states, such as the United States, provide “peaceful havens for those of differing cultural views and economic interests who share a common citizenship.” Quoting author Yoram Hazony, *The Virtue of Nationalism* (2018), Barone writes, “The best political order that is known to us is an order of independent national states.”

Abraham Lincoln presents an example of the good side of nationalism and patriotism. His Whig Party stood for the American System, a nationalist political program. His nationalist sentiment continued into his presidency during the Civil War. Lincoln proclaimed that the purpose of the war was to preserve the nation. Lincoln's nationalism was reflected in the opening lines of the Gettysburg Address in 1863: "Fourscore and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal. Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure."

Lincoln understood that a healthy nation—a healthy nationalism, if you will—needs to rest on higher principles, universal principles. For this nation, the American nation, the higher principle is that "all men are created equal." The American Civil War was fought to preserve the union and to uphold the belief that all men are created equal. Lincoln's was a healthy nationalism.

When nationalism is used to promote racial or ethnic superiority to the exclusion of some citizens of the nation, it subverts the nation itself. When populism—a distrust of elites—degenerates into conspiracy the-

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**September 17 is Constitution Day**, in celebration of the signing of the original U.S. Constitution on that date in 1787. This unique blueprint for governing a large and diverse nation, with amendments, has survived far graver threats than those we face today. May it long endure.

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ories aimed at certain ethnic groups, it misdirects a healthy suspicion of centralized power. When patriotism is used to suppress legitimate dissent, or to rally people for wars of aggression, national values are translated into dictatorships.

A Christian citizen living in a nation serves God and a higher law, but acts to defend and improve the nation. Being a Christian, a good citizen and a patriot is not contrary to one's faith. This was the point made by St. Augustine in *City of God*. Christian faith restrains and opposes the ugly side and misuse of nationalism to oppress or separate ethnic groups within the nation. The good Christian citizen understands the God has endowed each human with individual dignity. Human dignity, through God's grace, is given to all mankind—whatever their race, ethnic group, age or sex. Good Christian citizens act on their faith, often in cultures quick to condemn them as deplorables.

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- 1 Caroline Kelly, "Beto O'Rourke: President Trump is a White Nationalist," CNN, August 4, 2019.
  - 2 Tim Harris, "Beto O'Rourke: Trump Is Inciting Violence and Racism, 'Members of the Press, What the F\*\*\*\*?'" *Real Clear Politics*, August 5, 2019.
  - 3 Chris Perez, "Mayor Pete Buttigieg: 'Systemic Racism Is a White Problem,'" *New York Post*, August 9, 2019.
  - 4 Mike Brest, "MSNBC's Nicolle Wallace Claims Trump is 'Talking about Exterminating Latinos,'" *Washington Examiner*, August 6, 2019.
  - 5 "The Inconvenient Truth about Me," EgbertWillies.com (posted August 3, 2019).
  - 6 Reporting on nationalist/populist political parties has been extensive, but two sources on differences among these parties can be found at <https://www.dw.com/en/how-will-the-far-right-afd-party-shape-the-european-parliament/a-49228613>.
  - 7 Bret Stephens, "The New Conservative Pyrite," *New York Times*, July 26, 2019.
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