Sinn, Simone/Harasta, Eva (eds.), *Resisting Exclusion. Global Theological Responses to Populism*, Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt 2019, 291 pp., 20,- €, ISBN: 978-3-374-06174-7

Collating the results of a conference under the auspices of the Lutheran World Federation with 65 participants from 25 countries is no easy task, nor is reviewing a book with 30 papers from a variety of perspectives. The 'Summary of Major Findings' at the conclusion of this volume (283-287) gives an excellent précis of the main themes arising from populist exclusivism and their theological implications. This should perhaps be read before one plunges into the very diverse individual contributions. In what follows I shall try to pick out some of the issues I found most interesting.

The challenge of the **post-truth** era is identified by several contributors as an offshoot of increasing populism. Truth is enshrined in traditions, which of course are particular. But populism polarises; it is the enemy of "enlightened universalism" (Jackelén, 28-30); its reliance on propaganda avoids ideas, whereas the witness of faith asserts the autonomy of the individual (Ribet, 277, 279, drawing on the thought of Jacques Ellul). The advent of the internet – particularly the Twitter platform made notorious by Donald Trump – with its "digital swarms" has the effect of "marginalising the mainstream" (Jackelén, 30) and reinforcing a "narrative of fear" over a "narrative of hope" (Bedford-Strohm, 37-39). This has grave implications for journalism, creating a "cultural unconscious" (Hallonsten, 231) in which, for example, domestic violence and hostility to feminism can be rationalised, particularly when associations and their journals purporting to advocate public theology are controlled by (white) men (McIntosh, 224-225). As Olga Navrátilová points out in a particularly perceptive chapter, at stake here is the basis for asserting truth at all: "Universality of reason guarantees unity; individuality of conscience may divide" (250). The claim to universality, however, often coincides with the exercise of

power; is rationality, then, limited? (251). "There is no private truth", she concludes (253), leaving us with the question of how the "overlapping consensus" (John Rawls) of pluralist societies can guarantee truth at all. Is the "secular purity" of such societies with their "phobia of religion" and "non-religious normativity" now the typical worldview, as it is in Sweden? (Nausner, 256-257). The internet, with its "filter bubbles" and "individual information universes" (Höhne, 269), seems made to order for populism, whose manipulation of the masses gives individuals the illusion that they are being singled out as privileged.

The question of truth, which once might have seemed abstract and theoretical, is important because it is the basis of the trust which in turn makes social relations – both interpersonal and economic – possible. Hence the urgency of the volume's central theme, mentioned by the editors in their introduction and in the final communiqué: the "shrinking democratic space" under the pressure of populism (284), the "fundamental fear of ambiguity and the complexity of diversity" (285), the "deformed political culture" (Fabiny, 44) which is **undermining democracy**. Democracy lives on a "diet of values" (Jackelén, 32), but it is being steadily – one could almost say, morally – starved by religious fundamentalism and political nationalism, what in India is called 'communalism' as promoted by the religio-nationalistic ideology of *Hindutva* (Gaikward, 66, 69). Unlike the fascism of last century, populism can bring about "a form of authoritarian democracy", "illiberal democracies", which seize upon the purported failure of liberalism and socialism to personalise power in the figure of an autocrat like Orbán in Hungary (Ádam and Bozóki, 93, 95-98). The cruel irony is that this "surrogate religion" is presented as Christian, which the authors take to mean non-Jewish but in fact pagan (102-104). We are witnessing a "recession of democracy" in which only two per cent of people worldwide enjoy the freedom of an open public space (Werner, 148-149). In Latin America populism, in the form of neoliberal authoritarianism promoted by both Evangelical and Catholic

forces, is "systematically undermining democracy" (Beros, 175-176). The "shrinking public spaces" thus created perhaps suggest that the church could be a safe space for democratic action (Bretschneider-Felzmann, 192), as happened in some Eastern Bloc countries prior to the 1989 turning point (*die Wende*). But this may well demand a reassessment of what the public sphere really means; for feminists such as McIntosh the opposition of public and private spaces by thinkers such as Habermas betrays a male bias which is incapable of noticing that "intimate partner violence is a public issue" (221).

In discussing these issues the need becomes apparent for **public theology**, which several contributors invoke as an important part of the churches' response to the crisis of democracy. Between the (voluntary) voyage of Columbus in 1492 and the (involuntary) arrival of African slaves from 1619 on lies over a century in which wealth and power steadily accumulated, creating the situation in which American blacks – especially black women – find themselves today (Thomas, 57-58). Jackelén, in her thought-provoking opening lecture, neatly epitomises the dialectic: a culture that gives priority to *counting* profits and property lacks the dimension of *recounting* narratives of hope which transcend the merely rational (29). Max Weber's juxtaposition of an 'ethic of conviction' (*Gesinnungsethik*) and an 'ethic of responsibility' (*Verantwortungsethik*) holds good in the church as well as in politics (Bedford-Strohm, 39). The churches' complicity in the Rwandan genocide sheds further light on this relationship: the presupposition of peace is reconciliation, a "healing of memories" (Bataringaya, 85-86) (a lesson learned in other arenas of conflict such as Northern Ireland). Other authors advocate an "ethic of intellectuality" that would halt the "flight from complexity" and reconcile catholicity and cosmopolitanism (Koopman, 110, with reference to South Africa). In Latin American countries such as Brazil the question arises: who are 'the people', those who, when presented with the ‚preferential option for the poor' by (Catholic) liberation theologians, opted for the Pentecostals and destroyed the reputation of the

reformist Lula da Silva? (von Sinner, 119, drawing on Ernesto Laclau's analysis of the opposition between the particular *plebs* and the universalised *populus*). Africa supplies other examples: the 'theological heresy' of white nationalist churches and the promotion of the ANC as 'God's party' in South Africa (Forster, 134, 136-137); the extraordinary claims of (women!) politicians that Zambia is a Christian nation which needs a Christian president to be a 'father' who keeps it in 'wifely submission' (Kaunda and Kaunda). Similarly disturbing are the Christian Zionists and Israeli nationalists who regard the State of Israel as an 'act of God' in 'God's land' (Isaac, 181), rendering the Palestinians irrelevant. Finally, when evangelical groups in Britain could proclaim that the UK should leave the EU "for deeply spiritual reasons" and when comparable groups in the US find President Trump's misogynistic and racist remarks acceptable, the need for a responsible public theology appears overwhelming (McIntosh, 224-225).

The editors are to be congratulated for organising this diverse array of approaches to populism in a way that highlights its implications for both democracy and the church, a task that has become even more urgent now that the COVID-19 pandemic is testing the leadership structures of both democratic and undemocratic societies as never before outside wartime. This compact review has had to leave out many more valuable insights which readers are invited to discover for themselves. A number of the authors recognise the need for a credible public theology, though this prompts the question: *whose* theology? Acknowledging that the contributors are speaking from a Lutheran perspective, it still remains true that even among the main Christian churches there are numerous theological traditions which the ecumenical movement has not yet reconciled, and at a time when 'comparative theology' and 'interreligious theology' are challenging the distinctiveness of Christian theology itself any discussion of democracy in a wide range of social and cultural settings obviously has much wider implications. Quite apart from, but not unrelated to, the question of theological diversity there is the further question

of the economic injustice which underlies social inequality. It could perhaps have been brought out more clearly that just as ecumenical co-operation is intimately bound up with peace-building, so interreligious dialogue and efforts towards economic and ecological justice are closely connected. Nevertheless, the book achieves a welcome leavening of the urgently necessary debate about the threat to democracy posed by narrowly self-interested populism.

John D'Arcy May

Eva Vybíralová, *Untergrundkirche und geheime Weihen. Eine kirchenrechtliche Untersuchung der Situation in der Tschechoslowakei 1948-1989*, Würzburg: Echter-Verlag 2019, 373 S., 24,- €, ISBN 978-3-429-05363-5

Es war eine heftige Auseinandersetzung um Vorgänge in der Kirche in der totalitären Tschechoslowakei. Das ist knapp deren Kontext, den Frau Vybíralová im Kapitel 2 skizziert: Bald nach der Machtübernahme startete die Regierung eine Kirchenvernichtungspolitik, die als eine der grausamsten im „Ostblock" galt. Jedes Instrument war den Machthabern willkommen: die Vertreibung der Kirchen aus allen gesellschaftlichen Einrichtungen (Altenheime, Kindergärten, Schulen etc.); die Auflösung der Orden, die Inhaftierung vieler Priester; die Spaltung der Kirche, vor allem der Bischöfe und Priester; die bis in den Vatikan reichende Überwachung der inneren Vorgänge des ortskirchlichen Lebens. Der Überlebenskampf führte nicht nur zu geheimen Bischofsweihen, sondern trieb jenen Teil der Christinnen und Christen in den Untergrund, die sich vom Staat nicht korrumpieren ließen und keine Hoffnung mehr hatten, dass es in diesem Staat ein Überleben der Kirche geben könne. Im Untergrund organisierten sie sich in verschworenen Gemeinschaften, die sich notgedrungen um den Altar und damit um die Priester sammelten.

Natürlich war die dramatische Lage in „Rom" nicht unbekannt. Deswegen wurden den (Untergrund-)Bischöfen