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# Saving Nation, Faith and Family. Yoram Hazony's National Conservatism and Its Theo-Political Mission

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**Abstract:** Particularly pushed by the Edmund Burke Foundation and its president Yoram Hazony, the political movement of National Conservatism is largely based on specific concepts of nation, faith and family. Driven by the mission to overcome the violence of liberalism, identified with imperialism, national conservatives shape potent international and interreligious alliances for a religiously based system of independent national states. The article gives an outline of the main programmatic pillars of National Conservatism at the example of Yoram Hazony's *The Virtue of Nationalism*, one of the current ideological key works of the movement. It will show how its political framework is based on a binary frame of liberalism (identified with imperialism) versus nationalism, the latter supported as the way forward towards protecting freedom, faith and family. The analytic part will focus on the use of religious motifs and the construction of a specific kind of Judaeo-Christianism as a means of exclusivist theo-political nationalism. It will be shown that Hazony's nationalism is no way to overcome violence, but a political theory close to theo-political authoritarianism, based on abridged readings of Scripture, history and philosophy. It severely endangers the foundations of democracies, especially with regard to minority and women's rights, and delegitimizes liberal democracy and religious traditions positively contributing to it.

**Keywords:** nationalism; conservatism; political theology; Yoram Hazony; Christianity; Judaism; family; liberal democracy



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## 1. Introduction

It is the beginning of February 2020, the first Coronavirus cases in Europe become known. At the Grand Hotel Plaza on Via del Corso in Rome, however, people are less concerned about the virus than about God, honor and fatherland. From 3–4 February, the who's who of "National Conservatism" met here under the title "God, Honor, Country: President Ronald Reagan, Pope John Paul II and the Freedom Nations". It was the 3rd international conference. Particularly pushed by the Edmund Burke Foundation and its president Yoram Hazony, the political movement of National Conservatism is largely based on specific concepts of nation, faith and family. Driven by the mission to overcome the violence of liberalism, identified with imperialism, National Conservatives shape growing international and interreligious alliances for a religiously based system of independent national states.

In the following, I will outline the basic framework of National Conservatism at the example of Yoram Hazony's *The Virtue of Nationalism* (Hazony 2018), which can be considered the current political vademecum of the movement. The focus will be on its binary construction of liberating nationalism and violent liberal imperialism as the ideological framework of its own political theory, developed on the pillars of nation, faith and family.

The analytical section will discuss how far Hazony shows a sense for current theo-political challenges, but also displays severe short-comings in its theological, philosophical, historical and political dimensions. The final part will discuss if Hazony's concept

of National Conservatism is a religiously based traditionalist, patriarchal ethnocentrism that holds strong tendencies towards anti-democratic authoritarianism, as suggested by Linden (2020). I will argue that National Conservatism does not overcome the definitely existing aspects of violence in some versions of liberalism, but religiously legitimates political authoritarianism at the expense of minority rights, individual freedom and particularly women's rights.

### 1.1. *The Edmund Burke Foundation and National Conservatism*

Before moving into the details of Hazony's political theory, we must have a short glimpse at the Edmund Burke Foundation and its enterprise of "National Conservatism". Founded in 2019, the Edmund Burke Foundation has one goal in particular, i.e., "strengthening the principles of national conservatism in Western and other democratic countries" (The Edmund Burke Foundation 2021). A conference series in London, Washington, Rome and Florida aims at bringing together academics, lobbyists and political leaders in a transatlantic network and developing further the theoretical and practical foundations of National Conservatism. They postulate nation, faith and family as the salvific means in an increasingly fragmented world, suffering from the nightmare of an "open society" and the danger of liberalism.

German political scientist Markus Linden analyzes National Conservatism in a warning voice. For Linden (2020, p. 87, transl. MQN), it "[...] is no longer just a vanguard, but has long since become part of the radical New Right. It appears staid and distinguished and thus fulfills a hinge function between the democratic and the undemocratic camps". National Conservatism appears as a "redemptive counterforce" to "destructive liberalism," which in particular destroys faith and the family as the nucleus of society. For Linden, these new conservatives show an "ethno-pluralist chauvinism without any positive relation to democracy" (Linden 2020, p. 87). They are ready for "blatant anti-pluralist and anti-democratic alliances" (Linden 2020, p. 94). What is striking here is the central role that religion—more explicitly, what is identified as "Judeo-Christian religion"—is ascribed by key actors for the formation and shaping of the political community.

The Edmund Burke Foundation serves as the main institutional actor within the more diverse network of National Conservatism as a political movement and intended coherent political theory. National Conservatism as an openly visible theo-political network is relatively new, but its paths have been prepared for years. Currently, it is one of the most active international and interreligious movements that tries to melt together religion and politics. What makes it particularly interesting is its ability to network and to be more and more present in public debates and the academia, especially in the English-speaking world.

Thus, one has to pay special attention to its leading figures. For Linden (2020) these are especially R.R. Reno, Viktor Orbán and Yoram Hazony. This list must not be considered exclusive, but it represents three important dimensions of National Conservatism, namely the Christian–traditionalist axis that has close connections to evangelicalism, the practical political dimension, and the intellectual strand that has intentions to turn National Conservatism into a more academic enterprise<sup>1</sup>.

Russel R. Reno, a Catholic theologian and Chief Editor of *First Things*, is the hinge to Christian conservative groups, especially within the Evangelical sphere and Catholic traditionalism. His most recent monograph *Return of the Strong Gods* (Reno 2019) followed *Resurrecting the Idea of a Christian Society* (Reno 2016). Viktor Orbán, who has been Hungarian Prime Minister since 2010, is the inventor of "illiberal democracy" as the ideal of Christian democracy. He has been repeatedly celebrated within the Edmund Burke Foundation and its network as a prominent speaker and political leader who has already managed to implement National Conservatism into political reality<sup>2</sup>. However, in order to understand the intellectual dimension of the intersection of religion and politics within National Conservatism, one has to pay attention to Yoram Hazony, the president of the Edmund Burke Foundation, a lobbyist and scholar, and to his theoretical work, in particular

*The Virtue of Nationalism* (Hazony 2018), and in some aspects *The Jewish State* (Hazony 2000) as its forerunner.

### 1.2. Introducing Yoram Hazony

Born in 1964 in Rehovot (Israel), Yoram Hazony was raised in the USA, where he completed a BA in East Asian Studies (1986) and a PhD in Political Theory (1993). Already during his university studies in the U.S., Hazony advocated political conservatism with a nationalist impetus. After returning to Israel, Hazony established himself as an intellectual leader of religious nationalism in Israel. From 1991 until 1994, he served Benjamin Netanyahu as an adviser. After leaving politics, he founded the Shalem Center, now Shalem College, and currently serves as the President of the Herzl Institute, both located in Jerusalem, where he is married with nine children. In 2019, he founded the Edmund Burke Foundation, a public affairs institute that has the agenda of spreading National Conservatism in the academia and real politics (see Hazony 2021). Hazony declares himself “a Jewish nationalist, a Zionist, all my life” (Hazony 2018, p. 2). This becomes visible both in his engagement for the Shalem Center (now: Shalem College), and in his list of publications, including *The Jewish State: The Struggle for Israel’s Soul* (Hazony 2000), *The Philosophy of Hebrew Scripture* (Hazony 2012) and *God and Politics in Esther* (Hazony 2016).

Although previous publications such as *The Jewish State* (Hazony 2000) mainly focused on Israel as a distinct Jewish nation state and served as a severe critique of academia and political culture as “post-Zionism”, *The Virtue of Nationalism* (Hazony 2018) broadens his argument for nationalism on an international and more theoretical level. It goes far beyond Israeli politics and offers the ideological program of a revised, religiously based conservatism, particularly dedicated at reshaping Western politics as a whole.

Hazony is not the exclusive representative of the more diverse political movement of National Conservatism, but as president of the Edmund Burke Foundation, international lobbyist and proclaimed theo-political scholar, he is an important hub in the network. Understanding Hazony helps to better understand the basic ideological framework of National Conservatism and its theo-political challenges, although not every actor within the movement will share the whole ideology as outlined by Hazony (2018). Thus, the following chapter introduces the severe critique brought forward against liberalism in general and Europe in particular, a critique shared by most actors of the movement<sup>3</sup>. Subsequently, Hazony’s programmatic triadic answer based on nation, faith and family is presented and contextualized within his previous focus on Israeli politics.

## 2. “The Best Political Order”: Nationalism Overcoming Liberal Imperialism

### 2.1. Nationalism versus (Liberal) Imperialism: The Binary Framework

At the core of Hazony’s concept of nationalism, identified with national conservatism, is the idea of a homogenous nation. It is “a number of tribes with a common language or religion, and a past history of acting as a body for the common defense and other large-scale enterprises” (Hazony 2018, p. 18). The prototype of a nation is realized in biblical Israel as documented in the writings of the Hebrew Bible from Genesis to the Kings, i.e., the Tanakh. This Israel shares one language, one religion, one destiny in its fight against external enemies and the permanent danger of extinction. The biblical Israel is imagined as a unified community of fate, which predates any other nation. When the nation is united “under a single standing government, independent of all other governments”, Hazony (2018, p. 100) speaks of a national state.

On a historical level, Hazony sees this model implemented in what he identifies as the Protestant world order of the 17th century after the Peace of Westphalia. This order is characterized by two basic rules that simultaneously frame nationalism until today as the “best political order—that is, to an anti-imperialist theory that seeks to establish a world of free and independent nations” (Hazony 2018, p. 6). The first one is the moral minimum rooted in a natural order that is itself traced back to the Bible and the Ten Commandments.

Any ruler is subject to the moral minimum that is required for any legitimate government (Hazony 2018, p. 24). Second, it is the right to national self-determination, particularly visible in an own constitution and an own church (sic) (Hazony 2018, p. 25).

Hazony also offers several concrete examples of historical and contemporary nationalisms, including Gandhi, Ben Gurion and Roosevelt as celebrated nationalists who fought for the freedom of their people (see Hazony 2018, p. 2)<sup>4</sup>. The Protestant order of independent, homogeneous national states, based on Biblical nationalism, is the great opponent of Catholic imperialism and its ally, the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation<sup>5</sup>. However, even within the Catholic sphere there developed national churches, such as in France, which is appreciated by Hazony. Consequently, the Thirty Years' War was no religious war, but a war of independent national states against German and Spanish imperialists (Hazony 2018, pp. 22–23).

Nationalism has one great opponent, i.e., imperialism, which promises peace and prosperity in a united humanity under one political regime. Here, too, historical antecedents are noted. Biblical empires striving for universal world domination are Babylon and Egypt. As a later world-historical triumvirate, Hazony mentions the Roman Empire, the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the British Empire, which would still serve today's imperialists as inspirations (see Hazony 2018, pp. 3–4). Especially since the 1990s, i.e., after the fall of the Iron Curtain, the E.U. and the U.S.A. have been developing as “twin-empire building projects” (Hazony 2018, p. 4).

Today's most dangerous imperialism is liberalism—notice already that Hazony does not differentiate between different varieties of liberal thought and practice—and its endeavor to establish a global regime of international institutions and to abolish the independent national regimes. In the following, two main ideological roots of these current empires are identified, namely John Locke and Immanuel Kant, resulting in the “liberal construction of the West” (Hazony 2018, p. 30).

Hazony offers a specific reading of Locke's philosophy, interpreting him as a rationalist who propagates social cohesion on a mere contractual basis, the mere consent of the individual. This, however, would completely lack an anthropological basis without which, however, no political theory can be legitimate. If the nation state, community, family and religious tradition are missing as core elements, then a political theory—such as Locke's—is a complete bloodless illusion. A family, the core of any political community, is not based on rational consent; similarly, a state cannot survive when it is merely the result of a consent (see Hazony 2018, pp. 30–32). National state, community, family and religious tradition make up the political institutions of the Jewish and Christian world (Hazony 2018, p. 33), while liberalists in the Lockean tradition reject these basic categories of human and political life.

Kant, in this context, is read as the anti-nationalist par excellence, especially if one follows his writing *Über den ewigen Frieden* (Kant 1796), which envisages an international-imperial state as the highest fulfilment of reason. Only in such a state can moral maturity come to its full expression. Now, after the catastrophe of World War II, the Kantian paradigm of supranational liberal rule gains power and replaces the nationalist paradigm.

Let us have a closer look at this paradigm shift of post-World-War II. The old nationalist paradigm as realized in England, the Netherlands or France, was based on the order of 1648 and supported a Europe in freedom and self-determination, against the imperialist claims of the Holy Roman Empire. Zionism and the State of Israel were the late results of this nationalist paradigm (Hazony 2018, pp. 196–97).

However, after 1945, Europe moved to a different paradigm, imperialist liberalism, which identified nationalism and independent national states as the root of violence, especially World War II and the horrors of Auschwitz. Kant's cosmopolitanism and the vision of a unified empire, ideally realized in the Holy Roman Empire of German Nation and a unified church, serve as inspirations for this liberal paradigm, which ought to guarantee peace and prosperity without borders (see Hazony 2018, pp. 197–99). In Hazony's perspective, national-socialists, Marxists and liberals have one and the same goal:

the destruction of the national state, today prominently pursued by Habermas, the “leading theoretician of a postnational Europe” (Hazony 2018, p. 201) and the European Union.

## 2.2. Europe—Kantian Hypocrites

In Hazony’s view, the imperialist–liberal paradigm shift that began in 1945 and intensified in 1989 has left Europe increasingly trapped in the Kantian paradigm, which provides Europe, identified with “the West” and “liberalism”, with the normative glasses by which other states are judged—or condemned. Here Hazony imagines a Kantian three-step of barbarism–nation state–cosmopolitanism, with the help of which liberal Europe categorizes the rest of the world.<sup>6</sup>

The primary target of this liberal European process of judgment is Israel, which is measured against the yardstick of Kantian cosmopolitanism. In Hazony’s imagination of liberal Europeans, these judge “Israel is Auschwitz”, because the survivors of the Nazi horrors follow the seemingly violent nationalism of their persecutors and found a national state themselves, they take “the path of Hitler” (Hazony 2018, p. 206). If you found a national state after 1945, there is something wrong, especially when you are mostly migrants from Europe and should actually know about the horrors of nationalism. In this regard, contemporary European liberals judge Israel as having left the path of enlightenment and moral maturity, while its Muslim neighbors are granted compassion.<sup>7</sup> They are similar to little children caught on a lower civilizational level. They still need to overcome barbarianism and move towards the national state until cosmopolitanism is an option, while Israel would actually be capable for cosmopolitanism, but deliberately chooses nationalism (see Hazony 2018, pp. 209–13).

However, it is not only Israel that is a victim of European liberal hypocrisy, but also South Africa during the Apartheid regime, and Serbia in the 1990s, that suffered from delegitimizing liberal campaigns (see Hazony 2018, pp. 214, 217–18). Today, primarily the U.S.A., the U.K. and Eastern European countries striving for national sovereignty against the European Union are under liberal scrutiny. The U.S. rejects international institutions and organizations, the U.K., Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary are judged as fascists or even Nazis because of their striving for national independence, the core dogma of National Conservatives (see Hazony 2018, pp. 216–17). However, for Hazony this is only the expression of a deep European liberal hypocrisy; some countries need to follow higher standards than others, especially Muslim majority countries. However, what is the actual problem of liberal Europeans? It is the “Kantian renunciation of a national right to independent judgment and action, especially with regard to the use of force” (Hazony 2018, p. 218). This is precisely what liberalism wants to deny national states of— independence, freedom, and the use of force to implement these.

## 2.3. A First Sum: Framing a Polarized World

Building on a biblically founded distinction into empire (Babylon and Egypt) and nation (Israel), Hazony outlines a continuing duel between imperialism and nationalism. At the beginning of modern times, biblical nationalism becomes what he calls the Protestant order, which gains its counterpart in the Enlightenment in the form of the theories of John Locke and Immanuel Kant.

After the Second World War, there is a paradigm shift in Europe. Nationalism in the form of the Protestant nation-state order is held responsible for the atrocities of Auschwitz. Liberalism as a hegemonic world order is supposed to bring peace and prosperity. Systems that continue to be nation-state oriented—such as the newly founded State of Israel, Brexit-U.K., Orbán’s Hungary or PIS-Poland—are discredited by liberal actors and condemned as fascists, yet from Hazony’s perspective they are merely the victims of liberal imperialism, especially the European Union and liberals such as Habermas.

Thus, we have sketched the framework—but where lies the ideological core of the political theory that Hazony develops as the basis of National Conservatism? This can be summarized into a triad: nation, faith and family—the last one being the foundational pillar.

### 3. Nation, Faith and Family: The Programmatic Triad

#### 3.1. No Political Theory without the Hebrew Bible

Hazony's understanding of political theory is deeply rooted in religious thought. It distinguishes two levels of political philosophy (Hazony 2018, pp. 58–60). Philosophy of Government presupposes the state as a self-evident anthropological constant, but discusses how it should actually look, and which form of government would be the best. Philosophy of Political Order, in contrast, is interested in deeper anthropological questions and wants to know how people become organized in the first place. How and why do individuals join, and are there alternatives to the state as a form of socio-political organization?

For Hazony, there can be no reflection on the appropriate form of government without a prior examination of the foundations of human order, i.e., no Philosophy of Government without Philosophy of the Political Order. However, where do the foundations of this Philosophy of the Political Order come from? It is the Hebrew Bible as an unequivocal political book, which in the end demands nationalism.

Already in 2006, Hazony states in an essay that the Hebrew Bible, especially in its "central historical narrative" from Genesis to the Books of Kings, offers a self-contained political theory: "[...] the central historical narrative of the Hebrew Bible (beginning in Genesis and ending with the book of Kings) was composed with an eye to advancing a consistent political theory. The biblical narrative issues biting criticism of both the imperial state familiar to the ancient Near East; and of its opposite, political anarchy. In place of these, the Bible advocates a new and intermediate form of political association: the unification of all Israel under a limited state, to be ruled by an Israelite 'whose heart is not lifted above his brothers.'" (Hazony 2006, p. 137).

Martin Yaffe (2021, p. 11) perfectly sums up: "Hazony looks to the Hebrew Bible as a guiding precedent for modern (including Israeli) nationalism." What is the biblical author's goal in this regard? It is "to provide an account of why the Israelite state rose and why it declined". (Hazony 2006, p. 139). For Hazony, the Hebrew Bible in its narrative core provides the model for anti-imperialist nationalism. It offers the foundations of natural law, without which any form of human coexistence is lost. Yaffe (2021, p. 12) summarizes: "Hazony acknowledges as much by asserting that the Bible teaches 'natural law' or 'laws of nature' (he elides the two) as its 'political philosophy'". This law is the background for any legitimate order, starting with the family and resulting in the nation.

#### 3.2. Family

Framing "family" as the basic political unit is deeply rooted in political philosophy. In particular, Aristotle outlined the parallel structure between the *oikos* (house) and the *polis* (city). However, one has to be aware that the ancient concept of a "house", both in Greek political philosophy and the Hebrew Scripture, was far beyond the modern idea of a nuclear family. Klauck (2020, pp. 379–82) highlights the focus of ancient political philosophy on the authoritarian role of the head of the house (or Roman *pater familias*) and the increasing importance of the house within Jewish life as the basic unit of socio-religious life, particularly in times of hardship and oppression.

Hazony (2018, p. 66) takes up the idea of the family as the basic socio-political unit, defining it as the "strongest and most resilient of all small institutions known to human politics", but gives it a specific turn. Family is the nuclear family, structured analogously to a military unit led by a junior officer or sergeant. It is a strictly patriarchal organization where the heads of the family form a clan, whose heads form a tribe, while the heads of the tribe form the nation. The cohesion of each level is shaped by a common fight against external dangers, shared suffering and shared success. Families are "little fortresses to shelter its own special inheritance, its own treasured culture, in a garden in which it can flourish unmolested". (Hazony 2018, p. 75)<sup>8</sup>

The common struggle creates "mutual loyalty", the strongest political force (see Hazony 2018, pp. 66, 69). This is a recurring key term in Hazony's work (see Yaffe 2021,

p. 11), but also for National Conservatism in general. Loyalty has to be grown and maintained at each level, starting from the family<sup>9</sup>.

Taking Hazony's theory seriously, there can be no functioning political community without the hierarchically structured nuclear family. This family is bound by absolute mutual loyalty, rooted in a common fight against external enemies. As I shall point out later, the focus on antagonism as the origin of the political clearly draws inspiration from Carl Schmitt's concept of the political, but this affinity with the contested "father of political theology" is not openly visible<sup>10</sup>. The basic task is to strengthen and protect the collective, namely "health and prosperity", of the family, on three levels (Hazony 2018, p. 71). First of all, the physical and material well-being of the family has to be ensured. This means, above all, the bearing and nursing of children. Family means reproduction. Second, the internal integrity of the family has to be guaranteed, i.e., the cohesion of the family based on respect for its hierarchical structures (age and status) and harmonious conflict resolution. Finally, the cultural heritage must be transmitted to the next generation. Similar to a fractal hierarchy, each following unit—clan, tribe and nation—has to care for its well-being, integrity and the transmission of heritage.

### 3.3. Faith and Public Religion

Hazony's National Conservatism is built strictly on a specific reading of the Hebrew Bible as a political book; to be more precise, as a programmatic guide to nationalism. There can be no legitimate political theory without an anthropological foundation, which, according to Hazony, only exists within the Hebrew Bible. This has three concrete consequences. First, National Conservatism as an anthropologically based and thus legitimate political theory demands for independent national states on the basis of a uniform language, religion and history. Second, it distances itself from the imperial, universalist projects of Babylon, Egypt and their ideological successors. Third, the alternative national states must be organized according to the schematic fractal hierarchy of family, clan, tribe and nation.

Hazony does not only regard his theory as rooted in the Hebrew Bible, but also makes extensive use of the tradition of public religion, which is strongly represented in Anglo-American thought and which he considers essential for "Anglo-American Conservatism", a school of thought he wants to revive as "National Conservatism" (Hazony 2018, pp. 53–54; for a detailed discussion of National Conservatism as legitimate realization of Anglo-American Conservatism see Haivry and Hazony 2017). It includes a "public religion based on the Bible" (ibid., p. 54), which concretely results in three convictions. First, the biblical God and religious practice are indispensable for justice and public morality. Second, other faiths may be tolerated as long as their practitioners are no danger for the integrity and well-being of the nation. Third, the Bible is the basis for national independence, justice and public morality.

Hazony recalls the old tradition of public religion in the U.S., but he gives his own interpretation of what is included in a legitimate public religion. Whereas for public religion in the sense of Robert Bellah's "American Civil Religion" the institutional separation of state and religion (church) is essential (see Bellah 1967), Hazony wants to abolish it. For him, the institutional separation of state and religion is a mere product of post-WW-II liberalism. "The liberal doctrine requiring a 'wall of separation between church and state' at all levels of government is, as has been said, a product of the post-World War II period, and not an inherent feature of American political tradition" (Hazony 2019).

The wall destroys the national state, the traditional family and (Judaean-Christian) religion, and thus has to be torn down: "But liberal principles provide no resources for maintaining institutions such as the national state, the family, and Christian or Jewish religion. Having displaced the older biblical worldview that had given these institutions life, liberalism has, in the course of a few generations, severely damaged all of them. The current political reality of disintegrating national states, ruined families, and eviscerated religious traditions is the direct consequence of the embrace of liberal dogma as a kind of universal salvation creed throughout much of the West." (Hazony 2019).

Reflecting on the role of faith and religion in the political project of National Conservatism, we can observe that both are reduced to a specific kind of Judaeo-Christianism. It distances itself first of all from secularism and Islam in particular, but also draws a clear line to schools of thought and religious practices within the Jewish-Christian sphere that are identified as “liberal” or “progressive” and thus illegitimate interpretations of the respective faith tradition. Reflecting on the use of Scripture, we see an almost classical “quarry exegesis” where texts which could possibly contradict the national-conservative project are excluded. One might think of Jotam’s fable (Judges 9: 8–15) or other recurring warnings against earthly kings.

For Hazony and his supporters, the institutional separation of state and church (religion) endangers the programmatic foundations of a functioning human society—namely, national state, traditional family and religion. There can be no legitimate political theory, no legitimate state without his reading of the (Hebrew) Bible. What Hazony suggests is, however, no public religion in the sense of an integrative framework which is open for different interpretations of what the Divine and human responsibility in relation to the world and the transcendent could mean. For him, a legitimate public religion is an institutionalized religion, deeply entangled with a homogeneous concept of the nation and based on a hierarchical account of the political community, itself rooted in a patriarchal traditional family. Freedom and conflictive-productive discourse are only possible insofar as the non-negotiable institutions of the Judaeo-Christian collective are not put into question.

### 3.4. Nation, National State and Nationalism

Already at the beginning of this section, we have seen that Hazony’s idea of a nation is based on a common language or religion and common history of fighting an external enemy, a community of fate in a hostile world. If an independent state wants to really work well, it necessitates “the overwhelming dominance of a single nationality within a given state” (Hazony 2018, p. 159). There is one nationality within the state which consequently is described as a “national state”, not a nation state (Hazony (2018, p. 109ff). For him, only this homogenous state respects the diverse loyalties of the individual within its family, clan and tribe (cf. Yaffe 2021, p. 10).

However, why is nationalism superior to any other political paradigm, especially liberalism? Hazony (2018, p. 10) points to several advantages. First, only nationalism guarantees collective self-determination and protects from wars of conquest. In contrast, independent national states based on faith and family will peacefully compete for their best development. They will tolerate different ways of life and the loyalties within every single social level from family to clan, tribe and nation, and this will guarantee for independent institutions and individual freedom. Not reason or contract, but loyalty within the collective will lead to peace and prosperity. However, in the same breath, Hazony is clear that not every stateless people can have its independent national state. One might ask which people Hazony is thinking about, but he does not give a word about it.

What is labelled as a sovereign political community actually transpires to be a Judaeo-Christian national state (not: nation-state) based on the greatest possible homogeneity of ethnicity and religion. Its basis is mutual loyalty within the collective, first and foremost fostered in the traditional family. The individual is subject to the given order, prescribed by a nationalist, hierarchical and patriarchal reading of chosen texts of the Hebrew Bible. Minorities may be tolerated, but Hazony does not speak about civil rights or any kind of equal participation in the political process, but instead of tolerance. This raises severe questions. Is Hazony’s National Conservatism still within the sphere of democracy, especially with regard to the legal position of minorities and their right to equal participation in the process of political decision-making? Recently, Müller (2021) has pointed to the essential value of equality within the framework of democracy. Special attention also has to be paid to the role assigned to women and men. It is never outlined directly, but it nevertheless becomes very clear that only a male human being can be the head of the family, clan, tribe



or nation. Could a queen be head of the state, or just a “king (or president)” (Hazony 2019)? Is the capacity to lead and guide a privilege of men?

The nation and consequently the idea of a national state is presented as a quasi-divine institution and the privileged path to freedom, peace and plurality. However, freedom is first of all freedom of the collective; the individual has to arrange its freedom within the requested mutual loyalty of the community. Although Hazony polemicizes against liberal multiculturalism, he presents nationalism as the way to plurality in the sense of separated, homogenous communities. Plurality is identified using particularity and has to be protected from external blurring.

### 3.5. Tracing the Context: *The Jewish State* (Hazony 2000)

The nationalism presented by Hazony (2018) is not without forerunners in his own written work. Already in 2000, then still president of Jerusalem’s Shalem Center, Hazony published *The Jewish State*, a harsh critique of the “Post-Jewish” character of Israel (Hazony 2000, p. xix), fostered by Israeli intellectuals, political and mainstream culture and their “Post-Zionism” (ibid., p. xxvi). Especially the Hebrew University, Martin Buber and his allies are depicted as the origins of Jewish intellectual opposition to a Jewish nation-state.

In several aspects, *The Virtue of Nationalism* is an attempt to universalize concepts already presented in *The Jewish State* and turn Zionism—in Hazony’s version—into the prototype of National Conservatism. This is particularly visible in four points. First, Hazony now universalizes the unity of religion, nation and state. When he criticizes Israeli intellectuals for their call to separate religion and state, Jewish nationality and state (Hazony 2000, p. xxv), he now brings forward a very similar critique against liberalism and the concept of a secular nation state in general (cf. above 3.3.).

Second, already in 2000 Hazony rejects the concept of a state of citizens. Also in his recent work, citizenship as a guarantee of equality among people of differing (religious, ethnic etc.) backgrounds has no positive value.

However, probably most striking are two more characteristics. These are the focus on political and military force as the basis for a strong collective and the rejection of humanism and dialogue as fostered by Martin Buber and other intellectuals in the tradition of humanism and non-violence. Hazony (2000, p. 6ff) accuses Buber and his students of rejecting Israel as an illegitimate Jewish State longing for power. In the 1990s, it is particularly historian Moshe Zimmermann (pp. 10–11) that serves Hazony as a prolific representative of academic anti-Zionism in Israel. In particular, authors such as David Grossmann and Aharon Appelfeld are attacked for advocating a concept of strength through the experience of weakness (p. 28). As the Jewish State of Israel can only survive with political and military force, the same is true for any other legitimate state. Survival and sovereignty can never result from vulnerability and actually experienced pain. Hazony (2000) criticizes the rejection of force and military power in Israel’s intellectual culture of the 1990s, and in (2018) he expands this critique to liberalism in general.

Hazony (2000, p. xxviii) accuses Buber of rejecting Zionism as morally illegitimate, whereas in (2018) he broadens this argument against liberals in general who reject nationalism as morally illegitimate and the origin of violence. Martin Buber, a devoted religious humanist who intended to overcome the vicious circles of violence, is depicted as the crucial internal enemy of the State of Israel. “It seems that for Buber, no horror was greater than the reality of Jewish power”, Hazony (2000, p. 283) summarizes Buber’s critique of the Eichmann process and the final death penalty. Although for Buber, violence could not be the answer to violence, Hazony focuses on the necessity of political and military force, including violence, in order to guarantee the sovereignty of the people—be it the Jewish people or any other homogeneous nation, as then outlined in *The Virtue of Nationalism*.

## 4. Analysis: On the Way to Religiously Based Authoritarianism

### 4.1. The Sense for Current Hot Issues

National Conservatism as theoretically outlined by Yoram Hazony raises serious questions on a theological, philosophical, historical and political level. However, it also shows a sincere sense for current hot issues within theo-political conflicts. It is no secret anymore that liberal democracies are in crisis, both on a theoretical and a practical level (see i.a., [Crouch 2005](#); [Manow 2020](#); [Müller 2021](#)). Although one might argue that “being in crisis” is an inherent feature of a working, developing deliberative democracy, the recent rise of populist actors, especially from the political right, but not exclusively, using more or less democratic instruments to undermine the basic principles of democracy and consciously instrumentalizing religious sentiments, has introduced a new level of escalation (see [Applebaum 2020](#)). The Peace of Westphalia (1648) has shaped Western understandings of the relation between state, nation and religion, but this relation has to be reflected anew, especially after 1989 and after 9/11<sup>11</sup>.

In particular, the rise of social pluralism and migration have contributed to a rising desire for homogeneity. What is particularly interesting, however, is the specific attention Hazony and his allies pay to the family, or what is imagined as the “traditional family”; its endangerment and its necessity for any functioning legitimate political community. Gender and family orders have been shattered for 200 years, when the secular nation state and religious communities started fighting about the “legitimate” authority over family, reproduction, gender roles and thus crucial aspects of the future of a community (cf. [Scott 2018](#)).

Hazony and National Conservatism have a sense for the growing fragmentation of our societies, which long for a new solidarity. Their diagnosis has some credibility, but the suggested cure has to be regarded with great caution. There is the increasing danger of serious scenarios of religiously motivated violence, where one will again ask the question: Is religion the source of violence or is it instrumentalized by political actors for their specific power interests? Who serves whom and what can religion contribute to overcome the dead-end of violence, especially to the marginalized?

In the following, I will outline four dimensions of critique, which need to be deepened in further studies on Hazony, the Edmund Burke Foundation and the national conservative movement and the future of nation, state and religion. After shortly introducing some philosophical and historical issues, I will focus on theological and political concerns. The article will conclude with a reflection on the possible theo-political consequences of National Conservatism, especially the danger of re-introducing a new dimension of religiously legitimated exclusivism, violence and authoritarianism.

### 4.2. Philosophical Concerns

There have already been some discussions about Hazony’s interpretation of Locke as a strict rationalist and Kant as imperialist cosmopolitan and his use of Burke and other classical conservatives to construct National Conservatism (cf. in particular [Yaffe 2021](#); [Schaefer 2021](#)). Especially with regard to Burke, one might bear in mind Onora O’Neill’s (2014) warning that there is no consistent theory in Burke. He is used for many sides. This is particularly true for the human rights discourse in theory and practice. [Applebaum \(2020, p. 20\)](#) warns about the abuse of Burke for projects of the new right in Europe. These projects call themselves conservative, but have actually “broken with the old-fashioned, Burkean small-c conservatism that is suspicious of rapid change in all its forms”, they would be “more Bolshevik than Burkean” in the sense of destroying existing political structures.

Within the project of National Conservatism, human rights are depicted as an imperialist strategy of liberalism, deeply connected to a Kantian cosmopolitan regime that destroys the sovereignty of national states. There is some legitimate concern in the secular-liberal abuse of human rights for imperialist projects of the West, as has been analyzed by postcolonial critics such as Talal [Asad \(2003\)](#). Liberalism and its too often hypocrit-

ical stance towards human rights need to be put under scrutiny. However, in the case of Hazony's concept of National Conservatism, human rights per se are delegitimized as a violent instrument of liberalism, destroying the sovereignty of closed communities. The arguments brought forward very much resemble Carl Schmitt's political theology without quoting the ideological father. For Schmitt (1991, esp. pp. 54–56), the concept of humanity excludes enmity and thus destroys the political. For both, "humanity" is nothing but an ideological instrument of imperialism without any political legitimacy. There is no humanity, only its liberal delusion. "Whoever invokes humanity wants to cheat" (Schmitt 1991, p. 55, transl. MQN), thus reads his famous dictum. For both Schmitt and Hazony, there is no political legitimacy of humanity and human rights, respectively. References to a universal humanity are declared to be imperialist, violent and in contradiction to the concept of the political, i.e., the fight of a homogenous collective against an exterior enemy.

#### 4.3. Historical Misreadings

Hazony idealizes a Protestant post-1648 state order with homogenous national states that guarantee for peace and prosperity. This has to be put into question. Were the emerging states really religiously and ethnically homogenous and what was the prize for achieving this purported homogeneity? The process was accompanied by severe violence against the identified religious others, ranging from forced conversion to migration or even death. Many religiously persecuted communities found a new home in the Americas, where they had to arrange with practical pluralism and contributed to the emergence of the concept of an inclusive civil religion, while pushing the non-establishment of any institutional religion. The intention was to bring together diverse religious sentiments and foster an encompassing patriotism. Consequently, the de-institutionalization of religion became a key concept for the idea of a secular state that fosters religious pluralism and public religion. Currently, intellectuals such as Martha Nussbaum (2013) recall a religiously inspired, inclusive patriotism against the shortcomings of a too rationalist liberal tradition and the danger of exclusivist populism. Moreover, Pope Francis (2020) supports an inclusive, solidary patriotism that has to be in accordance with integral humanism and a global engagement for human rights, especially for the most vulnerable.

It is important to remember that even after 1648 and the famous "cuius region, eius religio", there were rarely any homogenous states in Europe. Especially the French Revolution was accompanied by massive waves of terror against particular communities within the territory, especially in the Vendée. Indeed, how homogenous was Europe before the atrocities and genocides of World War I and II?

However, according to Hazony, German National Socialism was not nationalist, but due to its war of conquest, was anti-nationalist and thus imperialist, such as liberalism, the European Union and Jürgen Habermas (Hazony 2018, p. 201). In this context, Hazony draws highly simplistic and dangerous comparisons, especially when he suggests that Europe depicts and thus delegitimizes the State of Israel as the continuation of "Auschwitz" (see above and Hazony 2018, p. 206). For Hazony, nationalism is the way to peace and non-violence, but "is it possible to sever nationalism from the tendencies to xenophobia and even aggressive imperialism as Hazony wishes to do?" (Schaefer 2021, p. 16). He completely ignores the problematic historical and contemporary use of the term "nationalism" and the entanglement of actual aggressive imperialism and nationalism: "On what ground can one distinguish the apparent imperial designs of contemporary Russia and China from purely 'nationalistic' policies, considering that each of those regimes relies heavily on appeals to nationalism?" (Schaefer 2021, p. 15)

#### 4.4. Theological Concerns

Bearing in mind the conflictive and too often violent history of Jewish-Christian relations, one has to be careful as a Christian theologian to point to possible shortcomings of a distinct Jewish approach to theo-politics. There has been a long history of Christian

replacement theology towards Judaism, which in the case of the Catholic Church only started to be overcome in the course of the Second Vatican Council and *Nostra Aetate* in particular. Yoram Hazony speaks as a Jewish religious political theorist, but intends to establish a sound theoretical basis for National Conservatism, bringing together Jewish and Christian religious nationalists. Thus, it is essential to point to several critical issues from a Christian theological perspective<sup>12</sup>.

National Conservatism intends to establish a Jewish–Christian axis against the imperialist shortcomings of liberalism it identifies. For Hazony as lead-theorist, only the Hebrew Bible, i.e., the Tanakh, can offer a legitimate anthropological basis for political theory. From a Christian theological point of view, this is difficult in several aspects. First of all, for Christians the canon of Scripture encompasses more books than the Tanakh. Both the books of the First and the Second (or: Old and New) Testament are canonical (although the exact number of books and some verses are disputed in between the different denominations). Hazony reads the Hebrew Bible as a political vademecum for nationalism and projects the idea of a nationalist, ethnically and religiously homogenous state, which is deeply enwoven with the nationalist romanticism of the 19th century, back into an imagined historical community. In many regards, this nationalist reading of the Bible is the result of a “choose and pick” exegesis, connected to the wish of religiously legitimating a political idea, i.e., exclusivist nationalism, dating back to recent modernity. One must ask, what actually happens to those texts that are seriously critical of immanent political rule, i.a., the parable of the bramble (Judges 9: 9–15). Or the continuous tension between Jesus’ understanding of power, community and solidarity and those in his direct environment? (Neulinger 2018)

A serious problem within Hazony’s theory is the depiction of those religious traditions that either do not fit into the concept of one religion—one nation, one state—or are not identified as “Judaeo-Christian”, Islam in particular. In case of the Catholic Church, a line is drawn between imperialist-papalist Catholicism, which intends to go beyond borders, and projects of establishing Catholic national churches, such as French Gallicanism. The concept of a “catholic” church in its literal sense (on the whole, general or universal) strictly contradicts the idea of particular communities. However, in Hazony’s National Conservatism, legitimate religion is identified with traditionalist, hierarchical and patriarchal Judaism and Christianity within clear territorial borders. Religious communities, such as families, are little fortresses next to each other, but without any integrating figure such as a “pontifex maximus”, one of the traditional titles of the Roman bishop. Thus, particularly with regard to Catholicism and papacy, the ambiguity and ambivalence of National Conservatism becomes visible. We might point to the use of John Paul II as a symbolic figure, e.g., in the Rome Conference’s title. On the one hand, specific aspects of a traditionalist and anti-communist Catholicism as fostered by Pope John Paul II are celebrated. The focus on the traditional reproductive family, the protection of traditional family values and the support of sovereign nation states against totalitarian ideologies and their regimes were of deep concern for John Paul II<sup>13</sup>. On the other hand, his support for international diplomacy, human rights and interreligious dialogue, especially with regard to Islam, clearly contradict the basics of Hazony’s conservatism<sup>14</sup>.

National Conservatism distinguishes between legitimate and non-legitimate interpretations of Jewish and Christian faith. The leading criterion is whether the respective interpretation supports the political pathway of National Conservatism or not. Other versions, especially those which question the identification of nation, state and religion and the traditional, patriarchally structured family, are delegitimized and rejected as violent, liberal imperialists. This has already been visible in Hazony (2000), where liberal or leftist Judaism is delegitimized as anti-Zionist and thus, for Hazony, anti-Jewish. Similarly, now, this split into legitimate and illegitimate religion and its political expression is introduced into Christianity and the Catholic Church. Hazony does not invent this Christian polarization, but it can easily accommodate with the already existing inner-Catholic polemics between “true” and “false” Catholics, particularly strong in North American Catholicism<sup>15</sup>.

#### 4.5. Political Dangers in Practice

Hazony is a binary thinker who presents the reader and political actor with monolithic ideological blocks. The construction of ideological enemies both on a religious and political level especially serves the goal to bring out one's own polarizing binary *Weltanschauung*. However, neither religious nor political traditions are monolithic buildings without any historical and social context. There are different schools and practices of liberalism. These also necessitate critique, but there is no monolithic violent liberalism as such<sup>16</sup>. One highly dangerous result of rejecting liberalism as such is the nearly complete neglect of the individual and their rights within and against the collective. Hazony's National Conservatism presents us a divinely instituted, hierarchical and gendered structure of the political community. The individual only exists within the framework of the collective, identified with the majority. This is particularly dangerous for women's rights and minority rights, which have been in the center of the struggle for liberal democracies throughout decades.

### 5. Reflecting the Theo-Political Consequences

Let us finally reflect some theo-political consequences of National Conservatism as presented by Yoram Hazony. This school of thought and its related international movement are characterized by an entanglement of political and religious actors, which intend to delegitimize liberal democracy, human rights, international cooperation and pluralism in the name of a religiously based political doctrine. It reads the Hebrew Bible as a nationalist vademecum and history as a conflict between empires and national states, the former identified with any *Weltanschauung* showing universalist tendencies, and a monolithic liberalism in particular.

National Conservatism and Hazony in particular is a prominent example for the significance of debates around sex, gender and family in contemporary theo-political conflicts. Scott (2018) underlines the focus of political conflicts between the secular and the religious on this range of topics from the early 19th century onwards. Already during that era, the conflict line was not in between the secular and the religious, but in between progressive and traditionalist actors within the respective communities and *Weltanschauungen*. Similarly, this is true for contemporary theo-political conflicts. National Conservatism is not the single representative of a religiously motivated political ideology, but unites traditionalist Jewish and Christian, sometimes even secular, intellectuals against those who are identified as violent imperialists. The focus on the traditional, patriarchal family serves as an essential focal point for the movement.

Within National Conservatism, religion is not an open, inclusive concept, which could serve as an integrating factor for a pluralist society, as suggested by Bellah's civil religion, but the exclusivist marker of the homogenous community called "nation". Calling for the end of institutional separation between politics and religion, the central pillar of a secular-liberal democracy, we observe the return of an institutionalized state religion.

However, who serves whom in this doctrine? Do religious actors use the idea of National Conservatism in order to implement their religious worldview on a political level or do political actors use religious motives and invoke "Judaeo-Christianity" as a bulwark for protecting their power, without any sincere interest in faith?

For the Edmund Burke Foundation, whose founder and president is Hazony, National Conservatism is not a mere academic enterprise. It aims at bringing together political theory and political activism, particularly supporting figures such as Victor Orbán, who famously coined the term "illiberal democracy" (for a first impression see Vormann and Weinman 2020; the most comprehensive and systematic overview is currently given by Sajó et al. 2021)<sup>17</sup>. "Illiberal democracy" is the practical implementation of National Conservatism, and National Conservatism is the intellectualized version of "illiberal democracy". As Orbán (2018) points out in a speech at Bálványos Summer Open University, Christian democracy and liberal democracy are contradictions; Christian democracy can only be "illiberal democracy" based on a prioritization of "Christian culture", the rejection of immigration and the focus on the "Christian family model" of father, mother, child.

Applebaum (2020, part. pp. 15–17) critically discusses the role of intellectuals in Europe, supporting the rise of contemporary authoritarian politics, and calls them “clercs”, a term coined by Julien Benda in the 1920s. Hazony and his co-fighters within the Edmund Burke Foundation can be summarized in this category. It is a group of Jewish, Christian and a few secular intellectuals who intend to offer a theologically and philosophically justified version of what they call “conservatism”, but what is actually in many aspects an anti-democratic, authoritarian enterprise, which silently delegitimizes both liberal democracy as such and religion as a productive, peace-building political force within democratic processes.

National Conservatism does not overcome the definitely existing aspects of violence in some versions of liberalism, but religiously legitimates political authoritarianism at the expense of minority rights, individual freedom and particularly women’s rights; women who are widely reduced to reproductive units beyond political power. Nevertheless, National Conservatism and his key thinker Hazony call for a reflection on the relation between nation, state and religion. Are there any inclusive, non-violent forms of nationalism, overcoming religious exclusivism? Palaver (2021), following Henri Bergson, has already suggested the helpful distinction between static and dynamic religions, and supports an open patriotism. This is an important task that both theology and political theory need to commence in an age of rising populism and religiously inspired political extremism. Interestingly, Palaver points to Hans Kohn’s distinction between civic nationalism and ethnic nationalism and his warnings of abusing essential Jewish concepts such as “chosen people” for a fierce nationalism, which is not tempered anymore by ethics and universalism. The same Buber-student Hans Kohn is criticized by Hazony (2000, pp. 212, 249) as representative of Jewish anti-Zionism.

National Conservatism is one voice within the rising front of theo-political networks fostering authoritarianism. They are attractive, because they touch hot issues within our current crises, i.a., the growth of pluralism, rising migration, the decline of traditional institutional religions, the shattering of established gender roles and family structures, and the loss of trust in liberal democracy. Theologians and political theorists are called to pay attention to the abyss that is re-opened again by National Conservatism and its fore-thinker Hazony. On a theoretical level, academia needs to reflect sincerely what a “good nationalism” in accordance with democracy could look like, especially with regard to the ever-present plurality in political communities and the quest for human flourishing in equality and freedom. Special attention has to be given to the role of religion and religious actors within this process. What is the persistent political contribution of religious actors in a fragmented world, resisting the seduction of identifying with one political doctrine? With exclusivist, ethnocentric schools showing anti-democratic, authoritarian sympathies?

Hazony’s National Conservatism displays many serious problems of the contemporary entanglements of politics and religion, but can hardly serve as a solution. In contrast, as pointed out, in addition to its highly problematic (mis-)readings of religion, history and philosophy, it will lead to deeper struggles, theo-politically fostering new waves of exclusion and violence. Especially with regard to minority rights, women’s rights and the role given to equality as an essential principle of democracy, National Conservatism raises serious questions whether it is still compatible with the basic outlines of a democratic political system.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> For the rise of traditionalism in the political and the religious sphere with particular regard to Eastern Europe, the U.S., Russian Orthodoxy and (Catholic) Evangelicalism, see i.a., Stoeckl and Uzlaner (2020).
- <sup>2</sup> For the intensive relations between the American Political Right and Victor Orbán in most recent times, see Zerofsky (2021). Zerofsky critically engages with Rod Dreher, a traditionalist converted Orthodox writer and activist, widely read in the U.S. and

increasingly spreading his networks in Europe too. Dreher and the Danube Institute, which hosted him in Budapest, are closely affiliated with the Edmund Burke Foundation and National Conservatism. The Danube Institute was one of the sponsors of the 2020 National Conservatism Conference in Rome. Dreher himself is a regularly invited speaker at National Conservatism Conferences (as is Orbán), e.g., in Florida 2021, where he spoke on “What Conservatives Must Learn from Orbán’s Hungary” (Dreher 2021).

3 A prominent scholarly critique within the network of National Conservatism is offered by Deneen (2018), who also spoke at the 2021 conference in Florida (see Deneen 2021).

4 Already these examples of nationalists show the readiness to pick and choose and reinterpret historical figures for one’s own purposes. Roosevelt fought against fascist totalitarianism and their aggressiveness towards independent nation states, but at the same time he supported international cooperation and human rights. For Gandhi’s politics of non-violence and his political stance, see the multiple contributions in this Special Issue.

5 For a recent discussion of the relation between nation and Catholic Church with particular regard to the German Empire and current developments, see Hoeres (2021).

6 Following Haivry and Hazony (2017), 1989 caused a deeper shift than 1945. While till 1989, there was a common enemy—communism—from then on, there could no longer be an alliance between conservatives and liberals in the Lockean tradition: “It is now evident that liberal principles contribute little or nothing to those institutions that were for centuries the bedrock of the Anglo-American political order: nationalism, religious tradition, the Bible as a source of political principles and wisdom, and the family. Indeed, as liberalism has emerged victorious from the battles of the last century, the logic of its doctrines has increasingly turned liberals against all of these conservative institutions. On both of these fronts, the conservative and liberal principles of the Anglo-American tradition are now painfully at cross-purposes. The twentieth-century alliance between conservatism and liberalism is proving increasingly difficult to maintain.” The trias “nation—faith—family” (see the following chapter 3), here put at the heart of the Anglo-American tradition, will be identified in Hazony (2018) with the heart of National Conservatism, the true heir of the Anglo-American tradition.

7 The issue of Islam and Muslims within the framework of National Conservatism cannot be deepened within this article. Already in a previous years, Hazony and Haivry pointed out that liberals were not capable of adequately reacting to “radical Islam”: “Radical Islam, to name one such challenge, is a menace that liberals, for reasons internal to their own view of the political world, find difficult to regard as a threat and especially difficult to oppose in an effective manner.” (Haivry and Hazony 2017). On the one hand, liberalism is accused of being blind to “radical Islam” and the failures of Muslim majority countries, on the other hand, it seems to be doubtful, that National Conservatism attributes any positive value to Islam and Muslims and thus shows a specific blind spot itself.

8 It is striking that Hannah Arendt (2020), whom Hazony (2000) is very critical of, underlines the clear distinction in ancient political philosophy between private, patriarchal family based on inequality and the public political space of the *polis* based on equality. Contrary to Klauck, Arendt (2020, p. 16) considers the parallelization of family and political community to be a modern invention which has to be overcome.

9 It is striking that Hazony never speaks about solidarity, but always uses loyalty. This is also a key difference to Reno (2019).

10 Schmitt is never quoted by Hazony, although his theoretical framework is deeply shaped by the friend–enemy distinction, the rejection of liberalism, universalism and humanity as non-political. I am inclined to suggest that this is on purpose, as Schmitt has a reputation for being one of the main theorists of national socialism.

11 See also (Höslé and Sorondo 2020). Nation, State, Nation-State. The Proceedings of the 22nd Plenary Session 1–3 May 2019. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana. Casanova (2008) offers important insights on the violence of the emerging Westphalian system, especially the expulsion and persecution of “the religious other”, however without rejecting the establishment of the modern political order as such. Especially in the past 20 years, the concept of the nation state as developed after the Peace of Westphalia has undergone severe critique, especially from a postcolonial perspective, see e.g., Asad (2003), who is not as balanced as Casanova. In current times, growing religious pluralization, especially with regard to global migration, challenges established concepts of governing religion, as suggested by the Westphalian system. The debate regarding how to move on is very diverse and often touches upon the question of how to deal with Islam, Muslims and the Muslim community on a legal, social and political level. Beyer (2013) summarizes some important aspects of the debate in the 1990s and 2000s. Cesari (2021) reconfigurates the relation between religion and nation with regard to Christianity, Islam and Hinduism and discusses the spread of the ideas of “religion” and nation-state”, both deeply entangled with the emergence of the Western Westphalian model, on a global level.

12 For a specific American-Jewish critique, see i.a., Soloveichik (2018).

13 Mannion (2008) is a valuable source for understanding the complexity of John Paul II’s biography, his theology and papacy. Lintner (2018) offers a critical discussion of the development of Catholic moral teaching in the context of sexuality, marriage and reproduction. He particularly highlights the role of John Paul II during the Second Vatican Council and in the making of the encyclical letter *Humanae Vitae*, but also his contribution to a polarization within the Catholic Church around exactly these moral issues. Harris (2006) gives an overview of John Paul II’s engagement for the democratic transformation in Eastern Europe.

14 International literature on John Paul II’s engagement for human rights and interreligious dialogue is vast. Christiansen (2006) gives a concise overview of his involvement in peace making during the second half of his pontificate. Recently, Gabriel (2020)

has contextualized the social teaching of John Paul II within the historical context of his pontificate. Admirand (2012) summarizes his legacy in intra- and interreligious dialogue.

- 15 The split between “traditional” and “progressive” Catholics in the U.S. is particularly visible in issues of sexuality and reproduction. Especially the personal stance towards abortion increasingly serves as a litmus test for “true” faith. Cf. also the recent conflicts about the eucharist in the U.S.-Bishops’ Conference.
- 16 For a concise critique of liberalism with a specific regard to religion, see Stoeckl (2017).
- 17 Vormann and Weinman (2020) offer a collection of essays on selected aspects of illiberalism. Within this volume, Krastev (2020) particularly discusses the Hungarian case. Sajó et al. (2021) give the first systematic and comprehensive overview of illiberalism as a global phenomenon ranging across the continents. It goes far beyond the political framework and includes social, cultural, legal, and mental aspects of illiberalism including contributions on the relation between illiberalism and Christianity and Islam, respectively.

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