

From the Cave of Adullam a King Shall Rise: Covid, Conspiracy Theories, Christian Nationalism, and Populism in Canada

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Abstract: Christian nationalism, populism, and conspiracy theories interconnected online during the COVID-19 pandemic, and eventually erupted in offline acts of protest against governments, with cabals attempting to create a New World Order and against the “tyrannical” COVID-19 mandates. In this paper we focus on the role of the Calgary-based Pastor Artur Pawlowski in building a religio-political social movement both in Canada and America, founded upon tropes of Christian persecution, conspiracy theories, Christian nationalism, and populism. This transnational online movement, in which national borders are blurred, helped to fuel the occupation of Canada’s capital city in December 2021, and continues to spur a Christian movement both in America and Canada as the pandemic wanes.

Keywords: Conspiracy Theories, Christian, Nationalism, Populism, COVID-19

Ottawa Occupied by Americans waving the Confederate flag!” “Canadians are refusing to obey the RCMP and disperse in an orderly fashion!” A decade ago, such headlines might have been from a clip of *Canadian Bacon, Part 2*. In December 2021 they were a shocking reality. Protesters, many from “Canada’s Texas,” Alberta, gathered strength and numbers as they travelled cross-country to the Canadian capital to protest rising oil prices, “government by elites,” and the precautions being called for by the Canadian government in the face of a global pandemic. As a civil disturbance this was destabilizing enough, but “religion” (including specifically the conspiracist, anti-COVID-mandate preaching of the Calgary sectarian Christian minister Artur Pawlowski) fueled the flames. Pawlowski’s significance – his message, ministry, and import – will be a central focus of our analysis of how conspiracy theories, Christian Nationalism, and populism fueled the Occupation of Ottawa by the so-called Freedom Convoys in December of 2021.

This was not the first time Canadians had travelled to Ottawa in protest. Massive unemployment in the Great Depression led to the policies of the Conservative Prime Minister R. B. Bennett, whose so-called “relief camps” sought to use unemployed single men to do “public works,” such as build roads, in unsafe working conditions for minimum compensation. The On-to-Ottawa Trek undertaken to protest these conditions made it from Vancouver to Regina, where it terminated in the “Regina Riot,” a physical conflict between the men and the RCMP. A little over a decade earlier, the RCMP had been brought in to quash the otherwise fairly peaceful 1919 Winnipeg General Strike. Canada has known social protest in the past, and government intervention has been part of that history. Pawlowski’s significance must also be understood against the backdrop of another major disruption to Canada’s cultural environment – the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent mandates requiring masking, limiting gatherings, and making travel much more difficult. Religious communities were particularly affected by these constraints, and indeed, Canada’s

COVID mandates were some of the world's longest.¹ In turn, Canadian politicians faced backlash, with much of it vented online. Future studies will therefore undoubtedly analyze the amplification of negative discourse on social media platforms with regard to this social protest, as well as others. In Canadian terms, it gave "Western Alienation" a megaphone with international range, building on old injuries and offences and combining them with the pro-American sentiments that have long been part of Alberta's history.

Background

Artur Pawlowski is the religious leader of two congregations in Calgary Alberta, Canada. The first is a physical church, the appropriately named Fortress (Cave) of Adullam; the second is a ministry that feeds the homeless, aptly called The Street Church. Pawlowski is no stranger to conflict in his ministry, having been ticketed and fined numerous times for his street mission, in a battle between the city and the pastor that began in 2005.² He has been charged numerous times for using an amplification system in parks in the service of his street mission, in spreading his message to drug addicts and homeless individuals. In 2007 he was charged for incidents in two parks in Calgary for using his amplifier without a permit. While he did not deny he had used the audio system he nevertheless fought the charges, arguing that his rights of freedom of religion and freedom of expression were being infringed.³ Pawlowski then began to preach on the steps of City Hall four times a week, while feeding the homeless. The City of Calgary has given him injunctions, fines, and has had him arrested in response to noise complaints, trespassing, and health code violations. His signs and Bibles have been confiscated by the authorities while he preached on the streets of the city. He moved his services and soup kitchen to the steps of Calgary's City Hall to protest after his ministry was banned from public parks. Pawlowski argues he is being persecuted for simply feeding the homeless, positioning his work as "saving lives." Should he be forced to stop, he suggests, the citizens of Calgary could be vulnerable to the homeless, who might break into homes to steal food.⁴

Nonetheless, the city has demanded that he be licensed by the health department to feed the homeless. Pawlowski's interpretation of these indictments is that the city is anti-Christian.⁵ In his view, the censoring of his predominantly anti-Muslim, anti-LGBTQ2SA, and pro-life messages being amplified in public spaces, including the steps of City Hall, is nothing less than persecution. While some might find his message offensive, others note that similar charges were made against Jesus, reinforcing the idea that Pawlowski is only doing what Jesus commanded. Still others, however, see him as fostering a political movement that mobilizes citizens in his support, through fear tactics, hate speech, and conspiracy theories.

1. Robin Levinson-King, "Toronto Lockdown – One of the World's Longest?," *BBC News*, May 24, 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-57079577>.

2. "Street Preacher Accuses Calgary Officials of Having a Vendetta in Eight-Year Battle Over Noise Complaints," *National Post*, October 24, 2013, <https://nationalpost.com/holy-post/street-preacher-accuses-calgary-officials-of-having-a-vendetta-in-eight-year-battle-over-noise-complaints>.

3. Daryl Slade, "Judge Sides with City of Calgary in Dispute with Street Preacher," *Calgary Herald*, February 24, 2011. It is useful to note the resonance here with an American emphasis on "rights and freedoms," as opposed to the well-known Canadian framework of "peace, order, and good government."

4. Maxime Bernier, "Get Out!" Interview with Artur Pawlowski, <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=237396574835677>.

5. Kevin Libin, "Calgary Street Preacher Smells Bias in the City's Unwillingness to Deal with Occupiers," *National Post*, November 2, 2011, <https://nationalpost.com/holy-post/calgary-street-preacher-plees-for-the-same-tolerance-city-hall-has-offered-occupiers>.

Prior to his current church leadership, Pawlowski was a lay pastor for Calgary’s Glory Christian Fellowship. In 2010 the Canadian Revenue Service revoked the church’s charitable status because “members of the Board of Directors espouse strong negative views about sensitive and controversial issues, which may also be viewed as political, such as abortion, homosexuality, divorce, etc.”⁶ Pawlowski’s anti-Muslim and anti-homosexual rhetoric has also caused friction between him and the officially secular province and city governments, a conflict Pawlowski reads as anti-Christian and persecutory. Insisting that Christians be treated “equally,” Pawlowski has gone to court. Among his demands are that the City of Calgary name December Jesus Month, raising a flag for Jesus on December 25, to parallel the mayor’s proclamation of June as Pride Month and raising a rainbow flag. When the Mayor refused, Pawlowski filed a human rights complaint.⁷ Pawlowski’s opposition to the LGBTQ2SA community has taken unusual forms, such as blaming them for the floods that hit Calgary in 2013. When COVID-19 hit, Pawlowski became active in the anti-mandate community. When health officials and police arrived at his church during Easter services due to his breaking of the laws against gathering, Pawlowski recorded himself yelling at the officials, referring to them as Nazis and screaming “Get Out!” The video went viral on alternative social media sites such as GETTR, Gab, Telegram, and BitChute.⁸ This encounter with the police became a significant moment in the populist movement in Canada, as Pawlowski was thrust into the spotlight as both a hero and a religio-political victim. The anti-mandate movement, swathed in conspiracy theories and demanding the dissolution of the democratically elected government of Canada, was preaching their own form of nationalism and now had a new contingent of supporters: Christians seen as persecuted by the policies of Alberta Premier Jason Kenney and Prime Minister Justin Trudeau.

Pandemic Populism, The Great Reset, and Christian Nationalism

Ideas of nationalism have been blurred by the Internet. Benedict Anderson’s “imagined community,” with its envisioned nation and its citizens, has become ambiguous and multi-layered, rendering nationalism more transnational in nature.⁹ Social media platforms have created a “transnational locale” where extremists can create nationalistic communities, share radical ideas, and create a sense of collective identity.¹⁰ This dynamic was heightened as COVID lockdown mandates forced people to isolate and communicate through digital means. For some, this was an opportunity to create political communities that might have drawn immediate (and negative) attention in the public square, but which were able to flourish without critical external scrutiny online. “Pandemic populism¹¹” is a term that has become prevalent in examining the growing influence of conspiracy theories on public discourse, for example, during the pandemic. Disparate groups that may have never encountered each other prior to the pandemic now found themselves connecting online. As a result, conspiracy theories, populist movements, and

6. Deborah Gyapong, “Calgary Bishop Comes to Defence of Lay Pastor,” *Catholic Register*, January 29, 2010, <https://www.catholicregister.org/item/8000-calgary-bishop-comes-to-defence-of-lay-pastor>.

7. Gyapong, “Calgary Bishop.”

8. “Polish Pastor Chases Cops Out of Church on Easter Weekend: ‘Get Out! You Nazis!’” YouTube video, April 3, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ziWXH7T15zw>.

9. Tiana Gaudette, Ryan Scrivens, Garth Davies, and Richard Frank, “Upvoting Extremism: Collective Identity Formation and the Extreme Right on Reddit,” *New Media & Society* 23, no. 12 (2021): 3492.

10. Gaudette et al., “Upvoting Extremism.”

11. Ulrike M. Vieten, “The ‘New Normal’ and ‘Pandemic Populism’: The COVID-19 Crisis and Anti-Hygienic Mobilisation of the Far-Right,” *Social Sciences* 9, no. 9 (2020): 165.

radicalized nationalism groups became more inter-communicative, coalescing in a powerful and critical alternative to pre-pandemic “normalcy.”

For conspiracies to take hold in society in general, there must be widespread distrust in governments and institutions, as well as a sense that the individual is disenfranchised and voiceless within the political process. The isolation and disruption of conventional life patterns forced by the pandemic created social anxiety, and with it, widespread distrust. Tepid responses from governments around the globe in the early stages of the pandemic, along with the emergence of new variants of COVID, led to further lockdowns in some countries, which in turn led to amplified distrust of government reliability and competence. Overall, citizens’ trust in their governments decreased.¹²

Some populist movements were able to capitalize on this distrust by claiming that elite political leaders had misled their countries. As social, economic, and political institutions grew increasingly fragile in the early stages of the pandemic, a conspiracy theory called The Great Reset provided a narrative to those feeling persecuted and marginalized. It provided a reason to rise against what was now identified as an “evil cabal” that was using political leaders, such as Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, as puppets for the establishment of a New World Order (NWO). This persecution narrative is based upon fear and a sense of impending disaster that crosses boundaries between the secular and the religious, as it blends conspiracy theories, eschatological myths, and the fear of economic downturns. As a result, the laws and restrictive public health guidelines put in place to address the rapid spread of the coronavirus helped fuel both conspiracy theories and populism.

The heart of the Great Reset Conspiracy is the theory that global elites are using the pandemic to establish a New World Order. It builds on a confluence of fears amplified by the pandemic, regarding the loss of health, economic agency, and personal freedom, all codified in the long-standing notion of elites enslaving humanity. The Great Reset is linked to a 2016 World Economic Forum (WEF) video¹³ in which WEF founder Klaus Schwab and economists made predictions regarding life in 2030. Conspiracists stress a key phrase: “You’ll own nothing, and you’ll be happy. This is how our world could change by 2030.” This prediction is one of the foundational pieces of evidence for theories about The Great Reset. The video was initially tweeted by the WEF, but the tweet has since been deleted. During the summer of 2020 the video resurfaced as the conspiracy theory developed. According to the theory’s adherents, COVID was created in a lab by elites specifically to enable their global takeover. By halting the economy and “forcing” people to stay within their homes, they have, allegedly, created laws that are one opening step toward the enslavement of all. The belief is that while people are in isolation and unemployed the various governments will try to alleviate our fears by eliminating all existing debt. In the process of doing so, the powerful cabal of elites will take over the ownership of homes, businesses, and all real estate. Since people will continue to work out of their homes, they will “rent” these spaces and not own them, as well as all the belongings within. Great Reset conspiracists believe that the policies enacted during the pandemic (changes to immigration, and political coordination to combat climate change) provide the foundation for a global communist society that will eliminate individual countries and nations. Resistance to COVID policies is therefore promoted by Great Reset conspiracists as the first step in saving each nation from this fate.

12. Thomas Strandberg, “Coronavirus: US and UK Government Losing Trust,” *The Conversation*, May 6, 2020, <https://theconversation.com/coronavirus-us-and-uk-governments-losing-public-trust-137713>.

13. A screen grab of the original video can be found here: “World Economic Forum Presents: The Great Reset – ‘You’ll Own Nothing, and You’ll Be Happy,’” Darrell Vermillion, November 14, 2020, YouTube video, 1:32, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4zUjsEaKbkM>.

The Great Reset narrative is a form of conspiracy known as “improvisation conspiracism.” This form of conspiracy theorizing only exists when there are significant subcultures and often appears during times of crisis. Improvisational conspiracism is comprised of heterodox religion, esoteric and occult beliefs, fringe science, and radical politics, and it can have a potent influence on politics within a nation.¹⁴ Michael Barkun calls this bringing together of various ideas like fringe science and heterodox religion “stigmatized knowledge,” which is connected to the belief that secret hidden evil forces are controlling human destinies.¹⁵ Such conspiracy theories can play a crucial role in the mobilization needed for populism to take hold. Populism and conspiracy theories can work in tandem because both depend on a notion of ordinary individuals rising against “elite opponents.”¹⁶ This identification of a common enemy is key. In essence, populists become critics of power, and through conspiracy theories this criticism is given a conduit of expression.¹⁷ There exists a premise in populism that the government in power and those holding authority in society do not represent the citizens of the nation. A populist movement emphasizes the sovereignty of the citizens, mobilizes through a rhetoric of attacking the elite, and defines the “other” by invoking ideas of nationalism. Through dependence on conspiracy theories, populists can identify hidden controlling factors that are silencing the majority, and create a relatively cohesive narrative, even if that narrative is derived from fictional premises and “facts.” Appealing to a sense of resentment against elites and others who threaten a weakening of nations, populism typically calls for radical change by the elimination of the hierarchical structure of societies. In this way, populism serves not only as a conduit to express concerns about injustice, but also offers recourse and remedy for the ills non-elites are forced to suffer.

The COVID-19 pandemic created a situation in which conspiracy theories and nationalistic political movements have become more mainstream. It is important to note that as extreme or populist political movements have become more accepted in society, conspiracy theories have become a primary means through which these ideologies have been delivered.¹⁸ Politicians who have extreme political positions in their platform often find a way to legitimize their positions with the public by aligning themselves with their base (normally those on the margins of political boundaries) while at the same time positioning themselves as reasonable defenders of a national identity. In this context, the proliferation of conspiracy theories in the public domain blurs fact and fiction. This blurring effect creates the conditions that allow the conspiracy to be positioned as a foundational narrative framing political actions. Typically, with far-right conspiracies, political leaders propagate a message that is anti-elite and pro-nation. It is a message that serves to valorize “everyday people” as social heroes, as they fight to protect their nation’s values and identity.¹⁹ Indeed, it is the notion of “the people” that links nationalism and populism and coalesces their overlapping points. This term can have three distinct meanings: 1) the common or ordinary people who should have respect and resources redistributed to them; 2) the sovereign people who should have their power restored; 3) the distinct people, as a moral, cultural, or political community who should

14. Michael Barkun, *A Culture of Conspiracy: Apocalyptic Visions in Contemporary America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), xi.

15. Barkun, *A Culture of Conspiracy*, 2.

16. Michael Kazin, *The Populist Persuasion: An American History* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 1.

17. Nathan Jessen, “Populism and Conspiracy: A Historical Synthesis of American Countersubversive Narratives,” *American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 78, no. 3 (2019): 680.

18. Andrew Fergus Wilson, “#whitegenocide, the Alt-right and Conspiracy Theory: How Secrecy and Suspicion Contributed to the Mainstreaming of Hate,” *Secrecy and Society* 1, no. 2 (2018), <https://doi.org/10.31979/2377-6188.2018.010201>.

19. Barbara J. Perry, “Defenders of the Faith: Hate Groups and Ideologies of Power in the United States,” *Patterns of Prejudice* 32, no. 3 (1998): 32–54.

be protected against threats.²⁰ In the transnational community in which Pawlowski is an influencer, “the people” take a position that is both sovereign and distinct. Both groups endorse and celebrate Christianity as the core of moral, cultural, and political definition, and as a power that must be restored to them.

When nationalist frameworks are adopted, “the nation” can be defined as a political community that is working in opposition to another political community that is redefined as “external,” even if it is formally a portion of the state.²¹ The nationalism that Pawlowski endorses is both Christian (albeit of a particular kind) and populist. Within this iteration, Christian nationalism is based on the conviction that Canada and the United States were created and founded as Christian nations, and as such, the legitimate government “rests not on the consent of the governed but on adherence to the doctrines of a specific religious, ethnic, and cultural heritage.”²² This is a staggering claim. Christian Nationalism consistently expresses the fear that the country has strayed from the Christian truths upon which it was founded. Only a restoration of those foundational commitments, it is asserted, will be sufficient to overcome the myriad challenges facing the nation today. One of the important aspects of Christian nationalism is the opportunity it presents for political mobilization of adherents. In the end, political power is the ultimate goal. Pawlowski has repeatedly heralded America as the ultimate Protestant nation, claiming that should it fall to evil, the rest of the world will follow.²³ Canada is to play handmaiden here, as in his Solidarity Movement where he outlines twenty-one demands for a Christian ruling government in Canada. At the same time, Pawlowski is touring America itself, instigating rebellion through Christian uprising, in deep connection with the Patriot Pastors movement of America.²⁴

Nationalism, Populism, and Fear Messaging

Nostalgia is a form of timekeeping that is rooted in politics. It is a lens through which to look at the contemporary world, in which fear and anxiety are catalysts for a longing for the past.²⁵ This mythic “past” is complicated, however, as it is dually envisioned. On the one hand, it sets a standard for when things were “better”; on the other, it is where the decline of society began. For a range of reasons (depending on the theory being espoused) a moral absence started creating the contemporary world in which true social relationships and personal authenticity are lacking.²⁶ Practically speaking, nostalgia is not a need or recollection of a past utopia but is instead a criticism of the present. It is not a personal memory but rather a collective memory about the biography of groups or the nation within which the remembering individual might be located. Thus, nostalgia lies on a plane between the personal and the collective memory.²⁷ Changes in society can be viewed through a nostalgic lens of longing for a less broken world, a longing that can fuel both conspiracy theories and populist movements based on nationalistic ideologies. Articulations of nationalism include the nurturing of positions of “us versus them” by creating racial, cultural, and social

20. Rogers Brubaker, “Populism and Nationalism,” *Nations and Nationalism* 26, no. 1 (2020): 49, <https://doi.org/10.1111/nana.12522>.

21. Brubaker, “Populism and Nationalism,” 50.

22. Michelle Goldberg, *Kingdom Coming: The Rise of Christian Nationalism* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2006), 4.

23. Artur Pawlowski, “Artur Pawlowski Rallies Tulsa, Oklahoma to Fight the Government’s Plans to Execute Christians,” Kenan SonOfEnos, June 19, 2021, BitChute video, 7:18, <https://www.bitchute.com/video/jQQuwkM3gr5d/>.

24. See note 54.

25. Elizabeth Evans and Prudence Bussey-Chamberlain, “The Problems with Feminist Nostalgia: Intersectionality and White Popular Feminism,” *European Journal of Women’s Studies* 28, no. 3 (2021): 354.

26. Evans and Bussey-Chamberlain, “The Problems with Feminist Nostalgia,” 354.

27. Evans and Bussey-Chamberlain, “The Problems with Feminist Nostalgia,” 354.

hierarchies. Stereotypes of racial and sexual identities are blended to create an “other” that is sexist and patriarchal, and promote the sexualization of racism and the racialization of sexism.²⁸

Pawlowski calls upon the tropes of nostalgia by recounting his past as a citizen of Poland, who immigrated with his family to escape communism. In each of his interviews he positions himself as a “historian” who remembers the atrocities inflicted upon the Polish citizens throughout World War II and its aftermath, experiences that legitimate his linking of the rise of fascism and communism to what he is witnessing in Canada through the COVID mandates. He harkens back to a time in Canada when the nation was a democracy and where Christians were not persecuted,²⁹ unlike the conditions under which Christians allegedly live in Canada now. He compares himself to Lech Walesa, and those who follow him are the enslaved Polish people who revolted against the Communist government’s rule of the nation, even while facing the ultimate sacrifice, death.³⁰ In a sermon to Freedom Convoy protestors blockading the border crossing at Coutts, Alberta, Pawlowski told the audience that “God has given us this moment in history” and that in this moment they had to be as brave as the millions who died in World War I and World War II: their lives were the price they had to pay for freedom and to give their children a “worthwhile society.”³¹ Referring to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau as “Trudeau Castro,” Pawlowski repeated the slander that Justin Trudeau was the son of Cuban leader Fidel Castro (a salacious slur against his mother, Margaret, who met Castro while accompanying Pierre Trudeau on a political visit to Cuba). Pawlowski consistently positioned the Canadian government as “the enemy,” as no longer a democratic nation, but one being governed by “those who had been appointed.”³² Pawlowski frequently uses homophobic and religiously bigoted language in his sermons describing the government as the enemy. He frequently complains that he is being “persecuted as a Christian” in Alberta, for example, because the mayor of Calgary “is a Muslim homosexual who hates Christians.”³³ The mayor of Calgary at the time was Naheed Nenshi, a heterosexual Ismaili Muslim.

Scholars have long been interested in how the expression of and definition of a demonized “Other” is created, generating an engine of perpetual fear which can then be mobilized through moral panics. Moral panics and the politics of fear are mechanisms through which right-wing movements mobilize people. These tactics are not new and have been used in political social movements on the right in the past, for issues such as immigration, poverty, and abortion.³⁴ A key component of this narrative strategy is the claim that people are being silenced, and that free speech and freedom of religion are being impinged upon. The claim was made repeatedly during the pandemic that the right wing’s free speech was being revoked while those on the left – progressives, liberals, and the “woke” – were now the arbitrators of what speech was free to use. When the Civil Rights Movement, anti-racists, feminist, and environmental movements were beginning to gain visibility in the 1960s and 70s, those opposed to change also framed their response within the “free

28. Daria Colella, “Femonationalism and Anti-Gender Backlash: The Instrumental Use of Gender Equality in the Nationalist Discourse of the Fratelli d’Italia Party,” *Gender & Development* 29, no. 2–3 (2021): 273.

29. Bernier, “Get Out!”

30. Artur Pawlowski, “Hold The Line, Stand Your Ground! The Speech that Fired up the Truckers by Pastor Artur Pawlowski,” Artur Pawlowski TV, February 4, 2022, YouTube video, 19:02, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ij8wRKF2mJ5o&t=937s>.

31. Pawlowski, “Hold The Line, Stand Your Ground!”

32. Pawlowski, “Hold The Line, Stand Your Ground!”

33. Alex Jones, “Alex Jones (Full) Fry 4/30/21 – Paul Watson, Artur Pawlowski, Norm Pattis, Dr. Carrie MadeJ & More,” Ron Gibson, April 30, 2021, BitChute video, 2:48:57, <https://www.bitchute.com/video/ayDCwDdWlnqJ/>.

34. Shaban Darakchi, “‘The Western Feminists Want to Make Us Gay’: Nationalism, Heteronormativity, and Violence Against Women in Bulgaria in Times of ‘Anti-gender Campaigns,’” *Sexuality & Culture* 23, no. 4 (2019): 1215.

speech” vernacular. (“I just said she was pretty; what’s wrong with that?”) False equivalencies were used to silence those who objected to “traditional” depictions of their character, gender and race, on the basis that limiting conventional (sexist, racist) expression was a form of censorship. This allowed those on the right to legitimize their promotion of ideas which were racist, misogynistic, or proven false.³⁵ Critics hold that those who argue that free speech is being restricted or censored are not always able to define what free speech is in legal terms or understand its limitations, nor understand the limitations or uneven distribution of free speech in most societies.³⁶ One outcome of this disagreement has been that the idea of censorship has provided a means for nationalists and racists to position themselves as victims of censorship by the left or the woke. The contention from the right is that “Social Justice Warriors” cannot engage in substantive debate, so their policies are enacted as a form of “cancel culture.” Through the use of this claim, hate speech is reduced to a question of “offensiveness” and not a matter of real harm.³⁷

Needless to say, the internet has played a significant role in the amplification – and obfuscation – of certain kinds of political debate. Arguably, the kind of hate speech commonly found in political discourse has been increased by the use of social media.³⁸ Greater exposure can diminish sensitivity, and if hate speech is used by people held in esteem, such as political or religious leaders, individuals can begin to perceive it as morally justified and legitimate.³⁹ Bilewicz et al., in their research on desensitization in hate speech on social media, found that those who used digital media as their primary source of political information considered hate speech to be a social norm.⁴⁰ Encounters with online hate can also contribute to political polarisation, sow distrust in institutions, and increase discrimination.⁴¹ Further, hate speech can lead to avoidance, discrimination, and violence against the target group members. Using empathy-reducing sentiments, emotions, aggressions, and political psychology (studying how social norms and authority shape behaviour), hate speech can lead to an erosion of both social norms and the empathy of those individuals who are exposed to it.⁴² One interesting finding was that racialized hate speech affects those who have preexisting racist attitudes, while those who hold inclusive or ambivalent attitudes have no change in their behaviour. Those with pre-existing biased or negative feelings towards groups of individuals rarely express these feelings, but the presence of hate speech could act as a signal that this is the norm, which could serve as a signal to act on or express such negativity.⁴³

Nationalist and populist influencers use their elitist credentials and backgrounds to gain access to mainstream platforms to spread their ideas, while simultaneously positioning themselves as being supportive of the victims rendered voiceless by the left’s censorship. Placing themselves in opposition to the politically correct, the woke, the social justice establishment that promotes multiculturalism, identity politics, and cultural relativism, nationalist and populist influencers frame themselves as champions of the

35. Aurelien Mondon and Aaron Winter, *Reactionary Democracy: How Racism and the Populist Far Right Became Mainstream* (London: Verso Books, 2020), 76.

36. Mondon and Winter, *Reactionary Democracy*, 77.

37. Mondon and Winter, *Reactionary Democracy*, 77.

38. Michal Bilewicz and Wiktor Soral, “Hate Speech Epidemic. The Dynamic Effects of Derogatory Language on Intergroup Relations and Political Radicalization,” *Political Psychology* 41 (2020): 7, <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/pops.12670>.

39. Bilewicz and Soral, “Hate Speech Epidemic,” 7.

40. Bilewicz and Soral, “Hate Speech Epidemic,” 10.

41. Lena Frischlich, Tim Schatto-Eckrodt, Svenja Boberg and Florian Winterlin, “Roots of Incivility: How Personality, Media Use, and Online Experiences Shape Uncivil Participation,” *Media and Communication* 9, no. 1 (2021): 2.

42. Bilewicz and Soral, “Hate speech epidemic,” 4.

43. Bilewicz and Soral, “Hate speech epidemic,” 5.

Enlightenment, rationality, equality, and the historical advancements of Western civilization.⁴⁴ Ironically, populist movements that are based upon exaggerated claims about “others” are often led by those who are from the “elite” classes and rarely a member of the groups who believe their claims, since elites are the ones who have the access to resources that allow them to spread such ideologies and claims.⁴⁵

For this process of mainstreaming extreme ideas to work, Mondon and Winter argue, there must be a sense of crisis requiring an urgent response. For the far-right this is expressed as perceived pressure from an “other” who is denigrating and attacking the prevailing norms of the nation.⁴⁶ The political process advocated by these nationalist groups is metapolitics, a term that describes the infiltration of political parties, public administration, universities, and media, emphasizing the use of cultural power over policy making and “politics as usual.”⁴⁷ The hopeful outcome of the use of metapolitics is presented as the removal of the left’s control of culture and the establishment of a far-right ideology as the culture of the nation.⁴⁸ This metapolitical approach is one that aims to “redpill” online communities, leading to a transformation of the country.⁴⁹ “Redpilling” has become a popular way of signalling awareness within conspiracy cultures. It references the film *The Matrix* (1999), where the main character is offered two pills, a blue one to remain unaware of reality, or a red pill to see the world as it really is. On social media platforms such as Reddit, redpilling might lead to someone accepting the repudiation of feminism, multiculturalism, globalism, and liberalism, leading to an embrace of traditionalism, hierarchy, and inequality. Sharing these epiphanies of being redpilled can lead to a communal experience and provide a shared language for communities on the internet that articulates a social transformation.⁵⁰ Here is where the political use of fear becomes an important tool within nationalism and populist responses. Politicians know that people with certain values are more likely to respond to messages that incite or provoke their fears, and therefore place these fears and concerns at the forefront of their political campaigns. These platform messages reinforce voters’ fears and make them more susceptible to future fear-based messaging.⁵¹

The People’s Party of Canada (PPC) seized upon Pawlowski’s viral influencer power during the 2021 federal election. The Leader of the PPC, Maxime Bernier, interviewed Pawlowski live on his Facebook channel, where they discussed the Christian persecution the pastor claimed to have been victim to due to the pandemic mandates. Eliminating the pandemic mandates and mandatory vaccines were pivotal party planks for the PPC in the election. Conspiracy theories, especially the Great Reset, were used to explain why Canadians were locked down. Wearing a T-shirt emblazoned with the words “Get Out!” (a reference to Pawlowski’s viral video calling police officers Nazis, demanding that they “Get Out!”) Maxime Bernier acted as a sympathetic listener, while insisting his political party could be trusted to end this persecution. In the opening of the Bernier interview, Pawlowski references “the Great Reset,” pointing out that when Poland was under communism the “people were slaves and owned nothing.”⁵² Pawlowski amplified Bernier’s dissent and distrust of the mainstream realm and its media, claiming that the police,

44. Mondon and Winter, *Reactionary Democracy*, 80.

45. Christopher D. Bader et al., *Fear Itself: The Causes and Consequences of Fear in America* (New York: NYU Press, 2020), 15.

46. Mondon and Winter, *Reactionary Democracy*, 113.

47. Alexandra Minna Stern, *Proud Boys and the White Ethnostate: How the Alt-right is Warping the American Imagination* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2019), 26.

48. Stern, *Proud Boys and the White Ethnostate*, 27.

49. Stern, *Proud Boys and the White Ethnostate*, 32.

50. Stern, *Proud Boys and the White Ethnostate*, 16.

51. Bader et al., *Fear Itself*, 21.

52. Bernier, “Get Out!”

Canadian courts, and media were being controlled by Trudeau’s government, just as the Nazis controlled Germany under Hitler. Pawlowski told the audience that people in the churches of Canada were looking for leadership, but not the current leadership of the Canadian nation, which is composed of traitors and turncoats. In contrast, Bernier was a politician who will stand up for Canadians: he is a defender of faith and a defender of freedom. “We have entered a new era, where God is going to replace the corrupted ones and replace them with the good patriots,” was Pawlowski’s prediction for the election. For Pawlowski, Bernier is one such God-anointed “good patriot.”⁵³

Transnational Conspiracy and Christian Nationalism

Pawlowski has also become an influencer in the United States. He has made regular appearances on the Alex Jones show *Infowars*, and in the summer of 2022 he toured across the nation with the Courageous Faith Tour in conjunction with integrative life coach Cindy Chafian. Chafian works with grassroots organizations that claim to be fighting for “freedom” in America. She was also a speaker in the “Reawaken America Tour” along with Eric Trump, Donald Trump Junior, My Pillow CEO and conspiracist Mike Lindell, and General Michael Flynn. The Reawaken America tour was promoted to American pastors – “America’s last line of defense” – calling them to come together with other patriot pastors to lead America’s next great awakening.⁵⁴ Pawlowski was also joined on some of the Courageous Faith tour locations by Laura Lynn Tyler Thompson, a former 700 Club Canada cohost, an outspoken anti-vaccine and anti-mandate spokesperson, and a candidate for the Christian Heritage Party of British Columbia (CHP). Thompson ran in two federal elections for the CHP, “delivering the message of pro-life, pro-family, and the dangers of political Islam.” She has supported lowering the number of immigrants to Canada, repealing Bill C-16 (the addition of gender identity and gender expression as prohibited grounds for discrimination), Motion 103 (condemning Islamophobia), and she strongly opposed the overall agenda of the United Nations.⁵⁵ Thompson also joined PPC Candidate Mark Friesen on a tour across Saskatchewan in June 2022. Pawlowski met Chafian on a previous tour in the United States, where the two joined forces. Pawlowski, Thompson, and Chafian bring together American populism, Canadian populism, conspiracy theories, and Christian nationalism, in a formidable and potentially frightening mix.

Shortly after the “Get Out!” video went viral, Alex Jones began giving Pawlowski a pulpit on his media platforms, often referring to him as a “thought criminal”⁵⁶ (referencing the rebellious independent thinker of Orwell’s dystopian novel *1984*). In his introduction of Pawlowski, Jones also denigrated Canada as a “new Nazi Germany” north of America,⁵⁷ and a country under medical martial law.⁵⁸ Pawlowski not only agrees with these descriptions but contributes to a conspiratorial narrative of what and who is in control of the nation. The pastor states that Trudeau’s government is forcing “poison” into the bodies of

53. Bernier, “Get Out!”

54. Pastors were aggressively recruited for the “Reawaken America Tour.” See <https://www.thrivetimeshow.com/wp-content/uploads/Reopen-America-Tour-Episode-14-Version-5-ThrivetimeShow.jpg>.

55. Rod Taylor, “Laura-Lynn Tyler Thompson Seeks Leadership of CHP-BC,” Christian Heritage Party of British Columbia Website, <https://www.chpbc.ca/candidates/laura-lynn-tyler-thompson/>.

56. Alex Jones, “Alex Jones (1st Hour) Thursday 10/7/21 – Pastor Artur Pawlowski, News, Reports & Analysis, Infowars,” Ron Gibson, October 7, 2021, BitChute video, 43:16, <https://www.bitchute.com/video/gsxk2Jy6ltUo/>.

57. Jones, “Alex Jones (1st Hour) Thursday 10/7/21.”

58. Alex Jones, “Alex Jones (Full Show) Wednesday 5/12/21 – Coach Pete, Pastor Artur Pawlowski, Dr. Francis Boyle,” Ron Gibson, May 12, 2021, BitChute video, 2:48:3, <https://www.bitchute.com/video/cvFpguF7zR9z/>.

the citizens,⁵⁹ referring to the vaccine passports. COVID mandates play a significant role in Pawlowski's version of Canada, where hardened criminals are being released due to the virus, and the prison cells are "being filled with Christians and Jews."⁶⁰ Building on this narrative of Christian persecution and prosecution, Pawlowski argues that he was arrested for simply "opening the doors of his church for people to worship God," claiming that Christians are no longer allowed to gather.⁶¹

As to why this is happening in Canada, Pawlowski claimed that Canada "kicked God out of the country," and that he (Pawlowski) had been begging people for years to "go back to our founding fathers and our Judeo-Christian values."⁶² The fact that "Canada" emerged as a nation due to significantly different dynamics (French and English battling over territorial control of land and resources) is ignored. For Pawlowski, all levels of the Canadian government are traitors to the country, forcing the end of the middle class to create a country enslaved to the NWO and elites.⁶³ On this account, the Canadian Emergency Response Benefit, which was given by the Canadian federal government to supplement the incomes of those affected by the lockdowns, was a tool of the Great Reset, a charity payment in exchange for our enslavement.⁶⁴ The pastor deals in numerous conspiracy theories in his exchanges with Jones, even borrowing the "Great Steal" election narrative from the Donald Trump election loss in 2020 to help explain that the mayor of Calgary won his office through cheating. "We know the election was rigged," and Mayor Naheed Nenshi wants to "finish him" (Pawlowski), since the elected official knows that he will lose the next election, because the city wants to "clean the swamp!"⁶⁵ Building on this momentum of linking conspiracy theories, Artur Pawlowski informed Jones that the judge who provided the arrest warrant for the pastor's arrest is named David Gates: "They have found a judge that is the family of Bill Gates, I don't know."⁶⁶ (Bill Gates is at the centre of many COVID conspiracy theories.)

To battle these conspiratorial forces, Pawlowski called on Jones' audience to rise up and fight with him. He explained that in Canada it is illegal to protest against the government, and if you do you will be arrested for contempt. Jones then invited Pawlowski to "tell us about the court order that you cannot protest unless you are Black Lives Matter."⁶⁷ Interestingly, Pawlowski stated this months before the Freedom Convoys began. Painting a picture of a nation of people enslaved and silenced, Pawlowski advocated that every politician, police officer, or physician who took part in the vaccines be charged with treason, and even suggested that some should "face capital punishment."⁶⁸ Pawlowski then called for ministers, priests, and rabbis to rise and demand that the tyranny end: "I am not talking BLM style or I'm not talking about Antifa style, terrorists style." Instead, he advocated that resisters adopt the Martin Luther King style of noncompliance. This was a religious duty, he stated, since the Canadian government was specifically testing Christians.⁶⁹

59. Jones, "Alex Jones (1st Hour) Thursday 10/7/21."

60. Jones, "Alex Jones (1st Hour) Thursday 10/7/21."

61. Jones, "Alex Jones (Full Show) Wednesday 5/12/21."

62. Jones, "Alex Jones (1st Hour) Thursday 10/7/21."

63. Jones, "Alex Jones (Full Show) Wednesday 5/12/21."

64. Alex Jones, "Alex Jones (Full) Fry 4/30/21 – Paul Watson, Artur Pawlowski, Norm Pattis, Dr. Carrie MadeJ & More," Ron Gibson, April 30, 2021, BitChute video, 2:48:57, <https://www.bitchute.com/video/ayDCwDdWlnqJ/>.

65. Jones, "Alex Jones (Full) Fry 4/30/21."

66. Alex Jones, "Alex Jones (Second Hour) Friday 4/30/21 –Pastor Artur Pawlowski, Norm Pattis, New, Reports & Analysis," Ron Gibson, April 30, 2021, BitChute video, 42:51, <https://www.bitchute.com/video/fuY10WUKI2LP/>.

67. Jones, "Alex Jones (Full Show) Wednesday 5/12/21."

68. Jones, "Alex Jones (1st Hour) Thursday 10/7/21."

69. Jones, "Alex Jones (Full) Fry 4/30/21."

As Pawlowski made his plea, Jones said that he could feel the Holy Spirit moving through the pastor, even through the Skype platform.⁷⁰ Drawing on this endorsement, Pawlowski became negative, accusing ministers and priests of being cowards, claiming that while Christians are persecuted Muslims are not. He informed the audience that he had received a video of Muslims in Calgary holding services with hundreds of Muslims in attendance with no charges, yet Christians are penalized if they allow Christian groups to gather.⁷¹ Jones followed this accusation by linking the persecution and closing of small Christian churches to the Book of Revelation. Evil demons are trying to rule the world through the NWO, he said, and if the Christians are able to gather in churches the Holy Spirit would work through them to stop the beast!⁷² The narrative of Muslims being given free rein in Canada (while Christians are persecuted) is a trope that Pawlowski often uses, all while claiming a special relationship to God.

In an interview with a Christian vlogger on BitChute, Pawlowski similarly told the interviewer that he was being persecuted for leading a Christian congregation because twenty years ago Canada became a socialist country where the government itself wishes to become God. Turning again to his example of Muslims being free to worship, this time Pawlowski stated that he went to a mosque where over 2000 Muslims were gathered, with police officers standing guard outside without ticketing or arresting anyone. In the pastor's interpretation, this was indicative of the "full hate or vendetta" against Christians in Canada. With Christian leaders allowing this to happen by not resisting the COVID mandates, Pawlowski claimed that the church had failed Jesus Christ. Pawlowski then claimed that he had received a vision from God in 2019, prior to the pandemic. In this vision he saw a fence with people sitting on it and suddenly the hands of God began shaking the fence. People began to fall to the left and to the right of the fence, and when no one was left God spoke to Pawlowski. God said that when he was done no one would be sitting on the fence: they would have to choose between God and the devil. Pawlowski said that in the COVID-19 mandates and subsequent persecution and prosecution of Christians, his vision from God was coming true.⁷³

Pawlowski provided remedies to this persecution and the coming NWO by asking for assistance from American Christians. In one instance, he called for a "Nuremburg trial number two" to try the Canadian government for treason. Alex Jones asked if America needed to orchestrate a D-Day invasion of Nazi Canada, to which Pawlowski replied, "We need it." He then proceeded to explain that without America's help, Canada would fall to tyranny. However, since Trudeau's government is frightened of the American government, Pawlowski claimed, if powerful American politicians would speak out for him and for all Christians in Canada, it would help immensely.⁷⁴ Pawlowski also called on people around the globe to protest outside Canadian embassies, to stop the persecution of Christians in Canada.⁷⁵ In a sermon given in Tulsa, Oklahoma, Pawlowski told the congregation that America is the land of Protestantism, that if they fall the world would follow, and that they needed to rise up and not bow before evil. Their battle and faith would ensure that the executions of Christians would not occur, he said, commanding them to "start with a prayer, but end with action."⁷⁶ (In all of this, it is likely not irrelevant that Trudeau and his family are Catholic.)

70. Jones, "Alex Jones (Full) Fry 4/30/21."

71. Jones, "Alex Jones (Full) Fry 4/30/21."

72. Jones, "Alex Jones (Full) Fry 4/30/21."

73. Mike Adams, "Pastor Artur Pawlowski Interviewed by Mike Adams: Anti-Christian Tyranny Comes to Canada," *Natural News*, May 17, 2022, BitChute video, 40:46, <https://www.bitchute.com/video/04SQLGaHMHUd/>.

74. Alex Jones, "Alex Jones (4th Hour) Wednesday 10/6/21 – Robert Barnes, Pastor Artur Pawlowski, News, Calls," Ron Gibson, October 6, 2021, BitChute video, 43:09, <https://www.bitchute.com/video/Yyte4osaFK7E/>.

75. Adams, "Pastor Artur Pawlowski Interviewed by Mike Adams."

76. Pawlowski, "Artur Pawlowski Rallies Tulsa, Oklahoma to Fight the Government's Plans to Execute Christians."

Pawlowski's response to the tyranny facing Canada is to create his own Solidarity Movement. This movement is linked to his own history in Poland and his notion of being like Lech Walesa. With his Solidarity Movement, he wants to create a new government in Canada that is not beholden to globalists (note here, too, the traditional fear of Catholics as "ultramontanists" owing their ultimate allegiance to the church in Rome). Instead, Pawlowski calls for "a government for the people, and by the people, and God in the middle," where Canadians live under God's rules.⁷⁷ This Solidarity Movement calls Canadians to stand up to end "this horrific ongoing genocide," by which he means COVID vaccines and the (alleged) loss of life due to mandates. To accomplish this end, they have come forth with a list of twenty-one demands, among them ending COVID mandates, a call for no censorship on social media, no government funding of media, audited paper ballots and no mail-in ballots or electronic tabulators, recognition of parental authority in all matters, gun rights "including the symbolic deterrence from both foreign and domestic threats," and the freedom of religious leaders to perform their duties without government interference.⁷⁸ The twenty-one demands reflect current moral panics on education, pandemic mandates, and American influence. This American influence is representative of the "transnational locale" referred to above, and the way borders are blurring within nationalism movements.

This blurring is also apparent in Pawlowski's social media presence. Various social media accounts mix posts on American politics with Canadian politics, conspiracy theories, and Christian nationalism. The posts promote the "Great Steal" conspiracy of the Donald Trump election loss, and support for Russian President Vladimir Putin (who they see as disrupting the NWO, the Great Reset, and defeating Bill Gates' vaccine plans). There are posts such as the one below that adopt ideas from QAnon, in which Canada (like America) is no longer a nation but rather a corporation, the government is comprised of blood drinking, Satanic pedophiles, and COVID is nothing more than a flu. This marriage of COVID denial and conspiracy can also be seen at work in Pawlowski's interpretation of Daniel 3, in which Dr. Fauci is King Nebuchadnezzar.⁷⁹

A King Rises from the Cave

Throughout the pandemic, Pastor Artur Pawlowski has built a religious movement using images of Christian persecution, conspiracy theories, and political populism. He has used this movement to build a position of influence in both the United States and Canada. He has created a position of political and religious power for himself, which he believes is the work of God. He claims his church, the Fortress (Cave) of Adullam, was established on God's instructions, since God spoke to Pawlowski and told him to start the church under that name, at which point according to the pastor he said "no" to God for two years (resistance to God's call is a common biblical response). Pawlowski could eventually resist no more, he says, and the video "Get Out," filmed on the church's steps, was a key result. According to Pawlowski, by saying "yes" to God he has been able to preach to millions around the world because of that viral video.⁸⁰ He has come out of the Fortress to lead a mission for God against the tyranny of the globalists, to resist their COVID hoax to enslave us all, and to build a religio-political movement that crosses the border between America

77. Artur Pawlowski, "Canadian Solidarity Movement Announced! Pastor Artur Pawlowski," A Walk to the Beach, December 3, 2021, BitChute video, 13:10, <https://www.bitchute.com/video/9MiYxhgabZRD/>.

78. "The Solidarity Movement of Canada's 21 Demands," Solidarity Movement of Canada, accessed October 13, 2022, <https://www.solidaritymovementofcanada.com/>.

79. Artur Pawlowski, "Courageous Faith Artur Pawlowski Tuesday, September 21 6:00-8:00 PM," Hope Family Fellowship, September 21, 2021, YouTube video, 2:29:15, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GzW6nDQXox0>.

80. Pawlowski, "Courageous Faith."

and Canada. Christians are rising up together against the demonic government, to elect populist leaders such as Maxime Bernier and Donald Trump – or even Pawlowski himself. According to the biblical narrative, David left the Cave of Adullam with a group of dissatisfied men, and he became captain over them. They were an army of “men of valor, trained for battle, who could handle the spear, whose faces were like lions, and were as swift as gazelles on the mountains” (Chronicles 12:8). Pawlowski clearly sees himself in a similar role, doing God’s work with a similar authority.

There are two significant tropes that Pawlowski includes in every one of his sermons, interviews, and videos. The first is a reference to Pastor Martin Niemoller (a possibly unintentionally ironic connection, as Niemoller was originally a Nazi sympathizer who only later opposed Hitler for interfering with the Protestant church). Pawlowski says, “First they came for me a pastor, and then they will come for you.” On his Solidarity Movement website, he has adopted Niemoller’s words to reflect his personal claim of persecution during the pandemic in Canada. His second trope is that Christians rising up must be lions who are not afraid of attacking the hyenas. Pawlowski refers to politicians, media, and people in positions of power as hyenas, meaning in his analogy those who must be ripped apart by his army of lions. His church motto claims that his is the “church that challenges the status quo.”⁸¹ COVID has enabled the rise of Pastor Artur Pawlowski as a religious leader amongst conspiracists, populists, and those with “Courageous Faith.” Many religious leaders worked to create new forms of community during the pandemic. Pastor Artur Pawlowski created a fear-based movement that supported the occupation of Canada’s capital city, one that depends on fearmongering through conspiracy theories, and that calls for the dissolution of Canada’s democratically elected government. Pawlowski has created a narrative of nostalgia for the Canada that allegedly fell twenty years ago to socialism, telling the world that Canada persecutes and prosecutes Christians in order to create a tyrannical, fascist nation. His nationalism and populism base their authority upon visions from God, his calling by God, and an army of Christian lions across North America battling those he deems hyenas, be they Muslims, members of the LGBTQ2SA community, or people in positions of authority.

Concluding Thoughts

People unfamiliar with the subcultural landscape just discussed might well be thinking that all this is just too strange for “regular” people to take seriously: conspiracy theories and “coded” messages are the stuff of tabloid imaginations, not of sound and sober political reasoning. A superficial glance at even conventional political life in recent years belies that comfortable assumption, and this was becoming the case even before the global COVID-19 pandemic disrupted conventional wisdom with a period of crisis. Through its focus on the case of one particular actor, Artur Pawlowski, this study has sought to illustrate broader themes that are significant, distinctive, and persistent. The first of these is transnationalism. While nations such as Canada and the United States exist as distinct entities in the off-line world (formerly, “real life”), in contemporary practice, we live increasingly in a borderless, interconnected world. “National character” is decreasingly significant as an identity marker within this political environment. Conspiracy theories and the populism that depends on them are alive and well in Canada, and improvisational conspiracism is the mainstream in these religiously-informed political movements.

81. Slogan on a Cave of Adullam church poster, posted to Facebook by The Cave of Adullam, accessed October 13, 2022, <https://www.facebook.com/thechurchcaveofadullam/photos/2729653663776912>.

Secondly, there is the pandemic. COVID-19 and its variant infections seem to be slowly abating, but that does not mean that the political movements that arose online in response (using conspiracy theories, populism, and a particular form of Christian nationalism) will just go away. Neither will the overwhelming sense of distrust toward conventional social and political institutions be encouraged by all these dynamics.

Thirdly, the case of Artur Pawlowski is a valuable reminder of the power of explanation as contained within a plausible, multiply faceted worldview. As social anthropologist Clifford Geertz outlined in considerable detail, “religion” – understood as a complex system of beliefs, practices, values, and assumptions – can function as a cultural meaning system that is self-reinforcing.⁸² Conventional political frameworks (political parties, elections, even nations) can participate within this meaning system, but they are actors within the system, not determinants of it. This stands as a reminder that the distrust, conspiracism, and xenophobia of populism is not just an American problem that has temporarily “infected” Canada, the Confederate flags at the Ottawa Occupation notwithstanding. Hatred and fear can not only cross national borders – they can effectively dissolve them in the rhetoric of Holy War.

82. Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 87–125.

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