

Sander Rietveld, *Nieuwe kruisvaarders: De heilige alliantie tussen orthodoxe christenen en radicaal-rechtse populistten*. (Amsterdam: Prometheus, 2021), 368 pp., € 24.99.

In this intriguing book, Rietveld explores what in the subtitle he calls “the holy alliance between orthodox Christians and radical right-wing populists,” not only in the Netherlands, but also in other European countries, like Poland and Hungary, and North-America. He does so primarily by way of interviews and follow-the-money techniques, along the way touching on important contemporary religious and theological issues.

The book can be read as a warning for anyone who affiliates herself with Christianity to stay far away from the many racist, particularly anti-Semitic, and protectionist nationalist dispositions that we find in many a right-wing political party these days. It targets a secular audience while the author himself has a Reformed background. Consequently, it reads as a lucid introduction to the complicated world of conservative churches, right-wing individuals, and the new right-wing populist parties. Time and again, Rietveld emphasizes that his portrayal applies only to a minority among right-wing Christians. Mainstream Protestant and Roman Catholic churches tend to avidly reject contemporary thoughts and sentiments of right-wing political parties.

Yet, these repeated claims obviously defeat the title and subtitle of the book: with a few exceptions—some pastors, a few business men, and a handful of conservative thinkers—there really is no alliance between orthodox Christians and the political far-right in the Netherlands. Dutch Christians have consistently voted less than on average for right-wing political parties. That being said, the title obviously *does* hold for other countries, like the United States, Russia, and Hungary. The reader would probably do best to skip the title, subtitle, and blurb on the cover, as these, probably for commercial reasons, highly exaggerate the claims actually substantiated in the book.

Of course, this raises questions that the author does not address: how come this holy alliance came into existence in these countries, but not in, say, the Netherlands or France? Such fascinating international differences

call for an explanation and it would be worthwhile to complement Rietveld's qualitative, often journalistic work with more quantitative sociological work and, in particular, theological and historical reflection. The absence of the latter is something of a lacuna in the book anyway: how come, for instance, that the Dutch Christian Union has clearly stayed away from collaboration with PVV and FvD (the two right-wing parties), whereas SGP (another Dutch Christian political party) has not? This has to do, among other things, with deeply embedded religious and theological convictions and nuances that the author seems to overlook. It also has to do with a different perception and reception of Dutch tradition and history, views on the Dutch language, classical family values, ideas about other religions, and other more sociological dimensions.

The book also calls for a complementary study that would provide careful psychological and theological research into the actual religious and theological sentiments and beliefs of right-wing political leaders. Some orthodox Christians buy into right-wing political movements because the latter seem to advocate positions that they themselves advocate and pursue goals they themselves pursue, positions and goals regarding Western culture and heritage, family values, the relation between what is one's own and what's foreign, religious rights, and various ethical issues. Could this alliance perhaps be broken by demonstrating what truly motivates various political leaders to adopt these positions and pursue these aims? Do they value Christian churches and movements in virtue of what the latter stand for, or do they merely *use* them for pragmatic reasons? An alliance always holds between two parties and to fully understand it, we need to study it from both perspectives.

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