

*Featured Keynotes*

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# The Spirit of Populism

*Political Theologies  
in Polarized Times*

**2-3 SEPTEMBER 2019**

**NEW COLLEGE**

**UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH**

Centre for Theology and Public Issues

Christian-Muslim Studies Network

Centre for the Study of Modern and Contemporary History

Call for Papers

## The Spirit of Populism: Political Theologies in Polarized Times

2-3 September 2019, New College, University of Edinburgh

Is populism on the rise? Across the political spectrum, populism is considered a catch-all category to be critiqued: describing something as populist and dismissing something as populist go hand in hand. But theological justifications of populism, such as the identification of Christianity with Europe, resonate with mainstream political positions that are articulated and accepted in the public square.

The critique of populism parallels and points to a critique of the role of theology in politics. This critique can come either as a rejection of the politicization of theology (presupposing that genuine theology ought to be non-political) or as a rejection of the theologization of politics (presupposing that genuine politics ought to be non-theological). What runs through these critiques is the assumption that claims to theology cause the populist polarization of the public square. Is populism yet another resurrection of Carl Schmitt? Whether populism is interpreted as an authentic account of religion or as an inauthentic appropriation of religion for political ends, it needs to be carefully examined and critically explored. Does theology in politics automatically lead to populism? Does populism automatically lead to theology in politics? What indeed is the role of political theologies in polarized times?

Considering questions like these, this international and interdisciplinary conference aims to interrogate both the roles of theology in populism and the roles of populism in theology. Situating the interrogation in the interdisciplinary field of political theology, we invite contributions on issues such as

- the uses and abuses of religion(s) in populist politics locally and globally, both on the left and on the right
- the conceptualization of populism in political theologies, including normative proposals
- the significance of theology for legitimizing political positions, such as the identification of nation and religion
- the formulations and functions of the category of the “Judeo-Christian” in left-wing and right-wing rhetoric
- the impact of the theologies of a variety of religious traditions on populist politics, including comparative perspectives
- the changing perception and the changing production of the category of religion in populist politics regarding concepts such as “Islamism,” “Christianism,” and “secularism”

Please send your abstracts of no more than 300 words to Ulrich Schmiedel ([ulrich.schmiedel@ed.ac.uk](mailto:ulrich.schmiedel@ed.ac.uk)) and Joshua Ralston ([joshua.ralston@ed.ac.uk](mailto:joshua.ralston@ed.ac.uk)) before 5 April 2019. A number of travel bursaries for PhD students will be made available.



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