

also to a dimension of the problem usually overlooked, namely, how the problem of heresy figured at its core. All this, according to Lazier, “calls into question one of the premises of the contemporary debate . . . not liberalism versus political theology but which of their many combinations we think best. . . . In this vein, political theology represents the embodiment of liberalism’s anxieties about itself.” To quote Taubes, “The enemy is the embodiment of your own question.”

Political Theology versus Theological Politics: Erik Peterson and Carl Schmitt

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Political theology has become a fashionable subject in recent decades. The terms *sovereignty*, *decision*, *state of exception*, and *political religion* have gained acceptance and a previously unknown level of circulation. It looks as if devotion to this once-scorned subject has now been granted a somewhat hasty reappraisal. Political theory and related areas therefore atone for the long and total neglect of the role that religions and religious thinking played in forming political ideas. Reflections on this subject, of course, are also motivated by newly pronounced attempts of various religious denominations to influence politics and society. Interestingly enough, this emerging area has remained under the spell of Carl Schmitt, the field’s problematic hero, who is universally credited with its founding document and some highly original conceptual means and incisive formulations. In what follows, I try to show that there is another, much less well-known hero of political theology, Erik Peterson, who not only upheld his principles through the period of raging murderous disaster when Europe ran amok but also offered an alternative to political theology by developing fundamental arguments against the sweeping pretensions of Schmitt’s ideas. To be sure, Peterson was a Christian theologian of vast

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patristic learning and, moreover, a Roman Catholic convert; this fact is not easy to swallow, but in the end Peterson's obscurity might be due only to the specialized expertise needed to follow his argumentation. By any standard, he has been neglected in recent discussions. However, those who venture to follow his thought will be rewarded for their efforts, since Peterson's engaging ideas can inspire some potent alternatives based on (patristic) theology against recent suggestions about political theology.

Schmitt's Political Theology

As is well known, the brilliant constitutional lawyer and legal theoretician Carl Schmitt (1888–1985) reintroduced the term *political theology* into modern discourse in 1922, when he became professor of civil law at the University of Bonn.¹ Schmitt was a highly problematic personality, an avowed Roman Catholic, who at the same time earned well-deserved notoriety for his pro-Nazi allegiances after 1933. In the third chapter of *Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, the first volume of his *Political Theology*,² Schmitt declared with masterful succinctness that “all significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularized theological concepts not only because of their historical development—in which they were transferred from theology to the theory of the state, whereby, for example, the omnipotent God became the omnipotent lawgiver—but also because of their *systematic structure*.”³ As Schmitt later explicitly said in the second volume of *Political Theology*, he did not mean to touch on any theological doctrine or dogma but wanted to make a scientifically based theoretical statement that was also relevant for the history of ideas.⁴

1. In *Der Monotheismus als politisches Problem: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der politischen Theologie im Imperium Romanum* (Leipzig: Hegner, 1935), Peterson credited Schmitt with the introduction of this term, as opposed to, for example, Alois Dempf, who credited Peterson with it. See Barbara Nichtweiß, *Erik Peterson: Neue Sicht auf Leben und Werk*, 2nd ed. (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1994), 811; and Carl Schmitt, *Die Legende von der Erledigung jeder politischen Theologie*, vol. 2 of *Politische Theologie* (Berlin: Duncker und Humblot, 1990), 21–23.

2. Carl Schmitt, *Vier Kapitel zur Lehre von der Souveränität*, vol. 1 of *Politische Theologie*, 6th ed. (Berlin: Duncker und Humblot, 1993); Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, trans. George Schwab (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985). All quotations are from this translation.

3. Schmitt, *Four Chapters*, 36; my emphasis.

4. Schmitt, *Legende*, 22. Already in his preface to the second edition of *Political Theology* in 1933, Schmitt explicitly approves historical research supporting his ideas about the genesis of modern secular politics. This work was brilliantly accomplished by Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957). I analyze the intricate relationship of Kantorowicz and Schmitt in some detail in “Carl Schmitt and Erik Peterson on the Problem of Political Theology,” 32–37.

However, Schmitt did not revive the politically motivated theology, or *theologia civilis*, of Varro or Pseudo-Plutarch. Varro distinguished among the mythical or fabulous theology of the poets; the physical or natural theology of the philosophers; and the civil or politically motivated theology realized in the law of the polis, or *urbs*. This political theology originates in the ancient polis as cultic community. *Theologia civilis* therefore belongs to the local, contingent *nomos* (as opposed to the universally valid *logos*), and its role is to unite the public sphere by the cult of the gods and by the sacrifices and the ceremonies as public displays of belonging to the community. Such a cult (*religio* in the Ciceronian sense of “tending, ministering the gods”) does not require belief in the gods, since it expresses political allegiances.⁵ This institutional or constitutive political theology legitimizes the political identity and continuity of a people, a city by the cult of the ancestral gods, the gods of the forefathers. This explains why every city has its own gods, whose care is the duty of the citizen.⁶

Schmitt was not interested in this *ethnology* of theology. In the same way, it would be a misunderstanding to read Schmitt as if he were discussing one of the two traditional Christian conceptions of the church's political role. Nor does he think in terms of the theological legitimation of the secular political power, a kind of coming to terms between *two* political entities: the church and the secular power. For Schmitt, the nineteenth century had rendered this view obsolete, since it abolished theistic and transcendent ideas altogether. Again, he cannot think of two differently founded entities meeting in one realm. On the other hand, a fortiori, Schmitt does not analyze anything such as the blueprint for political action that could follow from a particular theological doctrine (as in the modern case of liberation theology expounded by Leonardo Boff or Johann Baptist Metz). All these interpretations would miss Schmitt's point.⁷

Indeed, the expression *political theology* is systematically ambiguous, since it can mean the political pretensions of theology, a “politics from

5. Cicero, *De natura deorum*, 2.28, 72, ed. R. Klotz (Leipzig: Teubner, 1874), 64.

6. The Varroean division was accepted opinion in the Hellenistic period; see, e.g., Pseudo-Plutarch, *Placita philosophorum* (874d–911c), ed. Jürgen Mau, in *Plutarchi moralia*, vol. 5.2.1 (Leipzig: Teubner, 1971), 63 (879F9). An interesting instance of how *theologia civilis* worked can be found in Acts 19:27–35, when the Ephesians suppress the preaching of Paul and Alexander about a new god with their shouting of “Great art thou, Artemis!”

7. This division is similar to that of Ernst-Wolfgang Böckenförde, “Politische Theorie und politische Theologie: Bemerkungen zu ihren gegenseitigen Verhältnissen,” in *Religionstheorie und politische Theologie*, ed. Jacob Taubes, vol. 1 of *Der Fürst dieser Welt: Carl Schmitt und die Folgen* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1983), 19–23, quoted in M. Dahlheimer, *Carl Schmitt und der deutsche Katholizismus, 1888–1936* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1998), 208–9.

theology," or a politics analogical to theology. Schmitt had the latter meaning in mind. What he was interested in was the peculiar problem of the foundation of modern legal theory. As Ernst-Wolfgang Böckenförde formulated it, political theology in legal terms means "the process of the transfer of theological concepts to the realm of legal theory."⁸ Schmitt's statement declared the structural identity of certain early modern theological and legal argumentations. The term *early modern* is important, for when Schmitt or his modern followers talk about theology, they mostly have eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Christian theism in mind, with occasional asides on the subject of Greco-Roman mythology. The analysts rarely venture to interpret properly Hellenistic or medieval, let alone patristic, thought.

The introduction of political theology for Schmitt served a systematic interest. As "the state is neither the creator, nor the source of the legal order," the concept of the modern state presupposes the idea of the political.⁹ The political as the basic structural element, however, has its essence in distinguishing ally or the friend from opponent or the foe.¹⁰ The constitutive situation of the political requires a decision to be made between the friend and the foe. The decision establishes, and becomes manifest in, the form of the law. Thereby the foundation of the state is the constitutive decision, not consent or deliberation. Deliberation is the end of the political. Therefore the fundamental issue is the question of sovereignty, the answer to the question *Quis iudicabit?* (Who will pass the judgment?). In this way, the very nature of the political legitimates decision making.

As for the ultimate source of the legal system, neither truth nor nature but authority is responsible for its establishment, as the important adage of Thomas Hobbes, *Autoritas non veritas facit legem*, indicates for Schmitt. The capacity to promulgate is the only requirement needed to establish a unitary legal order. Schmitt drew the following conclusion: since the guarantee for the capacity to pass and to withdraw a law is the capability to decide, it has to be the sovereign will of the person who makes the law. The establishing or promulgation of the law is the creation of the law, whose testing ground is the extraordinary situation, the "state of emergency." For Schmitt, the fundamental axiom of legal theory is that "sovereign is, who decides on the state of exceptionality," meaning thereby the notorious article 48 of the Weimar Constitution.

8. Quoted in Dahlheimer, *Carl Schmitt*, 208; my translation.

9. Schmitt, *Four Chapters*, 19.

10. See Carl Schmitt, "Der Begriff des Politischen," *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaften und Sozialpolitik* 58 (1927): 1–33.

Schmitt observes that the ultimate analysis of sovereignty was conducted in premodern theology in the context of the Creation: this is the structure that modern, secularized legal theory will reproduce, but the ultimate decision maker is an immanent sovereign who, by his very position, assumes all the relevant attributes of the former transcendent sovereign.

From this, it is clear that in its fundamental points, the political is structured analogically to theology, especially to monotheism. The decision about the law is analogous to the *creatio ex nihilo*. The lawgiver is analogous to the omnipotent deity. The state of emergency, the exceptional case, corresponds to the concept of the miracle. Schmitt's claim is that, secularization notwithstanding, the conceptual framework of a world, even if deprived of the divine, still shows a "theological" structure. In offering examples for this immanentist theology, he considers Romanticism the secular version of mysticism or, rather, a "theology" in which the transcendent God is replaced by such secular elements as "humanity," "nation," "the individual," and "development."¹¹ Schmitt also mentions the example of "sociology" taking over the previous role of "natural law." Enlightening examples can be multiplied, such as the dogma of human rights, which takes over the role of the theological axiom derived from the notion of the unity of humanity (taken from Gen. 1:26). In the same way, the idea of utopia is the secularized version of paradise;¹² indeed, likewise, it can be shown that the communist ideal is a secular version of chiliastic eschatology.

In these terms, political theology can be taken to mean that the political in its abstract structures displays theological patterns, grounded in a homology of theological and political concepts and thereby constituting a secular reformulation of the theological. What modernity brings about, for Schmitt, is an "atheistic theocracy."¹³ For Schmitt, it is not by chance that during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries it was customary to talk about, for instance, the "altar of the nation" on which the "sacrifice" of the citizen should be laid (represented by, e.g., the Altare della Patria [Altar of the Fatherland] in Rome).

11. Many examples can be drawn from the investigations of Kantorowicz, *King's Two Bodies*.

12. As to the fabled lands of innocence exempt from the evils of sinful civilization, see Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, esp. 2.1, or Montaigne, *On Cannibals*, high literary versions of the popular Schlaraffenland or Cockaigne. These two texts (from the possible many) I owe to an amusing lecture of János Kelemen.

13. This expressive phrase was coined by György Tatár, quite in tune with the sympathy that Schmitt had for Charles Maurras, who is credited with a famous epitome of his intellectual position: "Je suis athée, mais je suis catholique."

This conception of political theology also exemplifies Schmitt's methodological principle that the metaphysical is the ultimate distillation of the structures of any lasting "historical form" of society.¹⁴ He lists the examples of the representational idea of premodern times, the "sovereign good Lord" of the baroque and the "great watchmaker" of classical deism and, finally, the conception of the divine becoming irrevocably secularized while retaining a theological architecture for the secular, in the nineteenth century, when the economic and deliberative forces finally prevail. Schmitt quotes his favorite nineteenth-century conservative author, Donoso Cortés, who claimed that as the epoch of royalism draws to a close, the only remaining political alternative is dictatorship.

Schmitt's powerful argument—let us not be misled about it—describes human history as a one-way passage toward total secularization.¹⁵ That he preserves the theological within the secular is quite a coup. But it comes at a high price: Schmitt has elaborated a "theology" of the secular world, conceiving of politics as an immanentist theology in its own right. His argument, however, can cut two ways: from the idea that politics is a consequence of the immanentist theology of the secular, immanent political order, it follows that it might not be theology that changes into politics but politics that forms theology and makes it conform to its own shape. Modern politics may be an heir to theology, but this might be only an instance of theology bluntly displaying its derivation from politics. This is the claim of the recent work of the Egyptologist Jan Assmann: politics determines appropriate religions. Secularization is, then, nothing more than a particularly manifest form of this relationship.¹⁶

This thoroughgoing employment of immanentist theology explains, for example, the rhetorical element in Schmitt whereby he can apply adjectives such as *theologian*, *church father*, *priest*, and *cleric* to such personalities as Karl Marx, Mikhail Bakunin, Karl Kautsky, and even Benjamin Constant.¹⁷

Peterson's Challenge

The initial response to Schmitt's introduction of the term *political theology* was moderate. Apart from the Catholic dadaist Hugo Ball (1886–1927)¹⁸ and

14. Schmitt, *Four Chapters*, 46.

15. Dahlheimer, *Carl Schmitt*, 211.

16. Jan Assmann, *Herrschaft und Heil: Politische Theologie in Altägypten, Israel und Europa* (Munich: Hanser, 2000).

17. Dahlheimer, *Carl Schmitt*, 212.

18. Hugo Ball, "Carl Schmitts politische Theologie," *Hochland* 21 (1924): 261–86, rpt. in Taubes, *Der Fürst dieser Welt*, 100–115.

Hans Barion (1899–1973),¹⁹ it was Schmitt's onetime friend, the theologian and church historian Erik Peterson (1890–1960), who reacted as a worthy opponent, giving a substantial answer to Schmitt's challenge.

Erik Adolf Grandjean Peterson was born in Hamburg of a Swedish Lutheran father and a Huguenot mother. After studying theology in Strasbourg, Bonn, Göttingen, and Berlin, he wrote his dissertation with Nathanael Bonwetsch: this was then expanded for the *Habilitation*. Between 1920 and 1924 Peterson taught in Göttingen with Karl Barth (1886–1968). When the dissertation was published in Göttingen in the prestigious series *Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments* in 1926, specialist circles immediately heralded this groundbreaking work.²⁰ Peterson was offered the chair of New Testament and church history in 1924 in Bonn. It was here that he became friends with Schmitt. In these years his gradual separation from Lutheranism became final. On Christmas Day 1930 Peterson joined the Roman Catholic Church in Rome. He resigned his position in Bonn, and thereafter he lived in Munich, then in Rome, in humiliating poverty. He financed his family as an independent scholar. Finally, Cardinal Mercati secured for him an *extraordinarius* position in the Pontifical Institute of Christian Archaeology in 1947. Peterson became a full professor only in 1956. He died in 1960 on a trip to Hamburg.²¹

Peterson showed gradual but steady theological development. Coming from a pietistic background, he initially sympathized with dialectical theology. In his thesis, however, he discovered, through an immense survey of epigraphic, papyrological, and archaeological materials, that the late antique use of the "one god" formula was not a statement of the conceptual content of a creed (pagan, Jewish, or Christian) but a formula of sacred law, which declares the sovereign by the acclamation of allegiance. In this sense, the Christian use of the phrase *one god* was of Jewish background, a constitutive acclamation of the community in the legal sense. The public assent is an acclamation of loyalty to the sovereign of the community. The acclamation is

19. Hans Barion, "Kirche oder Partei? Römischer Katholizismus und politische Form," rpt. in *Kirche und Kirchenrecht: Gesammelte Aufsätze*, ed. Ernst-Werner Böckenförde (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1984), 463–508. Barion, the great canon lawyer who became a member of the Nazi Party, discredited himself by supporting the 1933 sterilization bill.

20. Erik Peterson, *Heis theos: Epigraphische, formgeschichtliche und religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1926).

21. For details see Nichtweiß, *Erik Peterson*. The biography by Ernst L. Fellechner in *Monothismus als politisches Problem? Erik Peterson und die Kritik der politischen Theologie*, ed. Alfred Schindler (Gütersloh: Mohn, 1978), 76–120, is excellent.

the declaration of the relatedness to God of his people, manifesting their mutual belonging together and thereby constituting the community itself, a special case of the antique (pagan) *ecclesia*. The essence of the acclamation is that it is both religious and political. Peterson's great insight was that the congregation of the community of Christian believers was in fact a political act of the same kind, manifested in innumerable expressions of liturgy, doxology, litany, and hymnography. Already in his dissertation, Peterson expressed his interest in the political consequences of the "one [*heis*]" acclamation and its connection to the idea of monarchy.²²

By the time Peterson arrived in Bonn in 1924, he had heard about Schmitt in the Munich circle of Theodor Haecker (1879–1945), where they may even have met in passing.²³ In Bonn he quickly became a close friend of Schmitt. They met at least once a week, and Schmitt asked Peterson to become his witness at his second (civil, because uncanonical) marriage.²⁴

To understand Peterson's own position, first we have to look at his views on theology, which were about to develop toward his later Catholic stance. In his lecture "Was ist Theologie?" ("What is Theology?") in 1925, Peterson pointed out, in opposition to Søren Kierkegaard, Karl Barth, and Rudolf Bultmann, that theology differs from mythology in three respects: "that there is revelation, that there is faith, and that there is obedience."²⁵ Theology is not about possibilities but about concrete questions and answers. It is not about whether man can talk about God but about how the response to God's revelation should be formulated. In addition, theology, properly speaking, exists only in Christianity, for Christ is the incarnate Logos in whom God spoke. Theology is the concrete manifestation of the fact that the Word of God spoke about God in concrete terms.²⁶ The direct address of God to humanity is manifest in Christ and therefore in the dogma and the sacraments. A theology not essentially determined by dogma is simply literature, says Peterson. Theology therefore stands on its own, and acknowledging this is the only way to set theology free from the "humanities," that is, from the overbearing context of history,

22. "The problem of how the idea of the single ruler is connected to religious concepts and how the religious '*heis*'-acclamation is applied to the autocracy, would require a special investigation" (Peterson, *Heis theos*, 181; my translation).

23. Dahlheimer, *Carl Schmitt*, 539–45.

24. Nichtweiß, *Erik Peterson*, 727; Dahlheimer, *Carl Schmitt*, 481.

25. Erik Peterson, "Was ist Theologie?" in *Theologische Traktate*, vol. 1 of *Ausgewählte Schriften*, ed. Barbara Nichtweiß (Würzburg: Echter, 1994), 3–22. Cf. Nichtweiß, *Erik Peterson*, 591–646; and Dahlheimer, *Carl Schmitt*, 215.

26. Peterson, "Was ist Theologie?" 13.

literary theory, art history, or existential philosophy. If the task of theology is not in the care of theologians, by which Peterson means dogmatic commitment, and not "the academic theology of the professors," then it falls victim to various groups and guilds of society, and in due course there will be a theology of the workers, of the capitalists, of the journalists—and of the theology professors. Peterson did not mention Schmitt directly in his lecture, but it was impossible to miss the warning: there is no special theology of the constitutional lawyers, either.

Peterson's interest in political theology—certainly under the influence of Schmitt—is attested by two studies he published on the subject in the early 1930s. The first, "Göttliche Monarchie" ("Divine Monarchy"), followed the concept of monarchy (not equated by Peterson with monotheism) from the famous verse of the *Iliad*, "It is not well that there should be many masters; one man must be supreme" (2.204), through the pseudo-Aristotelian *De mundo* and Philo, to the church fathers.²⁷ Following the fortunes of the concept of monarchy, he points out, with great insight, how in the Hellenistic context monarchy offered metaphysical justification for the Roman emperors and how Christian theologians struggled with appropriating this idea, while finally the Cappadocian fathers altogether rejected the idea of a possible analogy between earthly monarchy and divine sovereignty.

The gist of Peterson's argument was that for the emerging Christian theology it soon became clear that divine monarchy cannot be realized politically, chiefly because the Christian concept of God is not monarchic. Peterson's key witnesses for rejecting divine monarchy were Hippolytus and the Cappadocians. The central text quoted by Peterson was from the *Third Theological Oration* of Gregory of Nazianzen (*Or.* 29.2):

The opinions about deity that hold pride of place are three in number: anarchy, polyarchy, and monarchy. With the first two the children of Greece amused themselves, and may they continue to do so. Anarchy, with its lack of a governing principle, involves disorder. Polyarchy, with a plurality of such principles, involves faction and hence the absence of a governing principle, and this involves disorder again. Both lead to an identical result—lack of order, which in turn leads to disintegration, disorder being the prelude to disintegration. For us, however, monarchy is the most valuable, but not a monarchy defined by a single person, for unity establishing plurality is self-discordant,

27. Erik Peterson, "Göttliche Monarchie," *Theologische Quartalschrift* 112 (1931): 537–64. It is interesting that this treatise, which addresses the central issue of Christian political theology, is not treated by Dahlheimer in his account of Peterson's criticism of Schmitt.

but the single rule produced by equality of nature, harmony of will, identity of action, and the convergence toward their source of what springs from unity—none of which is possible in the case of created nature.²⁸

In this text, Gregory makes it clear that the Christian concept of God is neither monarchic nor polyarchic nor anarchic. All other opinions about God (namely, the monarchic, the polyarchic, and the anarchic) ultimately result in a *stasis*, a fight or a rebellion. The triadic unity and the transcendent peace of the Trinity, however, have no corresponding example in the created world. This text certainly addresses Schmitt's core idea, that of the analogy between the secular and the theological. In Cappadocian theology, Peterson reminds us, this analogy is excluded in principle: "With the development of the orthodox dogma, the idea of divine monarchy loses its political-theological character."²⁹

Peterson's interpretation of this difficult text has been subject to intense scrutiny by historians, theologians, and philosophers ever since.³⁰ Schmitt himself played down the importance of his argument, deliberately misrepresenting Gregory's point by making the revolt of the one against itself the central claim of the argument,³¹ which was taken over uncritically by Peter Koslowski.³²

Another objection to Peterson's evidence, raised by Ernst L. Fellechner, was that the trinitological debates were conducted about matters purely theological, leaving the political aspect aside.³³ First, this is not quite true, as can be seen from Schmitt's answer itself. Second, the criticism is misguided. Considering that Gregory did not speak about "monotheism," a term coined only in the seventeenth century, but "monarchy," such texts must have had political implications for contemporary readers.

28. My translation, based on that of Lionel Wickham and Frederick Williams, in Frederick W. Norris, *Faith Gives Fullness to Reasoning: The Five Theological Orations of Gregory of Nazianzen* (Leiden: Brill, 1991), 244–45. Norris is completely unaware of the portent of the chapter, as can be recognized from his nonchalance in accepting the Wickham-Williams paraphrase of anarchy as "atheism" or of monarchy and polyarchy as "monotheism" and "polytheism." The translation paraphrase in this way entirely dulls the politicotheological aspect of the text.

29. Peterson, *Der Monotheismus*, 102.

30. Schindler, *Monotheismus als politisches Problem?* 23–75. See esp. Ernst L. Fellechner, "Die drei Kappadozier," in *ibid.*, 49–60. There is no room here to enter into one of the most interesting debates with Peterson, that of the sympathetic Arnaldo Momigliano, "The Disadvantages of Monotheism for a Universal State," *Classical Philology* 81 (1986): 285–97, rpt. in *On Pagans, Jews, and Christians* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1987), 142–58.

31. Schmitt, *Legende*, 116–17.

32. Peter Koslowski, "Politischer Monotheismus oder Trinitätslehre? Zu Möglichkeit und Unmöglichkeit einer christlichen politischen Theologie," in Taubes, *Der Fürst dieser Welt*, 26–44.

33. Fellechner, "Die drei Kappadozier," 54.

Instead of engaging with this objection in detail, I wish to add another testimony to the one quoted by Peterson, where the concept of the Trinity is clearly declared as a unity beyond oneness in political terms. In this unequivocal statement one can find a more complex, but probably even more interesting, instance for the unacceptability of monarchy from the point of view of the Christian theologian. In chapter 17 of the *Fifth Oration*, Gregory is debating with a fellow orthodox (Nicean) theologian, censoring his superrational support of the orthodox dogma. This theologian agrees with Gregory in accepting the divinity of the three persons, but he does not dare to call them *homousios* (one in substance). This theologian maintains that the expression *one in substance* would imply the common substance of three individuals, and thereby the "three persons one in substance" formula could not evade the charge of tritheism. The compromise would affect precisely the formula of Nicea, which the theologian dreads would imply polyarchy. It is this argument that Gregory answers. He says that giving up *homousios* would be as successful an answer as "evad[ing] the fear of death by hanging ourselves." Then he continues: "To avoid the struggle, by embracing monarchy, you betray the godhead."³⁴ It is clearly in tune with the *Third Oration* that it befits the Christian theologian to reject the monarchy rather than to sacrifice the threefold personhood of God.

It is not by chance that the Western Christian ear finds this argument close to scandalous. (Or the statements of Gregory of Nyssa, who in his treatise against Eunomius says that God is "one and yet not one."³⁵ This additional text, however, could be interpreted as a "metaphysical" statement only.) The *Orations* of Gregory were not translated into Latin until the sixteenth century, and almost all modern translations *mistranslate* the argument on this point by replacing *embracing monarchy* with *rejecting monarchy*, a near Freudian slip of the theological tongue.³⁶

34. Gregory Nazianzen, *De spiritu sancto* (Oratio 31), 5.17, in *Gregor von Nazianz: Die fünf theologischen Reden*, ed. J. Barbel (Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1963). My translation is based on that of Wickham and Williams. Williams misses the point (see n. 36).

35. Gregory of Nyssa, *Refutatio confessionis Eunomii*, 5.14, ed. W. Jaeger, in *Gregorii Nysseni opera*, vol. 2.2 (Leiden: Brill, 1960). This work is also available as *Against Eunomius*, bk. 2, chap. 2, in *Gregory of Nyssa: Dogmatic Treatises*, vol. 5 of *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, 2nd ser. (New York: Christian Literature, 1893).

36. The first standard translation of the *Orations* was by the Benedictine abbot Jacobus Billius (Jacques de Billy, 1535–81), *Opera omnia S. Gregorii Nazianzeni latine* (Paris, 1569–83). The history of the text's reception was fatefully influenced by including this translation in the then most advanced, bilingual Maurinian edition of Gregory's work (1778), which was made into the series of Abbé Migne in his phenomenally successful *Patrologia Graeca* series (1857–66). The Jesuit Hugo Hurter also published Billius's translation in the *Bibliotheca SS. Patrum Latin* series (1875). The recent English translation of Williams and also the commentary of Norris (*Faith Gives Fullness*, 244–45) misunderstand the Greek precisely where the Latin translation of Billius did.

The slip highlights a strong cryptomonarchic undercurrent in the Latin West, a rarely stressed character. The hidden "monarchianism," which emphasizes divine unity ("monarchy") at the expense of the Trinity, can be clearly detected in the famous argument of Thomas Aquinas, the greatest authority in theology between the fourteenth and the twentieth centuries in the West:

We must of necessity say that the world is governed by one. For since the end of the government of the world is that which is essentially good, which is the greatest good; the government of the world must be the best kind of government. Now the best government is the government by one. The reason of this is that government is nothing but the directing of the things governed to the end; which consists in some good. But unity belongs to the idea of goodness . . . as all things desire good, so do they desire unity. . . . Therefore the intention of a ruler over a multitude is unity, or peace. . . . it is clear that several cannot be the cause of unity or concord, except so far as they are united. Furthermore, what is one in itself is a more apt and a better cause of unity than several things united. Therefore a multitude is better governed by one than by several. From this it follows that the government of the world, being the best form of government, must be by one. This is expressed by the Philosopher: "Things refuse to be ill governed; and multiplicity of authorities is a bad thing, therefore there should be one ruler."³⁷

It is clear, from a comparison of Aquinas's text with that of Gregory, that Aquinas repeats a point that is the precise target of Gregory's argument. Not that Aquinas would have been an Arian in any sense of the word. But for him, the Unity is primary, and the Trinity is a monarchic Trinity—something that the Cappadocians clearly rejected.

The Cappadocian understanding of the Trinity assumed a unique and inimitable relationship of the persons that was often described in the special terms of *synoikesis* (mutual indwelling) and *perichoresis* (circumincession) in Eastern theology.³⁸ This unity is conceived as a completely transcendent notion: while this allows for a unitary extraneous action, this unity of action is the *result* of the peace in God, a result of the perfect love and cohabitation of will and reason among the Three. Consequently, this peace, which is absolutely unique, being totally beyond any analogy in the created nature, can be realized only and solely in God when he brings about that peace in the fulfillment of time, in the sense that "God may be all in all" (1 Cor. 15:28).

37. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, 1.103.3.c (cf. *Summa contra gentiles*, 1.42n7), trans. English Dominican Province, www.newadvent.org/summa/1103.htm (accessed June 4, 2008).

38. See G. W. H. Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1961), s.vv.

Peterson clearly identified the ideological nature of the Hellenistic *theologia politike* in the sense of Schmitt: the establishing of a parallel between the metaphysical and the political. In the Hellenic context the structure of the metaphysical is monarchic, and therefore the political equivalent in the realm of the *oikumene* should also be monarchic: that is, in theologized politics, the one emperor corresponded to the one god of the *kosmos*. This harmonious analogy was disrupted by the orthodox dogma. For Peterson's argument, it did not matter which way the argument went, whether the political inspired a metaphysical construction or whether the theological impregnated the political idea—any correspondence was precluded in principle.

In the ominous year of 1933 Peterson published a second paper, "Emperor Augustus in the Judgment of Ancient Christianity."³⁹ This time Peterson mentioned Schmitt by name. He said, quite in tune with Schmitt, that "as to its essence, political theology is a part not of theology but of political thought. In proportion to the measure the ancient city broke away from her gods, there emerged a need to produce a theory, be it philosophical or theological, which would harmonize with the political activity of the city."⁴⁰ It is this program, which he interpreted as an attempt to justify the empire with theological arguments, especially in the context of the history of salvation, that he set out to analyze.⁴¹ According to Peterson, the chief witnesses for such a development were Eusebius of Caesarea, the "court theologian" of Constantine, and Orosius, the fifth-century Hispanic theologian of history. Eusebius (like Origen) praised Constantine for providing the necessary peace for the church by his monarchy. In this sense the Roman Empire fulfilled a providential role. As the empire brought peace to the warring factions of the national states of the *oikumene*, it provided the best means for the spread of Christianity, and by its encompassing rule it not only prefigured but in fact fulfilled the eschatological promise of the universal rule of God. Thereby the religious notion of eschatology was transformed in Eusebius's hand into a political utopia.⁴² The universal rule of God and the Roman Empire was molded into one continuity, brought to the extreme by Orosius. If Augustus, however, had to be Christianized, then, *per consequent*, Christ had to be Romanized.⁴³

39. Erik Peterson, "Kaiser Augustus im Urteil des antiken Christentums: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der politischen Theologie," *Hochland* 30 (1932–33): 288–89. See also *Der Fürst dieser Welt: Carl Schmitt und die Folgen*, ed. Jacob Taubes, 2nd ed. (Munich: Fink, 1985), 174–80.

40. *Ibid.*, 174.

41. See Dahlheimer, *Carl Schmitt*, 216.

42. Peterson, "Kaiser Augustus," 177.

43. *Ibid.*, 179.

Peterson points out the novelty of Eusebius's idea. Eusebius said something quite against the previous tradition, exemplified already by Hippolytus of Rome, who in his commentary on Daniel rejected the identification of the Roman Empire with the "fourth kingdom strong as iron" in the vision of Daniel.⁴⁴ Peterson's chief authority against Eusebius and Orosius was Augustine. The important idea here is that the *pax augustana* was an illusion. Wars did not cease during Augustus's reign, nor can the kingdom of God be realized *within* history. A thoroughly eschatological view of the church cannot look on *any* existing political order as fulfilling the promise of the heavenly Jerusalem and the *coming* kingdom of God.

Therefore Augustine cannot accept the view of Ambrose on the church, either. Rather than an image of the heavenly Jerusalem, the church is in progression from the old law toward the heavenly city. The church exists in a transitory anticipation of the "kingdom to come," even if—and this should be stressed—it is in this world, in a public, tangible, and historical form:

This heavenly City, therefore, is on pilgrimage in this world. She calls out citizens from all nations and so collects a society of aliens, speaking all languages. She takes no account of any difference in customs, laws and institutions, by which earthly peace is achieved and preserved—not that she annuls or abolishes any of those, rather, she maintains them and follows them, . . . provided that no hindrance is presented thereby to the religion which teaches that the one supreme and true God is to be worshipped.⁴⁵

It is because of this conception of history that Augustine can reject any implied immanence of the kingdom of God in the *imperium romanum*. The Roman Empire simply cannot be part of the Christian view of salvation history over and above being an interim step, a means by which God directs the eschatological fulfillment of history. Eschatology precludes any utopian understanding of the *pax augustana* or *romana*. Not only did wars not cease, but the *oikumene* is not identical to the secular entity of the empire.

As a symbolic summary, Peterson called attention to a fourth-century text by Gregory of Elvira: "Whoever would want to realize the divine monarchy on earth would be like the Antichrist, for it is him who alone will be

44. Hippolytus, *Commentaire sur Daniel*, 4.9, 1 seq., ed. M. Lefèvre (Paris: Cerf, 1947).

45. Augustine, *Concerning the City of God against the Pagans*, 19.17, trans. Henry Bettenson (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972).

the monarch of the whole earth [*ipse solus toto orbe monarchiam habiturus est*]."⁴⁶

In 1935 Peterson reworked the two papers into a slim volume, *Der Monotheismus als politisches Problem* (*Monotheism as Political Problem*). The book's argument does not go beyond a summary of the two preceding papers: that the Christian attempt to develop a political theology, similar in its dimensions to the Hellenistic political ideology, was doomed to fail for the very reasons that Peterson has already worked out—the concept of monarchy is contradicted by the notion of the Trinity, and the accommodation of the empire into the history of salvation is failed by the church's eschatological orientation.⁴⁷

We have seen the argument against constructing a political theology based on a trinitarian concept of God. As to the relation between theology and politics, the possibility of analogy breaks down at the very concept of monotheism. This is why the *Monotheismus* treatise begins with a methodological warning. Peterson calls attention to the fact that the term *monotheism* is a new coinage, but with momentous consequences.⁴⁸ The theological meaning of *monotheism* is problematic both from theological and from political points of view. In fact, what he proved is that Christianity, in its normative form, is *not* monotheism (as we could see it from the text of Gregory of Nazianzen). The central concepts of the Incarnation and of the Trinity resist this classification (while it is obviously not polytheism, either). In his *Heis theos* Peterson was already aware of this difference when analyzing late antique theological materials. He considered Adolf von Harnack's view about the indistinguishability of pagan monotheism from Christianity to be completely misleading. Xenophanes' single deity and the "great king" of the *De mundo*, let alone solar henotheism, have nothing to do with the Christian Trinity. Accepting one god is not yet Christianity.⁴⁹

This theology resisted not only the temptation of justifying the monarchy of the emperor on the basis of theological monarchy, however, but also

46. Gregory of Elvira, *Tractatus (Ps.) Origenis*, ed. Pierre Battifol and Andrea Wilmar (Paris: Picard, 1900), 195, 13, quoted in Peterson, "Göttliche Monarchie," 563; Peterson, *Der Monotheismus*, 70. Cf. Schmitt, *Legende*, 46.

47. Peterson, *Der Monotheismus*. See also Peterson, *Theologische Traktate* (Munich: Kösel, 1951), 45–147; or Peterson, *Theologische Traktate*, vol. 1 of *Ausgewählte Schriften*, 23–81.

48. The neologism is usually attributed to the Cambridge Platonist Henry More (1614–87).

49. Peterson, *Heis theos*, 251n2. See also my "Theistic Fallacies," in *Reflecting Diversity: Historical and Thematic Perspectives in the Jewish and Christian Tradition*, ed. Péter Losonczi and Géza Xeravits (Münster: LIT, 2007), 166–90. Cf. James 2:19: "Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble."

the justification of the empire on the basis of redemption history. The Roman Empire may have had a transitory providential character in providing peace for the birth of the Redeemer and may have helped spread the Gospel, but it was no political utopia, let alone the realization of the heavenly Jerusalem. Peterson showed that there is a fundamental incompatibility between the *structure* of Christian theology and political theology because of the concept of the god and because of the role of the secular power in the history of salvation.

Peterson's radical conclusion stated the following: "The theologized monarchy had to fail because of the theological dogma of the Trinity, and the *pax augustana*, because of Christian eschatology. With this development, not only did monotheism as a political problem come to an end, but Christianity was liberated from the fetters of the *imperium romanum*. . . . The peace sought for by the Christian cannot be provided by any emperor, for it is a gift of him who is above every understanding."⁵⁰ To understand the full bearing of Peterson's rejection of Schmitt's political theology, one is advised to look at some circumstantial issues that indicate that he was publishing his writings not only because of purely historical interests. Apart from studies on political theology, Peterson published another famous treatise in 1933, *Die Kirche aus Juden und Heiden* (*The Church from Jews and Heathens*), which argues for the Judaic foundations of Christianity and for a *Christian* theological acceptance of Judaism, stating that "no power on earth will be able to eradicate [ausrotten] Judaism," as the role of Judaism is essential for Christian eschatology.⁵¹ Again, even Schmitt noted the curious reference to the *Führer* in the *Monotheismus* tractate, in the context of an argument rejecting the view that secular monarchy could have theological justification.⁵²

There was indeed more to the treatise than a historical argument. First, there are some strange references in the footnotes, whose implications are not immediately clear. It was Jacob Taubes (someone who, like Walter Benjamin [1892–1940], had a love-hate relationship with Schmitt) who found the key to the meaning of a footnote written by Peterson about the relationship of Cicero to Augustus. Taubes realized the importance of the date of the publication. In 1935 Schmitt was already living in Berlin, presiding at the National Socialist German Lawyers Association as the protégé of Hermann Göring. It was in these years that Schmitt defended the murder of Ernst Röhm in *Der*

50. Peterson, *Der Monotheismus*, 59. Cf. Phil. 4:7: "And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."

51. Erik Peterson, *Die Kirche aus Juden und Heiden*, in *Drei Vorlesungen* (Salzburg: Pustet, 1933), 155.

52. *Ibid.*, 52. Cf. Schmitt, *Legende*, 16.

Führer schützt das Recht (*The Führer Protects the Law*, 1934) and the racial laws of Nuremberg in *Die Verfassung der Freiheit* (*The Constitution of Freedom*, 1935).

Taubes noted that it is against this background that a reference in Peterson to chapter 30 of the third book of *De civitate Dei* becomes meaningful.⁵³ The footnote seemingly supports the claim that the *pax augustana* is an illusion—there were wars and, what is more, civil wars under Augustus himself. Here Augustine clearly takes sides against the imperial theologians, such as Eusebius of Caesarea and Orosius: "This young Caesar [Augustus] received the support of Cicero, who wanted to foster his power in opposition to Antony, hoping that . . . his hero would restore the liberty of the Republic. In this *he showed himself quite blind and unforeseeing*, for that same young man whose position and power Cicero supported, handed over his supporter to Antony's murdering hands."⁵⁴

In a letter to Schmitt, Taubes said: "This reference to *The City of God* 3.31 is truly admirable. It has no 'historical sense' whatsoever, while it was acutely topical in 1935: *caecus atque improvidus futurorum* [blind and unforeseeing] sent a coded message to you, which never reached you."⁵⁵

The last, desperate arrow of a leaving friend was true to their spiritual and scholarly relationship. Taubes saw, correctly in my view, that *Der Monotheismus* was the dear wound of a friend's arrow. Taubes understood Peterson much better than did Schmitt, blinded by his vanity. Taubes adds the scriptural proof: "Faithful are the wounds of a friend" (Prov. 27:6). Again, Peterson fixed a text from Augustine as the motto for the first edition of the *Monotheismus* treatise: "Arrogance has a certain appetite for unity and omnipotence, but only in the realm of nature, which all pass away like shadows."⁵⁶

A closer look at the footnote reveals that it carries again a hidden message. In the lines previous to the quote, the discerning reader can detect the following hint: "What else is coveted by man by means of it [the empty ostentation of the world] but to become the only one, if it would be possible, to whom all the others are subjected, *in a perverse imitation of God?* To whom if one would submit oneself, living according to his precepts, by him all the rest would be subjected to him, and then one would never be deformed to the extent that one would ever heed a little beast, who wants to rule the

53. Jacob Taubes, *Ad Carl Schmitt: Gegenstrebiges Fügung* (Berlin: Merve, 1987), 40.

54. Augustine, *City of God*, 3.31.

55. Taubes, *Ad Carl Schmitt*.

56. Augustine, *De vera religione*, 45.84: "Habet ergo superbia quendam appetitum unitatis et omnipotentiae, sed in rerum naturalium principatu, quae omnia transeunt sicut umbra."

people."⁵⁷ In 1935 this text does not require much explanation. The heeding of the little beast is a consequence of the secular imitation of divine monarchy based on the idea of an illicit analogy.

In my understanding, therefore, the *Monotheismus* treatise had a double agenda. It addressed a problem systematically in a historical guise: the issue of Christian political theology. But it was specifically addressed to Schmitt, the former friend, in a prophetic way. It is an intriguing fact that in 1951 the treatise's second edition was published without this motto.

What is the peculiarity of Peterson's criticism? While Peterson rejects the possibility of political theology, he in fact relied on theology not only to refute Schmitt but to articulate the theological basis of a spiritual resistance to the prevailing political dangers. One should not construct from this a self-referential, and thereby self-refuting, argument, as did, for example, Koslowski. To argue that rejecting political theology would result in another form of political theology entirely misses the point of consistency in Peterson's theoretical views and political actions. What Peterson denied was not the possibility of the public representation of Christianity, as if he would stand up for separating the "two realms," those of the secular and the sacred. That would have been entirely in opposition to his conception of the church as a visibly public and social entity. For Peterson, the public representation of the eschatological kingdom of God requires rejecting any and every attempt to identify this kingdom with a secular empire. No political utopia can masquerade as the heavenly Jerusalem outside of the final dystopia of the Antichrist. In fact, it was precisely in this period that Peterson wrote his seminal study on the Christian martyrs.⁵⁸

Peterson made a theological point. He did not belong to the leftist critiques of Nazism. A most unlikely opponent as he was, he came from a similar antiliberal direction to that of Schmitt himself. Peterson did reject the idea of religion as a private issue, withdrawing from the public sphere in the face of the dominance of the secular, exemplified in the tyranny of "economic thought." For him, the church and dogma were not concerns of the private individual: they were necessarily public forms, requiring the public presence of the church, a necessity originating from the church's representative function, testifying to the Incarnation and to the promise that "God may be all in

57. "Quid enim aliud in ea homo appetit, nisi solus esse, si fieri possit, cui cuncta subjecta sint, perversa scilicet imitatione omnipotentis Dei? Quem si subditus imitaretur, secundum praecepta ejus vivendo, per eum haberet subdita caetera, nec ad tantam deformitatem veniret, ut bestiolam timeret, qui vult hominibus imperare" (ibid.; my translation and italics).

58. Erik Peterson, *Zeuge der Wahrheit* (Leipzig: Hegner, 1937).

all," also manifested in the acclamatory actions of the people of God, that is, in giving testimony in the form of the eschatological cult of the church.

What did Peterson accomplish? To Schmitt he opposed a historical context, the period of late antiquity, when Christianity first faced the challenge of political theology. Through historical examples from the fourth and fifth centuries he showed that a representative current in Christian theology in principle excluded an analogy for the secular order, which would thereby allow one to use such an analogy as a pretext for sanctifying itself by reference to the then new theology of the church universal.

Schmitt's incisive theory of political theology would want to recognize the continuity in structure, the content of which might change through subtle transformations. The important issue is that the political retains the basic fabric of decision, sovereignty, the friend-foe distinction, and the lawgiver's omnipotence. Klaus-Michael Kodalle rightly points out that for the Schmittian type of political theology it is in principle a matter of indifference to know *what* emerges as ultimate at the end, that is, what will be chosen and believed in political theology: "Only *that* something is believed or chosen, that there is a content in the process of making something absolute, that is functionally necessary."⁵⁹

The structures, which remain the same while changing their content, are the heritage of *Christian* political theology. When Christianity is tied by its necessary consequences to the emergence of the modern absolutist state, and then (implicitly) to all later European developments, the gist of this wonderful collection of fascinating medieval antiques amounts to one gigantic historical *modus tollens*: if the natural trend of the historical developments of Christian theological concepts leads to thoroughly secularized doctrines clad in the legitimizing garb of the antecedent theological doctrines and to a transformation of the sacred character of the visible church into sacralizing the ruler and then finally to immortalizing the nation,⁶⁰ then the concomitant disasters retroactively discredit the theological ideas themselves.

A Debate on Secularization

Schmitt identified a metaphysical substructure remaining constant during the changes of the great "historical forms" of human society. Peterson, by contrast, tried to show, through the normative example of Cappadocian theology,

59. Klaus-Michael Kodalle, *Politik als Macht und Mythos: Carl Schmitts politische Theologie* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1973), 93, quoted in Dahlheimer, *Carl Schmitt*, 212.

60. Cf. Kantorowicz's analysis of the change from *ecclesia nunquam moritur* to *populus non moritur* (*King's Two Bodies*, 292, 295–300, 303–13).

which was to become the orthodox Christian doctrine, not only that this theology cannot be turned into political theology but that it can never degenerate into secular concepts. Peterson's hidden assumption is, of course, that the orthodox meaning of the Christian concepts is retained.

Schmitt, in his answer in 1969, dismissed Peterson's criticism as a version of Augustine's "two cities" doctrine on a church and an empire entirely separate from each other, as if Peterson had wanted to say that the blending of theology with politics results in something unclean.⁶¹ This graceful dismissal smacks of carelessness, if not of outright misrepresentation.⁶² Schmitt ought to know that Peterson interpreted the meaning of theology, liturgy, and especially the "soldiering" of martyrs under the command of Christ (this was first worked out in *Christus Imperator* [Christ Emperor], then in *Zeuge der Wahrheit* [Witness to Truth]) not as a withdrawal from the world but as a thoroughly public action.

The church for Peterson lives and acts in history, but its guiding principle is founded on its representative character of the eschatological. In particular, there is something mean in the objection of the old Schmitt when he ridicules Peterson by suggesting that he wanted to separate theology from politics precisely when they needed such a suggestion most: that is, in the face of the Hitler regime in 1935.

Patristic scholars pointed out that it was not only Arians who defended the monarchy but also Trinitarian theologians. To be sure, examples of attempts at the "instrumentalization" of the Trinity can also be found.⁶³ However, this argument misses the essential point and thereby becomes a version of the fallacy of *ignoratio elenchi* (irrelevance). Sporadic attempts at electing three emperors to reflect the Trinity (in which the soldiers of the Byzantine *thema* believed) only play into the hands of Peterson. There can be failed attempts

61. Schmitt, *Legende*, 20. See also Dahlheimer, *Carl Schmitt*, 219; and Assmann, *Herrschaft und Heil*, 22–28.

62. See proofs for this in Nichtweiß, *Erik Peterson*, 818: "Wenn man Carl Schmitt nicht eine bewusste Irreführung unterstellen will, sieht man sich fast zu der Annahme gezwungen, dass er Peterson trotz der persönlichen Treffen und Gespräche bis zum Dezember 1936, des brieflichen Austausches und der offenbar doch eingehenden Lek[t]üre seiner Werke—er soll die 'Theologische Traktate' sogar 'auswendig' gekannt haben—im Wesentlichen missverstanden hätte" (If one does not want to attribute to Carl Schmitt a deliberate attempt to mislead the reader, one feels compelled to assume that he misunderstood Peterson on substantial issues—despite the personal encounters and discussions until December 1936, the correspondence, and the ongoing familiarity with his writings. [Schmitt went as far as to say that] he knew the content of the *Theological Treatises* by heart).

63. Fellechner, "Die drei Kappadozier," in Schindler, *Monotheismus als politisches Problem?* 58.

at something impossible. But precisely the fact that a "Trinitarian emperor-group" could never become a *relevant* political institution, a proper "historical formation" (*geschichtliche Grösse*), proves the Cappadocians' point. As to the other issue, closer scrutiny reveals that the politics of the orthodox patriarchs and bishops do not contradict Peterson's point. Interestingly, though, the idea of the ecumenical council relies on the Gospel words "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matt. 18:20), which refers back to the commandment for "two . . . or three witnesses" required for a sentence (Deut. 17:6). This comes closest to a theologically sanctioned political entity on earth.⁶⁴

An argument in favor of Peterson's understanding of the church's role can be gathered precisely from the idea of "historical formation" (Schmitt). If a social or institutional character persists over time, recurring in conflicts and institutional struggles again and again, then that manifests a lasting, encoded characteristic. If the theological ideas institutionalized in the church result in a lasting struggle between the secular and the sacred institution, as they were indeed found to be in constant struggle during the Latin Middle Ages, how is this conflict to be explained? What kind of legitimization could the church call on to resist the pretenses of the empire? Why was there a need for compromise at all?

Peterson addresses this problem by assuming that eschatological orientation is a defining feature of the Christian church. The church always represents the future *eschaton* in the present. In the famous Gospel line "My kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36), Christ does not speak about some chiliastic expectations. The fulfillment of the world is the final event that happens in the city of God, in the heavenly Jerusalem. Therefore the church must resist every other political power that would consider itself the final stage of development, an end of history. Until the end there can always be despair, but also hope. No state of life, no formation of society can be considered stable or to have reached its ultimate formation. As long as the Second Coming of Christ has not happened and the heavenly Jerusalem has not descended to earth, the church always has to testify to this in representing this eschatological directedness in her celebrating temporal instances of the one liturgy and in the sacraments, until the history of salvation reaches its end. In principle, every kind of chiliastic theology, or secular or sacred myth, falls short of this character. Peterson quotes Philippians 4:7, "And the peace of God,

64. I owe this interesting point to István Perczel.

which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus," implying that the Trinitarian peace of the orthodox dogma is an expectation to be *represented*.⁶⁵

We have seen that Peterson's favorite authority in his understanding of the church is Augustine, probably the strongest opponent of any identification of eschatology with some existing political order or utopia: "So, then, he only who gives true happiness gives eternal life, that is, an endlessly happy life. And since those gods whom this political theology [*theologia civilis*] worships have been proved to be unable to give this happiness, they ought not to be worshipped on account of those temporal and terrestrial things, . . . much less on account of eternal life, which is to be after death."⁶⁶

Augustine's view was dominant for the early period of Christianity. On the level of ideas, the formulation was clear. The Christian way of life amid the transitory world is the subject of chapters 5 and 6 of the *Letter to Diognetus*: "They do not inhabit cities of their own. . . . They live in cities, be they Hellenic or Barbaric, as it is their lot. . . . They live in their own cities, but as though they were only passing through. They play their full role as citizens, but labor under all the disabilities of aliens. Any country can be their homeland, but every homeland is a foreign country. . . . They pass their days on earth, but they are citizens of heaven. Obedient to the laws, they yet live on a level that transcends the law."⁶⁷ The lack of a secular homeland is present in the formula "For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come" (Heb. 13:14). A political consequence of this principle can be found in the *Acts of the Scillitan Martyrs*, where Speratos, the speaker for the Christians, explicitly declares, "I do not recognize the kingdom of this world but praise and worship my god, whom no one has ever seen."⁶⁸

In this conception of the church, Peterson and Augustine stand in deep affinity with Benjamin's understanding of the messianic kingdom. Benjamin says the following in his *Theological-Political Fragment*:

Only the Messiah himself consummates all history, in the sense that he alone redeems, completes, creates its relation to the Messianic. For this reason nothing historical can relate itself on its own account to anything

Messianic. Therefore the Kingdom of God is not the *telos* of the historical dynamic: it cannot be set as a goal. From the standpoint of history it is not the goal but the end. Therefore the order of the profane cannot be built up on the idea of the Divine Kingdom, and therefore theocracy has no political, but only a religious meaning.⁶⁹

The end of history is not a part of history, not something in the historical order. The last event is not like any other event preceding it. It is not the last of the ordinary historical developments but something that consummates history as such. Benjamin's point reflects concern across historical periods, and it makes Peterson's reasoning more readily comprehensible. The Jewish philosopher and the Christian theologian display a remarkable parallelism in formulating a basic tenet of biblical thinking.

This quote from Benjamin prompts me to remark on a weakness in Peterson's original argument. In his conclusion to *Der Monotheismus* Peterson says that "something like 'political theology' is only possible on the basis of Judaism and paganism."⁷⁰ Quite in tune with Peterson's reasoning, Benjamin could have said that the Old Testament concept of the Jewish kingdom explicitly resists the "monotheistic" temptation, too. In 1 Samuel 9 the establishment of the kingdom for the Jews is demanded on the basis of *analogy to the Gentile nations* and against the will of God. God allows the Jews to elect a king, but this is a choice of the elect nation and is *granted* by God as an allowance; it has nothing to do with any kind of metaphysical analogy.

This corrective does not affect the argument's outcome. No purely secular order can be justified by reference either to Jewish or to Christian theology. It does not mean that theology does not justify secular order. Just the opposite. Every order ought to be regarded as under divine dispensation, as no part of history is exempt from the presence of a secular order. But the fact that secular power has some place in the divine dispensation (as in the theology of the Letter to the Romans etc.), that is, plays an assigned role in salvation history, does not imply the fulfillment of times.

What this theological argument amounts to, to be sure, is that it does not justify secular power by making it legitimate with reference to some analogy of being, that is, by the analogy of the overall order of the cosmos.

65. Peterson, *Der Monotheismus*, 105.

66. Augustine, *City of God*, 6.12.

67. Augustine, *Epistle of Mathetes to Diognetus*, 5.2–6, trans. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/diognetus-roberts.html (accessed June 4, 2008).

68. *Acta Scillitanorum martyrum sive Passio Sperati et sociorum*, ed. J. A. Robinson (Nendeln, Liechtenstein: Kraus, 1967), 113.22.

69. English translation by Jürgen Braungardt, www.braungardt.com/Philosophy/Benjamin/theological%20Fragment.htm (accessed June 4, 2008).

70. Peterson, *Der Monotheismus*, 99–100. Peterson, in a letter to Barth, summarizes his conclusions differently: "I say there that with the 'triune god' one cannot develop a political theology, but that it is possible with 'monotheism' and 'polytheism'" (Nichtweiß, *Erik Peterson*, 776).

It runs the risk of naturalism in theology, quite alien to the structure of patristic ideas, if a transient worldly order should be justified by a metaphysical order, since otherwise it would be unnatural and would have to perish. Aquinas and many other theologians used this fundamentally Hellenistic, that is, non-Christian, argument in developing their points. But Peterson (or the Cappadocians) would have answered this in the same vein that he answered Schmitt: it is not the analogy that is the reason, for there cannot be an analogy at all.

Is then Aquinas not orthodox enough for Peterson? For an answer we have to look at the theological foundations of Western Christianity, and we can discover (indeed, it is almost a commonplace) that while Western theology—in its representative forms—accepted the great formulas of the Cappadocians, it has retained different theological accents.

From this point of view, some characteristic Western theological positions betray subtle differences. I am talking not about explicit differences in dogmas but about latent, semiconscious preferences in their interpretations, like the cryptomonarchism alluded to above. Certainly, for the Cappadocians, who developed their conception of the Trinity during the second phase of the Arian controversy—a conception that became standard doctrine in the Eastern church—the Augustinian idea of the *vestigia trinitatis*, or the Thomistic concept of the *analogia entis*, would have been unacceptable. This difference is quite tangible in the vexed problem epitomizing Western trinitology: the Augustinian-Boethian theology of the intra-Trinitarian relations (which is largely responsible for the *filioque* doctrine) often attracted the charge, from the Greek theologians, of crypto-Sabellianism. Again, in Christology, there is a subconscious tendency toward extreme Antiochian dyophysitism. Without such a subtle trait (which we might call virtually Nestorian) it would have been strictly impossible to find an analogy between the two natures of Christ and the two bodies of the king, the key case for Ernst H. Kantorowicz in his account of early modern political theology. In terms of a Cyrillian sharpening of the complete union in one hypostasis, but with a simultaneous identity preserved for the divine and the human natures of Christ, this two-body doctrine would have been utterly counterintuitive.

In summary: the political and the strictly orthodox theological can be independent from each other, but unorthodox theologies cannot.

This implicit background of Peterson's arguments is indirectly corroborated by the theological revival of Arianism in the 1930s. Koslowski has also emphasized that in the West "the medieval and early modern doctrine of God was more theistic than Trinitarian" and has referred to Aquinas's

justification of the monarchy as well.⁷¹ In addition, he calls attention to the significant revival of Arianism among German Christians, who considered it a properly German Christianity: secular, nationalistic, preserving the race and the Nordic-German moral.⁷²

For Peterson, then, secularization is not something irrevocable, as it was for Schmitt. Peterson has a theological reason for this view. The time after the Incarnation is the final time of history.⁷³ There is no sufficient theological reason to assume any further caesura in this period, like a metaphysically novel period of history, as the secular modernity would be on Schmitt's account of historical formations. Peterson's argument, instead of secularization, relied on the autonomy of the theological while rejecting its confinement to the sole territory of the divine. For Peterson's understanding there can be no caesura within the last time of history, like "secularization" or "modernity." No significant event is to be understood between the Incarnation and the end of times. There is free human action, however, and concomitant responsibilities. The time for virtues and vices, sin and repentance, remains as the human condition, according the choice given to humanity between the way of life and the way of death. To explain Peterson's position, we may refer to the example of the establishment of the Old Testament kingship above. Or we could look at the famous scene in Genesis 18:20–33, where Abraham challenges God's decision to punish Sodom and Gomorrah. Indeed, during their argument Abraham *dissuades* God. The decision of God about history is implemented through human participation. Human responsibility and the freedom of choice, manifested in the faithfulness to or the betrayal of the covenant between God and man, are the true motivating forces behind Peterson's understanding of history.⁷⁴

Of course, one should not infer from this remark that to make a valid criticism of Schmitt one has to become a Jew or a Christian.⁷⁵ It only means

71. Peter Koslowski, "Politischer Monotheismus oder Trinitätslehre? Zu Möglichkeit und Unmöglichkeit einer christlichen politischen Theologie," in Taubes, *Der Fürst dieser Welt*, 35.

72. *Ibid.*, 44.

73. See Ernst Lewalter, "Eschatologie und Weltgeschichte in der Gedankenwelt Augustins," *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 53 (1934): 1–51. Challenging this view of the last period of the history of redemption was the principal impetus for the condemnation also of the views of Joachim of Fiore, who, not incidentally, was a hero for Schmitt.

74. In his important paper "Das Problem des Nationalismus im alten Christentum," Peterson develops an interesting view of history that depends on the free choice of the nations, in tune with his understanding of Romans 1 (*Frühkirche, Judentum und Gnosis* [Rome: Herder, 1959], 51–63).

75. The political theology of Islam would require a separate treatment.

that appreciating the patristic arguments applied by Peterson allows the discerning reader to see an alternative to those formulas of Schmitt that are rather difficult to counter from a secular point of view. The idea of "sovereignty," for example, plays a unique role in Jewish and Christian contexts. It has to be taken seriously, however, that there is only one possible "sovereign," namely, God, as this point is stressed repeatedly in such liturgical formulas as "One is the holy, one is the Lord" and "Thine is the dominion, thine is the kingdom, and the power and the glory," not to mention many other instances. It was an important service of Peterson to remind his readers that *kingdom, glory, power, peace*, and similar expressions are fundamentally political concepts. To this list we could add the specific adjective "mankind-lover" (*philanthropos*), which occurs many times in old Christian liturgical contexts. This adjective originally expressed a Hellenistic royal title, that of the "good ruler" who takes care of his subjects. In contrast to Kodalle's criticism of the "emptiness" of the decision situations, the liturgical phrase makes it clear that the sovereignty of God is not haphazard. Providence is not an unpredictable caprice but is directed by an unconditional, albeit transcendent, love of God for his subjects ("For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son" [John 3:16]).

Some Conclusions

Schmitt's achievements are often misunderstood and overinterpreted by modern scholars with an ongoing fascination for his formulas. An explanation for this may be that in our present eclectic culture those who are less well trained in theology or are trained only in a theology based on the medieval Latin tradition render themselves more or less powerless against Schmitt's formidable display of historical learning. It is not easy to realize that in fact Schmitt's "Catholicism" belonged to a special breed of German nationalistic Catholicism that was based on race rather than on the idea of the church universal. Peterson was probably justified in alluding to the heretical character of "political theology."⁷⁶

It is ironic that Peterson's decisive counterarguments were never acknowledged on the level that Schmitt's formulas were, not even by the anti-Schmitt polemicists. There is a straightforward sociological explanation for that. Few critics of Schmitt are in a position to call political theology a heresy, as Peter-

76. Peterson, "Kaiser Augustus," 174. I assess Schmitt's theological views in "Carl Schmitt teológiaiája" ("On the Theology of Carl Schmitt"), in *Carl Schmitt jogtudománya: Tanulmányok Carl Schmitt-ről* (*The Legal Theory of Carl Schmitt: Studies about Carl Schmitt*), ed. Cs. Kiss Lajos (Budapest: Gondolat, 2004), 260–90.

son did. (Interestingly, very few theologians, Joseph Ratzinger among them, dare to follow his uncompromising argumentation.)⁷⁷

Peterson is a conservative, not a liberal, a scholar of a difficult subject with a firm Christian conviction. Of course, the leftist and the liberal critiques of Schmitt cannot reconstruct the patristic Christian background of Peterson as their own, since neither sees the relevance of the once tremendous force of the political message of the "church universal," a political entity of a unique stance. Both types of critic would be opposed to the idea of a church that has pushed its own antinationalist, antiterritorial, antiestablishment character into the background at least in practice during centuries of adaptation to the institutions of the "neighboring nations." This is true, but an uncritical projection of these recent developments back to the early centuries would take its toll. Such a strategy would not allow one to perceive the origin of a unique, albeit religiously motivated, idea, depriving the critiques of a strong argument against Schmitt.

God being the only sovereign, however, this-worldly sovereigns are relegated to a subordinate position, since in this context every power is from God, and therefore no one can claim legitimacy by nature, that is, in a naturalistic sense. Accordingly, a distinction between "bare life" and "human or political life,"⁷⁸ "nature" and "culture" cannot be in the power of the "princes of this world" (John 12.31, 14.30, 16.11), only in a totally secularized framework. In a biblical context only God can say, "See, I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil" (Deut. 30.15; see also Deut. 30.19 and Jer. 21.8). For Peterson, the horrors brought about by tyrants owe their existence not to nature or to some inevitable fate but to decisions that choose freely the "powers of darkness."

77. Joseph Ratzinger, *Die Einheit der Nationen: Eine Vision der Kirchenväter* (Salzburg: Pustet, 1971). Ratzinger's many references to Peterson are not incidental. As can be gathered from Nichtweiß's biography, toward the end of his life Peterson was a must to visit for every major theologian before Ratzinger's generation, from the Rahner brothers to Yves Congar, Jean Danielou, and many others.

78. This is a basic issue for Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998).