

**Political Theology Revisited:
Carl Schmitt's Postwar Reassessment**

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The essay examines the pronounced theological turn of the late Carl Schmitt, especially in his Politische Theologie II (1970). He aim is to understand what Schmitt meant by a "Catholic intensification" in the relationship between theology and political theory. The essay gives equal attention to Schmitt's polemic against the theologian Peterson, who denied the possibility of political theology, and the dialogue with the philosopher Hans Blumenberg, who had severely criticized Schmitt's conception of secularization. The essay shows that in both instances the opposition merely encouraged Schmitt to sharpen and clarify his own theological position, which includes heretical Gnostic elements.

In the present discourse on Carl Schmitt the importance of the theological aspect of his work is still controversial (Hollerich 2007, Müller 2003). One could even speak of a divide. While Continental critics have, by and large, acknowledged the significance of Schmitt's theological thought, especially German scholars, the Anglo-American discourse has mostly deemphasized this aspect as a minor part of his political theory. After all, in *Politische Theologie* (1922) Schmitt speaks of analogies between theological and political concepts and reminds his readers of a historical dimension of modern political theory that is ultimately rooted in theological thought. Moreover, Schmitt himself later informed his readers that he always understood himself as a legal theorist without any ambition to intrude into the discipline of the theologians. In short, one could treat the theological aspect of Schmitt's early theory as an interesting extension of his legal and political theory without paying too much attention to it. Recently William Rasch defended this position by pointing to the essentially modern, post-metaphysical character of Schmitt's theory (Rasch 2003). However, this approach overlooks other statements of Schmitt in which the significance of the theological aspect of political theory in general is presented in an entirely different light. Here Schmitt, although admitting that he is not a (professional) theologian himself, emphasizes the seriousness of his engagement with theology as well as the foundational nature of theology for the political realm (Schmitt 1984). The fact that modern politics is seen as an autonomous sphere (as Schmitt is aware) does not mean that he considers this development (beginning with Hobbes and Spinoza) as a positive turn. Rather, as we will see, Schmitt is close to Karl Löwith who considers secularization as a fundamental loss. It is not

accidental therefore that he felt challenged by Hans Blumenberg who offered a serious critique of the prevailing understanding of secularization in his *Legitimität der Neuzeit* (1966).

The importance of the theological aspect is most clearly stated in Schmitt's late work, especially in *Politische Theologie II* (1970) and his posthumous *Glossarium: Aufzeichnungen der Jahre 1947-1951* (1991). In *Glossarium* Schmitt, who after 1945 was careful with public statements, since he felt that he was being scrutinized and hounded by his opponents, was extremely candid because these writings were not meant for immediate publication. They show Schmitt in a very different light; among other things, they demonstrate his stubborn refusal to admit any responsibility for his political involvement between 1933 and 1945, his continued fierce anti-Judaism, and his search for a theological position that would ground and legitimize his concept of the political. Looking back from *Glossarium* and *Politische Theologie II*, specific elements of his earlier theory, for example his understanding of sovereignty and the political, appear in a different light. They reveal a meaning that was not immediately accessible in the 1920s. For this reason those critics who take Schmitt's theology seriously, like Heinrich Meier, Günter Meuter, Ruth Groh, and Jürgen Manemann, have opened up a new dimension of meaning that allowed us to uncover hitherto unseen but important connections in Schmitt's writings. Of course, the fact that Schmitt, like Heidegger, was raised in a Catholic milieu was well known but mostly interpreted in terms of its social and political implications. Schmitt was seen as a member of a religious minority in Germany that was denied equal status in Imperial Germany. For this group the Catholic Church had a special relevance, a relevance that Schmitt himself described and celebrated in *Römischer Katholizismus und politische Form* (1923). But a more rigorous reading of Schmitt's theological statements revealed a much more complicated picture. Although Schmitt claimed to speak from a Catholic position, his own readings of the New Testament deviate significantly from an orthodox Catholic position. It is by no means accidental therefore that both before 1933 and after 1945 the Catholic Church kept its distance from Schmitt's writings. As we will see, Schmitt's theology owed some of its most significant elements to the Protestant side, especially to Luther and Calvin.

As far as I can see, *Politische Theologie II* has not yet seriously entered the Anglo-American discourse on Schmitt. Since the text has not been translated, the English-speaking world has by and large ignored it. Also the specific nature of the text makes this attitude understandable. The reader is confronted with a long polemical essay that means to refute a

work by the theologian Erik Peterson published in 1935 under the title *Der Monotheismus als politisches Problem*. Until his conversion to Roman Catholicism in 1935, Erik Peterson was a member of the Protestant Theological Faculty at the University of Bonn and had a chair for church history and the New Testament. During the late 1920s and early 1930s he and Schmitt, who also taught at the University of Bonn, were close friends (Nichtweiß 1994a, 722-830). Therefore Peterson's negative verdict concerning the theological legitimacy of any political theology may have come as a surprise to Schmitt, in particular the fact that Schmitt was explicitly mentioned as a proponent of the condemned position. But why should the reader of 1970 be interested in a half-forgotten disagreement between a legal scholar and a church historian? Of more relevance was clearly the extensive afterword that deals with Hans Blumenberg's path-breaking study *Die Legitimität der Neuzeit* (1966). But again: what is the connection between Peterson's tractatus that focuses on late antiquity and Blumenberg's revisionist understanding of modernity? For Schmitt the link between Peterson and Blumenberg was apparent. Blumenberg renewed the challenge by questioning Schmitt's conception of history and the relevance of the political within the historical process. While Peterson challenged Schmitt's reading of the Bible and theological dogma, Blumenberg challenged Schmitt's understanding of the connection between the concept of God and the concept of history, specifically Schmitt's eschatology. Through his polemical responses Schmitt revealed that the question of a political theology could not be contained as a strictly legal problem without any serious investment in the underlying theological issues. In other words, the critique of the theologian and the philosopher forced Schmitt to account for his own conceptual framework.

The time lag of thirty-five years in Schmitt's response to Peterson is curious indeed (Nichtweiß 1994b). It seems that Schmitt initially either did not recognize the fundamental character of Peterson's critique or decided to ignore it in 1935 for personal or political reasons. In any case, their friendship continued for a number of years. What may have influenced Schmitt's late decision to answer Peterson was the fact that after the war Peterson's critique found general acceptance among theologians and political theorists in West Germany. It was agreed that a political theology based on Christian dogma was impossible (Schmitt 1996, S. 26-35). To put it differently, after the collapse of the Third Reich the link between religion and politics was interrupted. The efforts of Protestant and Catholic theologians to legitimize Hitler's

regime in the name of Christ was clearly a strong reason to resist any form of political theology. However, when Schmitt returned to the question of political theology in the late 1960s, there was a new wave of political theology, but now the efforts came from the Left. Johann Baptist Metz and Jürgen Moltmann argued for the involvement of theology in political and social issues as part of a progressive intervention of the church (Metz 1997, Moltmann 1984). Schmitt's own intervention followed, as one would expect, an entirely different path. Schmitt argued for the necessity of a political theology in order to deal with anarchy and apocalyptic dangers. As we will see, his concept of the *Katechon*, the one who delays the coming of the Antichrist, is the answer. The ultimate reason for political theology in the modern world is its *Verlorenheit*, which cannot be compensated by philosophy. For Schmitt the philosophy of history as an immanent approach cannot offer a convincing solution.

Political Theologie II is dedicated to Hans Barion, a Catholic legal scholar who, like Schmitt, lost his academic appointment after 1945.¹ He was one of the few scholars whom the state barred from employment because he had joined the Party and strongly favored the alliance of Roman Catholicism and the National Socialists. His fate, in other words, is very similar to that of Schmitt. Peterson, on the other hand, while initially sympathetic to Fascism and certainly no admirer of liberalism, had drawn the line. His tractatus *Der Monotheismus als politisches Problem* therefore argues against a specific form of political theology that he recognized in the alliance between the early Church and the Roman Empire (*Reichstheologie*). While the argument of the essay is mostly historical, the conclusion is by no means restricted to the era of the late Roman Empire, as Peterson's "Vorbemerkung" (preliminary remark) makes quite clear. Here he argues against the development of modern post-Enlightenment monotheism (*Deismus*), a belief system without commitment to the trinity of God the father, Christ, and the Holy Spirit. "Für den Christen kann es politisches Handeln nur unter der Voraussetzung des Glaubens an den dreieinigen Gott geben" (Peterson 1951, 49). In his critical review of the relationship between the metaphysical realm (God) and the political realm (human community, state) Peterson tries to demonstrate that the concept of God as a monarch can be found both in the Aristotelian and the Jewish tradition (Philo). Here God is conceived as a monarch whose power (*potestas*) is the cause for both the cosmos and the human community. The decisive point of Peterson's argument is the close link between monotheism and monarchy. Both Greek philosophy and Jewish theology arrive at the same solution of the political: there is

a close conceptual exchange between God and monarch, which means that either the political is seen as an extension of the theological or the theological as an analogy of the political structure. In short, according to Peterson, monotheism, either in the form of Greek philosophy or in the form of Judaism, encourages a specific version of political theology: the identification of God and monarch as "*Göttliche Monarchie*" (Peterson 1951, T 60-61).

For Peterson the crucial question is to what extent the concept of God as monarch could be taken over by the early Christian tradition. If one could prove that the theologians of the early Christian church were familiar with and actually made use of this concept, one could speak of a Christian political theology. While Peterson is willing to entertain this interpretation with regard to early Jewish-Christian traditions (T 62f), he ultimately rejects the notion of a Christian political theology as dogmatically impossible. It is important for Peterson to show in detail that the church fathers rejected the concept of "*Göttliche Monarchie*" as heretical. However, there is the case of the jurist Tertullian, who explicitly uses the concept of the monarch to define God and argues that the trinity of God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit is not an argument against the conceptual construct. In Tertullian Peterson finds a defender of Christianity who is too close to the Roman Empire for political reasons and therefore unable or unwilling to comprehend the dogmatic problem involved in comparing the political structure of the Empire with the theological concept of the Trinity (T 73). After presenting the full range of the argument Peterson concludes: "*Unsere Ausführungen haben gezeigt, daß die ersten Versuche, die übernommene Lehre von der göttlichen Monarchie mit dem Trinitätsdenken zu verknüpfen, gescheitert waren*" (T 76).

The second part of the essay focuses on those later church fathers who make a more serious attempt to link orthodox Christian dogma and the notion of God as monarch, specifically on Origenes who defends the Christian faith against the pagan argument (Celsus) of its subversive and politically dangerous character, and Eusebius, the bishop of Caesarea and close adviser of Constantine. In this argument the emphasis is placed on the politically ambitious bishop and (problematic) church historian Eusebius. He becomes the real target of Peterson's polemic, since he combines in his person questionable theological concepts and a dubious role as a political adviser. To what extent was the Pax Romana, as it was first established by Augustus, useful for the spread of Christianity beyond Israel, as Origenes and others had argued? For Peterson this argument is problematic because it potentially contains the notion of

the priority of the Roman Empire and the idea of a unified world state. These are the very ideas that Peterson wants to push back in 1935 when the autonomy of the Catholic Church is at stake. It is therefore the close link that Eusebius constructs between the development of a transnational Roman Empire and the development of Christianity within this empire that Peterson understands as the fundamental failure of Eusebius to grasp the theological essence of Christianity. What Eusebius foregrounds, namely the overcoming of civil wars and the establishment of lasting peace under the Roman emperors, an obvious political argument, is precisely what Peterson, looking at his own world, cannot accept. In Peterson's reading "*prinzipiell hat demnach (for Eusebius) mit der Monarchie des Augustus der Monotheismus begonnen*" (T 90). Eusebius turns the church over to the emperor.

Why is Peterson so concerned about Eusebius's interpretation of the link between church and state? The answer is: "*Die Gedanken des Eusebius haben eine ungeheure geschichtliche Wirkung gehabt. Man findet sie allenthalben in der patristischen Literatur wieder*" (T 93). What concerns Peterson about this tradition is the mutual intertwinement of Christian Church and pagan state, the fact that Augustus is turned into a Christian statesman *avant la lettre* and Christ into a (loyal) Roman citizen (under Roman law). The key word in this context is "*Reichspolitik*" (Imperial politics) as a specific strategy of the Church towards the Roman Empire during the fourth century. But theologically speaking, this type of politics is based on the heretical understanding of the Trinity by Arius and his followers. For Peterson the heretical nature of Christian political theology is sufficient proof that a political theology based on the Bible is impossible, since it fails to account for the trinity. Only a monotheism without proper recognition of Christ and the Holy Spirit as part of the unity of God can be extended into a political theology, moving ultimately towards a unity of church and state. Peterson's conclusion is that orthodox Christian dogma, represented for instance by Augustine, prohibits the construct of political theology. Only a footnote reveals that this thesis expresses a critique of Carl Schmitt (T 147, A 168), since the refutation of Eusebius's political theology also amounts to a fundamental attack on Carl Schmitt.

It is necessary to explore the character and the aim of this critique. Towards the end of his study Peterson moves more and more away from a descriptive historical account, focusing instead on normative aspects. The final argument of the essay points to the importance of eternal theological truth. A rigorous reading of Peterson's tractatus could not deny the

fundamental thrust of the critique. Schmitt's political theology is described as illegitimate and heretical. In 1935 the indictment of “*Reichstheologie*” had a specific political meaning: it attacked the alliance of the church (both Catholic and Protestant) with Nazi Germany, the very alliance that Schmitt favored. To be sure, in Schmitt's polemical response this alliance is not mentioned or even alluded to.² Instead, Schmitt, for reasons that we will have to discuss, means to re-establish the legitimacy of political theology, specifically in the wake of Vatican II and its reformulation of the Catholic Church's political and social stance. Apart from the personal hostility towards Peterson that is still apparent, the connection with Vatican II should be kept in mind.

In his response to Peterson, Schmitt himself chooses a different emphasis to frame the debate. He invokes the crisis of Protestant and (to a lesser extent) Catholic theology in the early twentieth century and Peterson's role in this crisis as a stern defender of Christian dogma and critic of liberal, historically inflected versions of theology. The tractatus *Politischer Monotheismus* is read as an extension of the theological crisis caused by the rise of National Socialism to power in 1933. Schmitt refers to the “*Totalitätsansprüche*” of Hitler's regime and suggests that the tractatus must be interpreted as an intervention in an extreme situation. But what kind of intervention is it? To answer this question, Schmitt carefully prepares the ground for his rejoinder by stressing the traditional dualism of state and church, politics and religion, and its dissolution after 1918. The fact that the state lost “*das Monopol des Politischen*” (Schmitt 1996, PT II, 21) created the need for a new, a more fundamental definition of the political, a definition that Schmitt offered in 1927 in *Der Begriff des Politischen* by making the basic distinction between friend and enemy. By separating the state and the political, Schmitt also, at least implicitly, suggests a political element in the religious sphere, since the political has become a free-floating concept. In a quotation from Ernst-Wolfgang Bockenförde this political moment becomes more concrete. “*Man entgeht dem Politischen daher nicht dadurch, daß man sich auf eine neutrale Sachlichkeit, ein vorpolitisches Naturrecht oder auf die reine Verkündigung der christlichen Heilsbotschaft zurückzieht*” (PT II, 22). The fact that Bockenförde functioned as one of Schmitt's important disciples in postwar Germany makes it sufficiently clear that through this quotation Schmitt reinstates his own position as correct and true. A more serious challenge to this position, but now linked to the 1960s and the arrival of Pope John XXIII, is Barion's insistence that the new teaching of the church developed in the wake of Vatican II does not

have a foundation in the dogma. In order to reject the progressive theological stance of Pope John, Barion, like Peterson before him, denies the legitimacy of a specific political doctrine as derived from the dogma. Again, the writings of Augustine become crucial testimony to support Barion's intervention.³

As we have seen, Schmitt's return to the question of political theology occurred at a specific time, one critical for the fate of the Roman Catholic Church. Vatican II raised the question of a necessary political involvement of the Church on the progressive side. For Catholicism Johann Baptist Metz developed the idea of a politically and socially committed church, while Jürgen Moltmann spoke in a similar vein for the Protestant (Lutheran) Church. Those who disagreed with this development, like the conservative political scientist Hans Maier, referred back to Peterson in order to reject the political theology of Vatican II. In the discussion of the late 1960s, in which Schmitt finds himself involved as a defender of political theology, he does not really question the theoretical possibility of a political use of the Christian faith or, to put it more cautiously, the political implications of theological positions. At the center of the debate (as Schmitt certainly realizes in his polemic against Ernst Feil) we find the disagreement over the political goals—a progressive or conservative commitment, democracy or authority. In Schmitt's eyes Feil is inconsistent when he calls for a new form of political theology along the lines of Metz, but attacks conservative versions under the heading of “*Göttliche Monarchie*” and “*Caesaro-Papismus*” (PT II, 31). Schmitt's own defense of political theology would clearly not include a theology of revolution proposed by the radical left wing of the Church. Still, both Schmitt and Feil are involved in what Jan Assmann has called “*handelnde politische Theologie*” (active political theology) as distinct from a merely descriptive version that explores different ways of connecting or separating state and church or the political and the theological (Assmann 2003). It is difficult, if not impossible, for Schmitt to relate to a descriptive concept of political theology, as can be gleaned from his critique of Ernst Topitsch, who proposed a sociological approach to the problem. For Schmitt Topitsch's method amounts to neutralization and positivism, since it excludes the moments of commitment and action.

Still, it has to be noted that Schmitt makes a serious attempt to reconstruct Peterson's essay, both in terms of its history and place within his *œuvre* and its argument. At the same time, he discusses its function in 1935 as a possible analogy between Constantine and Hitler or Stalin, suggesting that the historical material does not sufficiently support this analogy. But

Schmitt's real aim transcends this skeptical argument; he means to demonstrate not only the feasibility of political theology but its inevitability given the public role of the Church in the world (*Sichtbarkeit der Kirche*). Basically, he does this by reorganizing and reinterpreting the historical material that Peterson had used to demonstrate the incompatibility of political theology and Christianity. Here it is important to remember that Peterson's early work, especially his monograph *Heis Theos* (1926), was an important text for Schmitt, since it seemed to confirm Max Weber's concept of the charismatic leader (PT II, 41-42). On the whole, Schmitt's strategy is to broaden the discussion by including non-Christian forms of political theology and stressing sovereignty rather than monarchy. The aim is to deflect the interest of the reader from the theological point that Peterson wants to make, i.e. the significance of the concept of Christian trinity for political theology, to a discussion of the imprecision of Peterson's concept of the charismatic leader (PT II, 49f). If Peterson cannot, as Schmitt suggests, distinguish between a legitimate king and a charismatic leader, his entire argument is too simplistic to be of any use. Obviously, however, this strategy does not get to the core of Peterson's argument, as Schmitt realizes when he finally squarely focuses on Peterson's theological reservations. He rightly emphasizes that Peterson's negative verdict is exclusively directed against a Christian form of political theology and he also correctly notes that the historical evidence that Peterson presents is more ambiguous than the conclusion the latter finally draws. The most apparent case would be that of Eusebius, the friend and counselor of Emperor Constantine, whom Peterson, following Jacob Burckhardt, describes as a dubious politician. The crucial issue here is, as Schmitt knows, not the good or bad reputation of the bishop of Caesaria but his theological position. In other words, the question is: Can one derive a valid form of political theology from his theological statements on the trinity? Or was he a secret supporter of Arius, who had denied the similarity of God the father and Christ?

Schmitt's defense of Eusebius uses both historical (political) and theological arguments. By placing the bishop in the context of the Concilium of Nicea (325) he stresses the inseparable unity of the political and the theological aspect. It is interesting and important to observe how Schmitt changes the character of the problem when he suggests that there is ultimately no position outside of the political that even a completely orthodox theologian would turn into a political theologian as soon as he participates in the public debate. We have to remind ourselves that this is not Peterson's problem. Peterson wants to demonstrate that a legitimate

form of political theology cannot be derived from Christian dogma because of the essential category of the trinity. Schmitt does not respond to this challenge by giving evidence for Eusebius's correct interpretation of the trinity and a correct deduction of the political monarchy from this dogma. Instead, he shifts the argument to an assessment of the Roman Empire in the light of the eschatological expectations (*heilsgeschichtliche Endzeiterwartung*) of the Church. Eusebius, according to Schmitt, was really condemned because of “*seiner heilsgeschichtlichen Übersteigerung des Römischen Imperiums*” (PT II, 59). Schmitt shrewdly points out that in 1929 Peterson himself in a lecture on the Church had emphasized the ambiguous nature of the early Catholic Church, “*Die Zweideutigkeit, die der Kirche anhaftet, erklärt sich aus dem Ineinander von Reich und Kirche*” (quoted in PT II, 60). Obviously this statement is not normative but descriptive and historical. And this is, it seems, the level where Schmitt wants to situate the question of political theology. The assumed ubiquity of the political extends into the theological realm and becomes the public space of the Church. It is the political mission of the Church that he wants to defend, while Peterson wants to restrict this mission. Therefore the question of whether one can devise a valid form of political theology from a specific theological dogma is not the crucial issue for Schmitt. For him, the mere fact that a theological argument extends into the realm of praxis makes it political.

Rethinking the question of political theology after the war and in particular his disagreement with his former friend Peterson, Schmitt realized that Peterson meant to send him a message about the consequences of the recent alliance between state and church in Germany and the role of those who favored this alliance, for example Schmitt himself. The polemic against the “*berüchtigten Caesaropapisten Eusebius*” (PT II, 56) has, at least in Schmitt's eyes, a personal angle, although neither he nor Peterson openly state the analogy. The defense of Eusebius uses the familiar argument of the ubiquity of the political. Peterson's retreat from the political to the theological sphere cannot solve the problem because this move is as much a political decision as the support of the alliance. This argument undermines the very distinction that Peterson made to save the church. With some justification Schmitt points out that Peterson's 1935 essay is itself a political intervention in the name of pure theology against political corruption, here personified by Eusebius's support for Constantine.

The ground for this defense is explicated in the following paragraph when Schmitt shifts the argument from the theological to the political sphere and suggests (going back to his

concept of the political) that in a period of crisis clear distinctions between state and church are no longer effective. “*Wenn das Religiöse nicht mehr eindeutig von der Kirche und das Politische nicht mehr eindeutig vom Reich oder vom Staate her bestimmbar ist, versagen sachlich-inhaltliche Trennungen der zwei Reiche und Bereiche*” (PT II, 68). The point Schmitt wants to make is that in a period of crisis (like 1933) the pretension of absolute purity cannot be upheld. The politicization of religion and its institutions becomes as inevitable as the transfer of religious concepts into the political realm. To be sure, Schmitt's approach misrepresents Peterson's position, since the latter, by insisting on the absolute priority of the theological dogma, means to block the intrusion of forms of political actions that are not legitimized by the Church's theology and its institutions. The example for this kind of corruption is Heidegger, who, according to Peterson, transferred the commitment to God and Christ into a commitment to the charismatic leader (Hitler, PT II, 69).

Ultimately, Schmitt's refutation of Peterson never quite focuses on the most basic disagreement, which involves the theological interpretation of history. While Schmitt's final polemic against Peterson foregrounds the limitations of a pure theology and claims the relevance of jurisprudence for the conception of political theology, his real disagreement with Peterson concerns the problem of eschatology, notwithstanding his claim that he understands *Politische Theologie* (1922) as “*Aussage eines Juristen über eine rechtstheoretische und rechtspraktisch sich aufdrängende, systematische Struktur-Verwandtschaft von theologischen und juristischen Begriffen*” (PT II, 79). What is the meaning of history? For Peterson its meaning can be defined only and exclusively in theological/religious terms; for Schmitt, on the other hand, the time between the first and the second coming of Christ is given its own specific meaning in the realm of political action. This aspect becomes much clearer in Schmitt's response to Hans Blumenberg, which is added to the essay as a postscript.

Before we turn to the postscript, it is important to emphasize the nature of Schmitt's religious and/or theological commitment because his own statements are contradictory. His attempt to create a legitimate space for himself as a non-theologian who moves into the field of theology by demarcating his own position as strictly defined in legal terms (*juristisch*) has to cover the fact that Schmitt makes theological claims, claims that transcend the safe method of stating analogies and pointing to the fate of theological concepts and ideas in a process of secularization. For Schmitt secularization is not, as we will see, a neutral term. In a letter to

Helmut Rumpf (May 23. 1948) Schmitt states his own Catholicism in strong terms: “*Ich bin Katholik nicht nur dem Bekenntnis, sondern auch nach der geschichtlichen Herkunft*” (Schmitt 1991, G 131). His almost simultaneous critique of Jünger's use of the Bible in his diaries (G 130) underlines the seriousness of his own commitment. It does not suffice therefore to emphasize Schmitt's definition of political categories as secularized theological concepts; one has to see the concept of secularization in Schmitt's late work as a theological notion. In his study of Donoso Cortés, published in 1950, Schmitt offers a reading of history that operates with the concept of the Christian historical period and its possible end: “*Hier wird die Frage gestellt, ob der christliche Äon zu Ende ist oder nicht*” (Schmitt 1950, 93). At the same time the Catholic commitment and consequently the belief in the coexistence of a spiritual and a worldly realm has not prevented Schmitt from favoring a political solution of the conception of the Catholic Church, i.e. an emphasis on Christianity as the religion of the state as promoted by Eusebius (Faber 1994, 272-274). In this respect he was and remained part of the New Catholicism in Germany together with intellectuals such as Theodor Haecker, Hugo Ball, and Georg Moenius. Especially for Moenius the connection between Roman Empire and Catholic Church was crucial (Faber 1994, 275). Given the basic pattern, it did not matter whether one supported or rejected the National Socialists. In either case the priority of the Church would be preserved, which means that the support of National Socialism is seen as a secondary commitment only. In *Politische Theologie II* Schmitt, now removed from his involvement in 1933, reiterated the need for a political theology based on the Roman-Catholic Church. The much-quoted testimony for this self-understanding is the statement in *Glossarium*: “*Das ist das geheime Schlüsselwort meiner gesamten geistigen und publizistischen Existenz: das Ringen um die eigentlich katholische Verschärfung*” (G 165). This “*Verschärfung*” (intensification), part of a quotation in a text of Konrad Weiß on Theodor Haecker, marks a radical turn against liberalism, modernity, humanism, and pacifism, i.e. a decisive step beyond traditional Catholicism.

One of the areas in which this “*Verschärfung*” would have significant implications is the concept of history, specifically the definition of the period before the end of history and the second coming of Christ. Already in *Politische Theologie I* this question was foregrounded in Schmitt's attempt to define the relationship between theological and legal concepts. For Schmitt legal concepts were secularized theological concepts. However, in 1922 Schmitt did not fill out the theological frame by referring to the end of history. In *Politische Theologie II*, through the

discussion of the function of the Roman Empire for the Church, this topic came into the foreground. This was probably the reason why Schmitt added his response to Hans Blumenberg's *Legitimität der Neuzeit* (1966) as a postscript, although Blumenberg's and Peterson's positions were clearly not compatible. While Peterson's theology denied validity to the realm of secular history, Blumenberg's aim was primarily to rescue the secular human sphere from the obsolete demands of theology. In this respect, while disagreeing with Schmitt, Blumenberg raised the very questions that challenge the legitimacy of absolute theological claims. For this reason, Schmitt was justified in his assessment that Blumenberg's critique of his work, in particular his understanding of the process of secularization, appears as an appropriate continuation of the debate. He notes: “*Dieses Buch setzt die Nicht-Absolutheit absolut und unternimmt eine wissenschaftliche Negierung jeder politischen Theologie, wissenschaftlich im Sinne eines Wissenschaftsbegriffs, der keinerlei Weiterwirkungen oder Umbesetzungen aus der Heilslehre einer sich absolut setzenden Religion gelten läßt*” (PT II, 85). These remarks, while they seemingly only summarize the book, already anticipate the strategy of Schmitt's response. By emphasizing the scientific nature of Blumenberg's approach, he suggests that Blumenberg ultimately cannot do justice to the metaphysical aspects of the problem. It is interesting to note that he takes over Blumenberg's key concept to describe historical changes in the field of theology and philosophy, but seems to be uncertain how to use it. In Schmitt's use, “*Umbesetzung*” is a term to describe loss rather than reorientation and rethinking.

But what precisely is the nature of the disagreement? Schmitt presents his own position as that of a legal scholar who accepts and supports Western rationalism as it was developed (against religious and theological claims) in the field of law and politics. The state, he reminds us, is a specifically modern institution. Only recourse to Blumenberg's critique in *Die Legitimität der Neuzeit* can clarify Schmitt's response. Blumenberg's central theme is the problematization of the category of secularization as a method to explain the modern age (*Neuzeit*) as a qualitatively distinct period of history, a period that has left behind a theological Christian interpretation of the world. Secularization, Blumenberg argues, is used in different areas and ways to demonstrate the dependence of the modern age on previous historical formations. The concept of secularization thereby undermines the legitimacy of modernity and the Enlightenment. In this context Schmitt's *Politische Theologie* is briefly mentioned as an example of the typical and problematic use of secularization; however, Blumenberg's critique focuses on Karl Löwith's

study *Meaning in History. The Theological Implications of the Philosophy of History* (1949), which offers a rereading of German Idealism, especially of Hegel, that stresses the moment of transformation from theological to modern philosophical thought. In this context Christian *Heilsgeschichte* became philosophical progress. Where Löwith assumes continuity, Blumenberg objects and argues: “*Zwischen Eschatologie und Fortschrittsidee bestehen entscheidende, die Umsetzung blockierende Differenzen, die das Kriterium der Identifizierbarkeit des theologischen Moments in der Geschichte problematisch machen*” (*Legitimität der Neuzeit*, 1966, Blumenberg/Schmitt, 2007, BW 24). The shift from a transcendent to an immanent interpretation of the world cannot be explained by the concept of secularization. Blumenberg suggests that the persuasive force of the secularization thesis is largely a linguistic phenomenon—the similarity of linguistic formulations where the actual historical processes and actions are quite dissimilar. Schmitt's political theology would be a case in point: “*Der Satz 'Alle prägnanten Begriffe der modernen Staatslehre sind säkularisierte theologische Begriffe' ist, seit er 1922 ausgesprochen wurde, insofern nicht glaubwürdiger geworden, als man zu zweifeln gelernt hat, ob diese 'Modernität', je modern gewesen ist—*” (*Legitimität der Neuzeit*, 1966, BW 33). The criticism comes from an unexpected angle, since Blumenberg emphasizes the slowness and inadequacy of the process of modernization in Europe. What Schmitt reads as a specifically modern secularization of theological concepts may well be the belated status of basic legal and political concepts. It is, in other words, the incompleteness of the process of the Enlightenment that Blumenberg holds against Schmitt's thesis. It is also apparent that he does not, as in the case of Löwith, charge that Schmitt did not grasp the character of the *Umbesetzung*. The specific angle of Blumenberg's critique offers Schmitt the opportunity to answer the criticism by focusing on the legal aspect while downplaying the theological and by foregrounding the problem of modernity that Blumenberg himself had stressed.

The postscript of *Politische Theologie II* proves beyond any doubt that Schmitt fully understood the challenge of Blumenberg's thesis, far beyond the specific criticism of his early work. Therefore his response aims to radicalize this thesis to the point where its problematic nature will be apparent. According to Schmitt, Blumenberg's goal is the “*Enttheologisierung*” (detheologization, PT II, 85) of the world. “*Im Grunde geht es Blumenberg um die Selbstermächtigung des Menschen und um die Wißbegierde des Menschen. ... Der Autismus ist der Argumentation immanent. Ihre Immanenz, die sich polemisch gegen eine theologische Transzendenz*

richtet, ist nichts anderes als Selbst-Ermächtigung” (PT II, 88f). The choice of words makes clear that Schmitt is, to say the least, uncomfortable with Blumenberg's claim. But he does not close the door by simply restating the need for transcendence and the limitation of human knowledge and planning. Instead, he opens a dialogue by suggesting to Blumenberg that the theological debate between him and Peterson, including a serious reassessment of Gnosis, might be the way to understand his concept of the political.

As it turns out, the assessment and evolution of Gnostic thought patterns becomes central in the dialogue with Blumenberg. We have to remember that for Blumenberg Gnostic dualism and the need for redemption of the world because of its basic imperfection is the unresolved problem of medieval theology, a problem that only the modern age would overcome. This position was clearly stated in *Legitimität der Neuzeit*. In his dialog with Blumenberg, Schmitt acknowledges this position without accepting it. In fact, he reintroduces the Gnostic dualism between a bad creator God and the God of redemption to ground his own political theology. “*Das strukturelle Kernproblem des gnostischen Dualismus von Schöpfer-Gott und Erlöser-Gott beherrscht aber nicht nur jede Heils- und Erlöserreligion. Es ist in jeder änderungs- und erneuerungsbedürftigen Welt unentrinnbar und unausrottbar gegeben*” (PT II, 93, my emphasis). By claiming to uncover a universal pattern, Schmitt also includes the Christian faith. He does this by underlining the proximity of Augustine and Gnosis with the distinction, of course, that for Augustine the human beings are to blame for the evil in the world. As Schmitt puts it, “*der Mensch bewährt seine Freiheit nicht durch Taten, sondern durch Untaten*” (PT II, 93). Whether one follows the Gnostic or the Augustinian argument makes no fundamental difference: one has to accept the presence of evil in the world and the fundamental enmity between men (*Feindschaft zwischen Menschen*). As a result, there can be no basic change or improvement of the human condition. Neither reforms nor revolutions can accomplish this. In other words, Blumenberg's thesis is forcefully rejected. When Blumenberg argues in favor of human emancipation from the oppression of absolute theology (God is unknowable and humans completely dependent), Schmitt returns to what he calls a “*Stasiologie*” (PT II 95) that cannot be overcome. It is the function of the state to limit the political implication of *stasis* (civil war). Not surprisingly therefore, Schmitt defends the need for a political theology in a strict sense of the term, since in secularized modern versions of the political the older patterns remain intact. Without mentioning Blumenberg, at the end Schmitt restates his position in strong terms. It is no less

than a complete rejection of modernity, i.e. human emancipation, progress, development of knowledge independent of theological foundations. The final statement also illuminates the importance and range of Blumenberg's provocation, which is much more fundamental than the intervention of Peterson. The disagreement concerns the historical function of Christianity, especially in the transition from the Middle Ages to modernity; a form of questioning that was equally alien to the theologian and the legal theorist.

Blumenberg forced Schmitt to rethink the theological foundations of his position and, at the same time, enabled him to sharpen the theological argument. Now he can do what Peterson denied: he can anchor his own position in the concept of the Christian trinity by arguing that the unity of God includes the hostility between God the father and God the son (Groh 1998, 160). We have to realize that Schmitt is developing his private theology that would not be acceptable to the Catholic Church. If one separates the two persons of God in such a way that Christ the redeemer must turn against his father, then he takes on the character of a rebel who endangers the work of God. Only by dividing Christ into a *göttliche* and a human side can Schmitt control the explosive outcome of his own private theology (Groh 1998, 163). It is the human, the promethean side that has to be checked. Christ the rebel is responsible for the division within God, which in turn is responsible for the origin of the political in Schmitt's sense. The reality of the enemy as the organizing principle of the world can therefore always be retraced to its theological origins.

Despite the conciliatory rhetoric of the postscript, Blumenberg could not overlook the severity of Schmitt's rebuttal with the implied claim that a solution could be found only within the theological framework offered by Schmitt. Still, Blumenberg decided to approach Schmitt and enter a dialogue. The recent publication of the exchange of letters between 1971 and 1978 throws much more light on Blumenberg's formal response in the second, significantly revised edition of *Die Legitimität der Neuzeit* and later monograph *Arbeit am Mythos* (1979). Among other things, he had to persuade Schmitt that his own project could not be properly described as "scientific", i.e. a form of positivism, quite apart from the fact that his own biography as a Half-Jew, who was put into a concentration camp, escaped and went into hiding until 1945, created a personal challenge.⁴ In the exchange of letters the personal aspect is consistently left out. Instead, it is the difference of their positions (theologically, philosophically, and anthropologically) that defines the nature and direction of their dialogue.

In the context of this essay a detailed analysis of this dialogue cannot be offered. It must suffice to follow the process of the (mutual) clarification of their respective positions, a process in which the younger partner was more interested than the older one. Blumenberg takes up the challenge by explicitly questioning his solution to the problem of secularization. In this question he maintains his goal, i.e. a reassessment of the concept of secularization that does not include the notion of illegitimacy. However, he is not satisfied with his own understanding of detheologization through the concept of “*Umbesetzung*” and “*Selbstbehauptung*” (letter to Schmitt March 24.1972, BW 195f). At the same time, he tries to define the methodological difference between Schmitt's assessment and his own. It is tentatively described as the difference between Schmitt's interest in the question “*wo liegt der extreme Zustand*” (BW 106) and his own interest in the question “*wie kann sich dies erhalten?*” (BW 106). But the explication does not go beyond this brief statement. Schmitt's response (31.3.1972) makes clear that he fully understood the tentative nature of Blumenberg's first letter as an invitation to explore the difference, but he politely declines the offer. Instead, he suggests that Blumenberg's approach is indebted to Troeltsch and Max Weber, i.e. to a sociology of religion, while his own conception of secularization is based on canonical law. Of course, this seemingly neutral assessment of the difference is anything but neutral, since it places Blumenberg within a scientific tradition that tries to neutralize theological concepts. Furthermore, Schmitt refers to his study *Der Nomos der Erde* (1950) to demonstrate his own understanding of the difference between a theological and a secular, juridical approach to the question of war. In this context Schmitt emphasizes the danger of an absolute, theological understanding of war. In other words, he makes room for a positive and legitimate conception of secularization, while at the same time holding on to a theological frame. There remains a tension, which becomes evident in two contradictory claims. On the one hand, Schmitt, especially in *Der Nomos der Erde*, argues for the more humane quality of a strictly legal politics over an absolute theological politics; on the other, he stresses, as we have seen, the inevitable theological origin of the political. It seems that Schmitt was unable to extricate himself from this tension, and Blumenberg's intervention in *Säkularisierung und Selbstbehauptung* (1974), the revised first two parts of *Legitimität*, as much as it did more justice to Schmitt's theory than the first edition, ultimately did not help Schmitt, since it rigorously reinterpreted the theological claim and its insistence on a historical grounding of the political in theology as an extended metaphor: “*Die Politische Theologie ist eine metaphorische Theologie*”

(Blumenberg 1988, 112). As a metaphorical construct it becomes plausible insofar it operates with persons rather than laws that can be applied mechanically. The distinction between a rational and a voluntaristic theory enables Blumenberg to define Schmitt's political theology. Schmitt represents the second type that needs a subject at its center, *“Ein Voluntarismus ist notwendig auf ein Subjekt, und sei es ein fiktives, angewiesen. Daher erfordert es 'Personen', und seien es juristische. In der Gestalt des Dezisionismus geht es nicht ohne den 'Souverän', und sei er nur metaphysisch”* (Blumenberg 1988, 110). For Schmitt God is needed to legitimate the political sovereign, but this need is, according to Blumenberg, no more than need for an analogy. In other words, Blumenberg reads Schmitt backwards: The structure of modern political theory, beginning with Hobbes, suggests a theological background that can be invoked to legitimize its existence and its structure. This reading allows for a connection between the old theological and the new secular construct, but it is not perceived as a deduction or a substantive continuation, or as a loss of substance. Instead, Blumenberg stresses the need for human intervention to leave the cage of theological absolutism: *“Es ist nicht eine verweltlichte Theologie, sondern die Selektion des weltlich Erträglichen aus der Theologie, das dann seinerseits als Norm des Dekretierten ausgegeben werden kann”* (Blumenberg 1988, 106). Theological terminology becomes a vehicle for the explication of the political, and as such it is useful and legitimate, but it is not the process of secularization that Schmitt wants to claim.

As Blumenberg acknowledges, Schmitt did not concede the use of legitimacy in the context of his study. Instead, he spoke of the legality of the modern age, thereby suggesting a lack of legitimacy. This critique of modernity is of course a central element of Schmitt's work, as much as Blumenberg affirms the justification of modernity in historical terms. In the face of this critique, Blumenberg must defend himself against the accusation of arguing in favor of human *Selbstermächtigung* as the defining moment of modernity. He does this by pointing to specific historically conditioned functions of reason in early modernity. Reason accepts the challenge created by the absolutism of late scholastic theology; namely the complete dependence of humans on the will of an unknowable God. It is therefore not the autonomy of reason that is the problem but its interpretation as the unruly and illegitimate child of theology. *“Die Selbstbehauptung (des Menschen) bestimmt die Radikalität der Vernunft, nicht ihre Logik”* (Blumenberg 1988, 108).

There is no indication that Schmitt ever accepted Blumenberg's interpretation of his political theology, although the exchange of letters continued. For Schmitt, in particular in the later years, political theology was not a question of metaphors but a question of religious commitment. He remained convinced that history after the first coming of Christ moved towards the second coming of the Redeemer. In this eschatological view the figure of the *Katechon* mentioned in Paul's letter to the Thessalonians plays an increasingly important role for Schmitt (2. Thess., 2, 1-8). The *Katechon* is the person (or power) who holds back the coming of the Antichrist at the end of history (Metzger 2005, Grossheutschi 1996). While a strictly eschatological orientation (that of the early Church) devalued history, the work of the *Katechon* gives meaning to history. For Schmitt the emperors of the Roman Empire and the German Medieval Empire can be seen in this light. By establishing a political order in the secular realm they postpone the arrival of the Antichrist. One might say that the significance of legal theory depends on this model, for pure eschatology would make it superfluous. At the same time, theology and law cannot be separated. As Heinrich Meier observes, the central element in Schmitt's theory that secures the connection between revelation and politics is the idea to ground the political in a triadic constellation, which can occur any time and everywhere. Where we have three persons (natural or metaphysical) the political becomes possible. It is precisely the distinction between friend and enemy that makes the political and the theological sphere compatible (Meier 2004, 111f.). Meier points to the struggle between Christ and Antichrist as the ultimate political constellation. But, as we have seen, it is the concept of the divided God, the tension between father and son that provides the theological model. It is therefore not only the rebellion of Satan that demonstrates the metaphysical character of the political but also the Schmittian concept of the trinity (ultimately turned against Peterson). Schmitt's "*eigentlich katholische Verschärfung*," the emphatic insistence on the Catholic ground of political concepts, turns out to be less Catholic than Schmitt believed.

The deviation from orthodox dogma can either be interpreted as a private mythology (Ruth Groh 1998) or in theological terms as a form of Gnosis (Jürgen Manemann 2002). Schmitt's unrelenting insistence on the evil of man in metaphysical rather than moral terms and the loneliness and depravity of the world in general should be read as indicators for his proximity to Gnostic thought.⁵ In this respect he is by no means an isolated figure in the early twentieth century (Manemann 2002, S. 82-87, Strohm 1997). Still, the question that has to be

answered is the compatibility of Schmittian theory and Gnostic thought as well as the place that Gnosis has in Schmitt's writings. The fact that Schmitt considered himself a Roman Catholic would not exclude Gnostic affinities because these were already present in the early Church. For this reason the theologian Metz refers to the “*gnostische Dauerversuchung*” (permanent Gnostic temptation) of the church (Metz 1988). Still, it is not sufficient simply to point to the moment of deviation from orthodox Catholic dogma, for instance Schmitt's emphasis on evil, his interpretation of Christ as a promethean rebel figure, and his emphasis on the role of the *Katechon* (which is minor in the dogma), to demonstrate Gnostic structures; it is the de-emphasis on the Christian belief in redemption through Christ and the belief in the permanent conflict between good and evil as an irresolvable dualism that highlights the deep affinity. The lonely and contingent individual, desperate in its need for redemption because of its own contamination with evil, represents the Gnostic version of the Christian constellation. Most revealing is Schmitt's note in *Glossarium*: “*Gott ist das ganz Andere? Das verkünden die Theologen. Na ja, Theologen christlicher Kunden, staatsbeamtete Opfer des Faschismus, Überprivilegierte und potentielle Nobelpreisträger. Gott das ganz Andere? Gott ist das ganz Identische; Gott ist Ich.*” (July 5.1950, G 307). The knowledge of the God within, the Gnostic version, stands outside the Christian dogma. Even the typical Gnostic constellation is modified in this statement, insofar the Gnostic system saw God the redeemer as the complete Other that Schmitt denies. With some justification Jürgen Manemann speaks of Schmitt's Gnosis as “*kupierte Gnosis*” (Manemann 2002, S. 180), since it remains immanent but retains a strict dualism. However, this dualism places the emphasis on the radically sinful nature of man and therefore the need for redemption. Moreover—and here Schmitt is closer to Calvin than Catholic orthodoxy—he underlines the divide between those who are chosen and those who are not (G 63). If the world, as Schmitt claims, is fundamentally depraved and lost, there are two possible responses: either one strives for redemption or one tries to give order to the chaotic world through the law. As Jacob Taubes suggests, this is Schmitt's perspective as legal theorist (Manemann 2002, 182). Any order is better than chaos.⁶ It is not surprising therefore that Schmitt understood himself as a *Katechon* whose actions postpone the end of history. The *Katechon* counters the utopian drive, the confidence to fundamentally change the world as a secularized form of the eschatological constellation of the New Testament. For Schmitt's political theology this counter force is of crucial importance. It defines the state as an interim formation between the first and the second

coming of Christ. The state itself does not have sacramental power; it cannot by itself carry out or even bring closer the redemption promised by Christ.⁷ Hence the history of the state and *Heilsgeschichte* remain separate, although they are of course part of the same overarching constellation. The fact that Schmitt sometimes insists that his own discourse is exclusively juridical and, on other occasions, claims a theological role for himself may be related to this dual history and its dialectic. The full and ultimate meaning of the worldly order can be grasped only from a theological perspective, but this does not mean that it is a mere extension of *Heilsgeschichte*. Especially in a Gnostic version, as Schmitt puts it in *Politische Theologie II*, the divide between God the redeemer (*Heilsgeschichte*) and God the creator of an evil world (secular history and the state), i.e. the objective dualism cannot be overcome. This assumption throws light on the specific character of Schmitt's political theology: Its political perspective is not Christ the redeemer but the opposition of imperfect creation and redemption. Yet even this definition of the *complexio oppositorum* is not the final word. By splitting the figure of Christ into a *promethean* (rebellion) and an *epimethean* (obedient) part (Groh 1998, 216-243) Schmitt forcefully undercuts all utopian aspects of the political. In this context, Schmitt's reference to Dostoevsky is revealing. The true aim of the Catholic Church is to neutralize the impact of Christ the redeemer, to block the anarchist tendencies inherent in Christianity without openly showing the anti-Christian commitment of the Church (G 243). Establishing order in the world is more important than Jesus the redeemer. It is telling that Schmitt cannot find a fundamental distinction between the *ecclesia militans* of the counter-Reformation and Hobbes's modern sovereign. For both sides the constitution of political and social order is the foremost goal.

This raises a fundamental question: What does Schmitt mean when he reasserts the viability of political theology in 1970? As we have seen, only in *Political Theology II* do the radical theological implications of his position come into full view. There is significantly more involved than the analogy between theological and legal concepts. Against Blumenberg, who suggests that one should understand Schmitt's theory metaphorically, Schmitt underscores the reality of the theological aspect both in historical and metaphysical terms. Modernity has not emancipated itself from the grasp of a theological past. The conciliatory tone of his letters to Blumenberg can only mask the radical disagreements when it comes to the interpretation of secularization. For Schmitt secularization did not change the fundamental structure of the world; it made it only less visible. His claim against Peterson that political theology does not dissolve itself because of

a particular Christian dogma (here the structure of the concept of Trinity) is not only meant as a specific historical argument. Instead, Schmitt maintains the relevance of theology for political thought in much more general terms. However, his own reflections were focused on Christianity and indirectly on Judaism. To what extent all forms of monotheism either contain or at least allow a political theology remained outside of his horizon, since he looks at political theory from a Catholic position that is in polemical disagreement with secular definition of the law, hence his conception foregrounds “the opposition between authority and anarchy, faith in revelation and atheism, obedience to and rebellion against the supreme sovereign” (Heinrich Meier 2006, 23). To put it differently, for Schmitt political theology always had a strategic and polemical function and reflected deeply held personal convictions. This may be the reason that Schmitt did not open a dialogue with younger theologians such as Jürgen Moltmann on the protestant side and Johann Baptist Metz on the catholic, who explicitly renewed the tradition of political theology from a left perspective, although he shares their belief that Christianity implies a political commitment. Given the radically conservative nature of his commitment, which finds its ideal expression in the admiration of Donoso Cortés, Schmitt must either ignore or attack the reactivation of political theology in the wake of Vatican II. Schmitt insists on the concept of the sovereign God as the ultimate ground of the political and thereby rejects the possibility of a purely immanent approach through philosophical reason, a position that sets limits to his dialogue with Blumenberg, for whom political theology in the Christian tradition is a strictly historical moment whose present relevance only philosophical reflection can adequately explore.

The renewed interest in the link between religion and politics, partly inspired by the revival of religion after the exhaustion of secular ideologies and partly imposed on the West by radical Islamic fundamentalism, has also increased the interest in Carl Schmitt's version of political theology. At the same time, this recent discussion has demonstrated the limits of a debate within the parameters of Schmittean thought. Jan Assmann's work, for example, has shown that the concept of political theology is by no means limited to the Christian and/or Judaic tradition by focusing on Ancient Egypt. Even Heinrich Meier's suggestion that a monotheistic religious structure would be needed to develop a political theology turned out to be too narrow, for the connection between religion and political institutions in the older kingdom of Egypt can be interpreted in terms of a political theology. Of course, with his

reconstruction of this constellation in *Herrschaft und Heil* (2000) Assmann does not mean to revitalize ancient forms of political theology. In contrast to Schmitt he understands his project as descriptive rather than prescriptive (*betreibend*) (Assmann 2000, 16). When he characterizes Schmitt's *Politische Theologie* as polemical and strategic, he also defines Schmitt's self-understanding. Although Schmitt avoids the term, his project is normative. However, one has to realize that Schmitt's discourse cannot easily be defined within the opposition descriptive vs. normative, since Schmitt blends historical elements and normative aspects with performative moments in which the act of writing itself becomes a political act.

After 1945 he preferred to downplay or deny the performative moment because it reflected his involvement in the NS-regime. The private political implications of his theological position are not spelled out in concrete terms. In this respect *Politische Theologie II*, although highly polemical with regard to the fundamental theological issues, remains aloof and refrains from any direct political intervention. This ambiguity has confused Schmitt's readers. They were not always certain how to interpret his statements. Are they serious polemical claims or merely historical and conceptual descriptions? More recently, there has been a growing consensus among Schmitt's critics that both the theological and the political claims have to be taken seriously. If there had been any doubt, his polemical response to Peterson and Blumenberg confirms this reading. Carl Schmitt presents himself as a political theologian who invokes scripture and dogma (although heretically) to assert his political position. Consequently, it would depend on the social and political context whether the theological invocation turns into political decisions or not. These decisions, however, as we have to remind ourselves, are framed by the fundamental divide between friend and enemy.

As a political theologian Schmitt remains an enigmatic and ambiguous figure, capable of shifting positions and contradictory claims. It seems that only in his later years, particularly in his *Politische Theologie II*, did he engage in a sustained theological discussion, which was imposed on him by his adversaries Peterson and Blumenberg. In defense of the position he outlined in 1922 he now looks carefully at scripture and (Christian) dogma as well as the theological discussion surrounding them. A specific theological position, which is distinct from that of the Roman Catholic Church, becomes discernable. It is based upon Paul's interpretation of the Christian faith but, as we have seen, by no means limited to Paul's position. In addition, Gnostic ideas seem to influence his understanding of the New Testament and, by extension, his truly

pessimistic interpretation of world history — an interpretation that the Church could hardly endorse.

This approach to political theology differs significantly from the type of political theology put forth in *Politische Theologie* and especially *Römischer Katholizismus und politische Form* (1925) where the agent of the political is the Church with its consistent neutrality vis-à-vis the ideological positions of external secular powers. However, this neutrality of the Church, its willingness to form alliances with progressive and reactionary governments, contains, as Schmitt shows much later in his discussion of Bishop Eusebius in *Politische Theologie II*, the ultimate claim that, supported by its theological dogma, the Church was called upon and empowered by God to rule over the world, either directly or indirectly. While the medieval Church could still maintain this position, the Christian schism in the 16th century turned this position into an intractable political problem, namely the spread of civil war caused by the rivalry and hostility of competing Christian churches. Under these conditions, Schmitt argues, modern legal theorists looked for a lasting solution to the religious conflict by separating the state from the churches and turning it into a neutral arbiter who resolves the threat of civil war.

The early Schmitt clearly sides with the jurists (and Hobbes) and in *Der Begriff des Politischen* favors a secularized concept of the political. Even in *Der Nomos der Erde* of 1950, the political is still seen as a post-religious sphere structured by legal terms and norms to which the Europeans agreed in order to contain war. The late Schmitt, however, returns to the radical question posed decades before. But now, forced by his opponents, he uses a theological discourse based on the New Testament and the history of Christian dogma to find a theologically grounded answer. This twofold answer is ambiguous and ultimately contradictory: On the one hand, Schmitt affirms the historical claim of the Church to be the final arbiter not only in spiritual but also in secular questions (including political issues). On the other hand, closer to Gnosticism he posits the unredeemable nature of the secular world, which can be sustained only by a Katechon, a power, that arrests or slows down history and thereby prevents the second coming of Christ. In either case, however, the concept of secularization is taken back. Theology has returned to the center.

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¹ The theologian and professor of canonical law Hans Barion was among Schmitt's close friends and important intellectual contacts after World War II. Among other things, he shared the fate of being removed from his teaching position after 1945 because of his close links to the NS-regime. Already during the 1920s Barion was impressed by Schmitt's lectures and writings, especially his monograph *Römischer Katholizismus und politische Form*. Under the influence of Schmitt and the Catholic theologian Karl Eschweiler, Barion joined the Nazi party in 1933. Because of his activities as a consultant to the Third Reich, also in matters concerning the organization of the Catholic Church, he was temporarily suspended by the Church but later reinstated under pressure from the regime. From 1939 until 1945 he taught at the University of Bonn where he also served as the dean of the Theological Faculty. After the war the Church kept its distance from Barion; he was as isolated as Schmitt. Both were highly critical of the later development of the Church and opposed the outcome of Vatican II. In his late publications Barion became a severe critic of the new theology, a position that was shared by Schmitt. See Marschler 2004.

² Only the informed reader could grasp the old context, since the preface emphasizes the importance of Barion as a legal scholar and thereby acknowledges indirectly Barion's fate; he was also ousted in 1945 because he strongly favored the submission of Roman Catholicism to the NS-regime.

³ It is worth noting that Hans Barion, although personally dedicated to Schmitt and clearly a close personal friend after 1945, rejected Schmitt's concept of political theology as it was restated in *Politische Theologie II*, on theological grounds. While Schmitt and Barion agree on the negative consequences of political Catholicism within the structure of a pluralistic liberal state, they disagree about the appropriate involvement of the Catholic Church in political issues. According to Barion, the church was theologically not legitimized to exert political power (Marschler 2004, 401). This means that Barion, although he was by no means convinced by Peterson's arguments (which he explains in a letter to Schmitt dated December 8, 1969), shares the latter's fundamental negative verdict against a Catholic political theology. Barion's criticism of Peterson, however, makes clear that their agreement on the fundamental issue is motivated by very different concerns. In political terms, at least in 1933, Barion favored National Socialism (and like Schmitt the concept of the total state), in historical terms; he thinks that Peterson misreads the history of the church and especially the role of Augustine. Based on Georg Koeppen's book *Die Gnosis des Christentums* (1939), Barion argues that the theological legitimacy of political theology did depend on the incarnation of Christ. Notwithstanding his own strong hostility towards Peterson, whom he accuses of incompetence, Barion opposes Schmitt by insisting on the exceptional role of the Church as being situated outside the political sphere. The Church cannot participate in the political sphere. For Barion the Church has to remain indifferent to the specific nature of the political regime. As he points out, "innerhalb eines Staates, dessen verfassungsorientiertes und als unabänderlich normiertes Religionsrecht die Kirche durch ein Ralliement anerkannt hat, verpflichten politische Weisungen der Kirche, die über das verfassungsmäßige Religionsrecht hinauszielen, nicht unter Sünde" cannot be treated "unter Sünde." See Barion, "Kirche oder Partei? Römischer Katholizismus und politische Form," in Barion 1984, 506. The Church is supposed to stay away from political discourse. Barion was quite aware that his 1965 essay did not support the position of his friend. See Marschler 2004, 406f).

⁴ A letter to Jacob Taubes dated 24 May, 1977 stresses the distinction between a moral judgment of Schmitt because of his participation in the NS-regime, which he explicitly and polemically (against Taubes) rejects, and a philosophical critique, which he considers as both appropriate and necessary. (See BW 260f). Taubes's description of the Schmitt-Blumenberg controversy suggests that he either did not fully understand or he misrepresented

Blumenberg's approach. See Taubes, *Die politische Theologie des Paulus*, ed. Aleida and Jan Assmann, Munich 1993, p. 95

⁵ In this context it is curious that Blumenberg, for whom the latent Gnosticism of medieval theology is the unresolved problem of the Middle Ages which could only be overcome by the Enlightenment, did not recognize or at least not foreground the Gnostic elements in Schmitt's work.

⁶ See also Schmitt, 1984, S. 49f, where Schmitt emphasizes the formal nature of law and its adaptability to different positions of power.

⁷ Günter Meuter, *Der Katechon. Zu Carl Schmitts fundamentalischer Kritik der Zeit*, Berlin, 1994, S. 213, notes the similarity between Schmitt's view and that of the Protestant theologian Wilhelm Stapel, "Versuch einer Metaphysik des Staates", in *Deutsches Volkstum*, (Juni 1931), H. 6, 409-419. The affinity to certain forms of Protestant theology has to be kept in mind.