

Politeja

No. 3(72), 2021, pp. 21-49

<https://doi.org/10.12797/Politeja.18.2021.72.02>

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THE THEOLOGY OF CARL SCHMITT¹

ABSTRACT The paper addresses the theology of Carl Schmitt. Schmitt often stresses his ‘natural born Catholicism.’ At the same time he also claims repeatedly not to be a theologian in the professional sense. On the other hand, his main ideas like the concept of the political (*Der Begriff des Politischen*), the public character of the church (*Römischer Katholizismus und politische Form*), and finally, his *Politische Theologie II* in reaction to Erik Peterson’s refutation of *Politische Theologie I* show that Schmitt’s ideas imply deep and problematic theological positions. The role of the *katechon*, or the Grand Inquisitor and his criticism of Peterson’s patristic arguments, especially the rejection of the anti-Arian reasoning of Gregory Nazianzen show a markedly unorthodox theological stance reminiscent of Charles Maurras’ political Catholicism. Schmitt’s transcends patristic orthodoxy in order to apply his historically conditioned 19th-century theology to sacralizing his idea of the political.

Keywords: Carl Schmitt, Erik Peterson, *katechon*, Catholicism, political theology, Church, institutions, secularisation

¹ The Hungarian version of this article was published as ‘Carl Schmitt teológiája’ in: *Carl Schmitt jogtudománya. Tanulmányok Carl Schmitttről* [The legal thought of Carl Schmitt. Studies on Carl Schmitt.] Szerk. Cs. Kiss Lajos, Budapest 2004, pp. 260-290. Bibliotheca Iuridica. Acta Congressuum 9. [On the theology of Carl Schmitt.] I thank Rachel Hideg for the translation. All remaining shortcomings are mine. Andra Juganaru offered valuable help in preparing the manuscript. For Bible quotations, I follow the New King James version.

*It is good to conceal the secret of a king,
but to acknowledge and reveal the works of God
(Tobit 12:7)*

The post-second world war interrogator of Carl Schmitt described him as *undurchsichtig*, or lacking in transparency. This impression prompted Schmitt to undertake his own self-examination. In a collection of writings in which he reflected on his post-war imprisonment, he described himself as a ‘contemplative,’ someone with a tendency to acuity but not to attack or counterattack.² His self-description was that of a man more comfortable in the role of defendant than accuser. In fact, he was even more inclined to assume the role of inquisitor than that of accuser. He noted that *[t]his may have its roots in theology*.³ This was in keeping with his view that jurists occupy a position halfway between technological rationality and theology. At the same time, he insists categorically elsewhere that he is a *non-theologian*.⁴

Within the ‘Carl Schmitt labyrinth,’⁵ one can aspire to a meaningful analysis only if both these positions are viewed in context. It is in fact true that Schmitt was not a theologian, if we think in terms of the doctrines of traditional ‘systematic theology.’ Indeed, he does not discuss his views on the existence or essence of God, on the divine attributes, or on questions of Christology. He stated on several occasions that he would not venture to debate with theologians on the question of the Trinity.⁶ At the same time, however, all of Schmitt’s weightier ideas implied a direct or indirect connection with theology. He, more than anyone, was acutely aware that political theories are based on anthropological presuppositions, that the concepts of history and eschatology are interdependent, and that the unity or separation of the political and the theological is the outcome of the most fundamental decisions of faith. While few people have shed more light on these interrelationships than he did, Schmitt alludes to their theological consequences in the form of erudite references only and does not deal with them explicitly and *per se*. It is precisely for this reason that whatever arcane, hidden relationships there are in Carl Schmitt’s thinking, concealed behind the magic words of political theory and technical legal reasoning, they are to be found in the field of theology.⁷

However, these concealed theological relationships cannot, of course, be discerned from references to clearly identifiable sources. Referring to his own activities, Schmitt

² C. Schmitt, *Ex captivitate salus. Erfahrungen der Zeit 1945/47*, Köln 1950, p. 10.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 89.

⁵ The expression is quoted by B.A. Laska from G. Maschke (B.A. Laska, *Katechon und Anarch: Carl Schmitts und Ernst Jüngers Reaktionen auf Max Stirner*, Nürnberg 1997, p. 1)

⁶ C. Schmitt, *Politische Theologie II. Die Legende von der Erledigung jeder Politischen Theologie*, Berlin 1990, p. 101.

⁷ It is often assumed that the title itself, *Ex captivitate salus*, is a hint, as if referring to his own monogram. The reference to Max Stirner on pp. 80-83 might have a similar function. B.A. Laska, *Katechon und Anarch*, p. 15 and *passim*.

claims that everything he says is *purely juristic*. Thus, for example, under the rubric of ‘political theology,’ he discusses the structural identity problems of theological and juridical concepts arising from a legal theoretical and technical perspective. His investigations remain, in principle, within the framework of ‘legal history and sociology.’ He is keen to quote the methodological observation made by the professor of civil law Albericus Gentilis from Perugia, who is regarded as one of the founders of international law: *Silente theologi in munere alieno!* ‘Keep silence, theologians, in matters that concern others.’⁸

Elsewhere, however, Schmitt agrees with Helmut Plessner, who argued that *there exists no philosophy and no anthropology which is not politically relevant, just as there is no philosophically irrelevant politics.*⁹ In certain instances, ‘philosophy’ can also be understood as ‘theology.’¹⁰ These implicitly theological perspectives emerge in the context of the most profound problems in the existential sense. History, the theological foundation of the state, and the separation of religion and the state are not, after all, abstract issues but concepts related to the organization of daily life, which are materialized as much in politics as in law. The principle of the separation of academic faculties, as postulated by Albericus, can thus scarcely be preserved in practice, nor indeed does Schmitt make any sincere attempt to do so. The inevitability of the metaphysical foundation of the philosophy of law, if we consider it seriously, precludes the possibility of such a separation.

It is only in one of his early, shorter papers, *Die Sichtbarkeit der Kirche*¹¹, along with the two longer works, *Politische Theologie*¹² and *Römischer Katholizismus und politische Form*, that Schmitt explicitly formulated definite, explicitly theological opinions.¹³ Other than these, we regard indispensable for a more profound reconstruction of Schmitt’s theological opinions the work *Politische Romantik*,¹⁴ and, even more emphatically, *Der Begriff des Politischen*,¹⁵ which has likewise theological implications and whose elucidation contributes fundamental perspectives alongside the three works referred to above. Schmitt’s biographical writings, and especially *Ex captivitate salus* and *Glossarium*,¹⁶ contain numerous references that are for the most part traceable only

⁸ C. Schmitt, *Politische Theologie II*, pp. 107, 111.

⁹ Idem, *Begriff des Politischen. Text von 1932 mit einem Vorwort und drei Corollarien*, Berlin 1996, p. 60.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

¹¹ C. Schmitt, “Die Sichtbarkeit der Kirche. Eine scholastische Erwägung”, in idem, *Die Militärzeit 1915 bis 1919. Tagebuch Februar bis Dezember 1915. Aufsätze und Materialien*, Berlin 2005: Summa 1 (1917-1918), 2. S., pp. 71-80.

¹² Idem, *Politische Theologie*, München–Leipzig 1922. Magyarul: *Politikai teológia* (ford. Paczolay Péter), Budapest 1992.

¹³ Idem, *Römischer Katholizismus und politische Form*, München 1925.

¹⁴ Idem, *Politische Romantik*, München–Leipzig 1925.

¹⁵ The first version of *Der Begriff des Politischen* was published in the *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaften und Sozialpolitik*, no. 58 (1927), pp. 1-33.

¹⁶ C. Schmitt, *Glossarium. Aufzeichnungen der Jahre 1947-1951*, E. Freiherr von Medem (ed.), Berlin 1991.

by readers well-acquainted with his oeuvre, and which the author does not systematize within a more extensive theoretical context. These quotations can, of course, help in the interpretation of earlier books and papers; however, when invoking them, we must bear in mind that they were born out of resignation that resulted from the second world war and other causes, and as such they conceal complex mechanisms of self-exculpation. Of significance from a theological point of view is the later polemical essay *Politische Theologie II*, written as late as 1969, in which Schmitt attempts to respond to Erik Peterson's refutation of his book *Political Theology*.

In what follows, I refrain from exploring biographical aspects apparent in the development of Schmitt's thinking, with the exception of one single question. This biographical question can be stated as follows: Does the implicit theology of the 'avowedly Roman Catholic' Schmitt belong within Christianity at all? First, therefore, we must examine the kind of theology that is inferred by Schmitt's thinking, as only then will we be able to answer the fundamental question whether this conceptual structure can in fact be referred to as Christian.

In order to evaluate Schmitt's implicit theology, we must necessarily examine the normative concept of Christianity. For a historian, this is an extremely delicate task. Historians are not, after all, theologians, which means they are unable to propose an unbiased, normative definition by reference to the interpretation of present-day official Church teaching. The task is more complicated than the examination of Schmitt's relationship towards the spiritual trends of the contemporary Roman Catholic Church. This was the path chosen by the historian Manfred Dahlheimer, who essentially analyzed Schmitt's links with German Catholicism between 1888 and 1936, two important dates in his biography.¹⁷ According to this approach, Schmitt's unique concept of theology can be understood from the perspective of the conditions prevailing in Germany at the beginning of the 20th century. Besides, Dahlheimer's analysis further clarified the methodological observations made by Helmut Quaritsch, who insisted on Schmitt's '19th-century Catholicism,' since his understanding of theology was shaped by the later model of Western Christianity as defined by the Council of Trent (1545–1563) and by the First Vatican Council (1869–1870). One aspect peculiar to this model was the fact that, although in the early 20th century the 'Church Triumphant' had briefly emerged as a spiritual sanctuary for those disillusioned by the liberal state in the wake of the cataclysm of First World War, in spiritual terms the Church was nevertheless still defined by the ongoing battle for the preservation of its political role in Europe and against its relegation into the background in the increasingly secular nation states. The Catholic Church's spiritual-political battle was thus essentially a rear-guard action in favor of restoration and anti-modernism directed against the ideas of the French Revolution and the secularization of the nation state.

Clearly, it would not be inappropriate to regard Schmitt as a 'child of his times,' since, following Edward Caird, he himself regarded metaphysics (and thus also theology) as

¹⁷ M. Dahlheimer, *Carl Schmitt und der deutsche Katholizismus 1888–1936*, Paderborn–Munich–Vienna–Zürich 1998.

*the most powerful and clearest depiction of an age.*¹⁸ In this understanding, therefore, Schmitt's political theology itself would be a reflection expressive of a historical period that could be identical only to itself.¹⁹ Caird's adage, however, would force us to understand the historical periods of European thought as unique 'monads.' The introduction of such 'monads of time period,' however, would preclude the possibility of comparing the metaphysics and theology that most powerfully express Schmitt's 'period' with *other* metaphysics and theologies, since, once again, these latter would be the most powerful expressions of other periods exclusively and, as such, could resemble only themselves. One-off, unrepeatable periods of time can of course be examined from a 'conceptual-sociological' perspective, but only in themselves, since in principle they do not allow for comparison. Scrupulously observed, Schmitt's methodology, which he radicalized following Weber, rules out the recognition of possible alternatives to a theological (or metaphysical) doctrine and thereby the definition of their intellectual 'place value.' By isolating time periods, this method represents the modern historical denial of the validity of the principle that 'in tradition there is nothing earlier or later.'

This principle of interpretation is known in this form as early as from the Talmud, and in fact it can be seen as a common presupposition in general Christian theological practice before the emergence of the history of dogmatics, as, for example, in the treatment of *sic et non* problems in collections of medieval patristic texts. Without this presupposition, the unity of teaching could not be preserved. (A further theological, or more precisely, salvation-historical, problem underlying the concept of 'time periods' is discussed below.)

Since we have no reason to adhere to the theory of 'monads of historical periods,' we will examine the place occupied by Schmitt's position within the spectrum of mainstream Christian theology. In order to provide a characteristic representation, we will consider the wider background of theology of the Great Church before the Carolingian age as a frame of reference. This patristic frame of reference, complemented with certain medieval aspects, represents a more articulate, less constrained context, and therefore seems more appropriate than restricting ourselves to Latin Western theology of the 19th century.

Finally, it is important to ask what kind of investigation can be undertaken by a historian of philosophy in relation to Schmitt's theology. It is not, of course, an investigation of the validity of the question. However, historians of philosophy are able to resolve the conflict between a normative and a descriptive analysis, since they examine the potential consequences of particular concepts, and the extent to which those consequences can be reconciled, as well as the extent to which they contradict one another and the respective theological frame of reference. Thus, to be precise, what the analyst is able to do is to examine the consistency of the picture that emerges if we compare the

¹⁸ C. Schmitt, *Politische Theologie II*, p. 56.

¹⁹ The remark of Quaritsch that Schmitt was influenced „from many sides” is correct in this sense. H. Quaritsch, „Einleitung: über den Umgang mit Person und Werk Carl Schmitts”, in idem (ed.), *Complexio oppositorum. Über Carl Schmitt. Vorträge und Diskussionsbeiträge des 28. Sonderseminars 1986 der Hochschule für Verwaltungswissenschaften Speyer*, Berlin 1988.

consequences of Schmitt's ideas with the tradition of Christian theology understood in the above sense, considered as normative for itself, especially in the patristic age that can be regarded as the 'shared past' of Christianity. (Incidentally, Erik Peterson regarded Early Christian theology as a frame of reference in relation to Schmitt for similar reasons.) In the event of possible contradictions, the task of deciding does not lie with the analyst, although, if the analysis has been performed correctly, the analyst will be able to indicate the point at which the decision becomes problematic, or indeed where it arises.²⁰

THE CATHOLIC SCHMITT

In the interpretation of Schmitt's theology, analysts typically regard the problem of subjective religiosity as one that goes without saying. In light of biographical data, however, Schmitt's Roman Catholic faith is often misleadingly presented as uncomplicated. This begs the question: What really lies behind the frequent and diverse formulas that are used to express Schmitt's personal convictions? Although we have no reason to be skeptical about Schmitt's sincerity, we must nevertheless examine the question of whether this personal conviction, and the objective statements that are the sole tangible manifestation of these convictions, are consistent with Christian, or in a more narrow sense Roman Catholic, tradition. In one of his more widely known quotations, Schmitt describes his Roman Catholicism as follows: *I am as Catholic as the tree is green (...). For me, the Catholic faith is the religion of my fathers. I am Catholic not only by confession, but rather also by historical extraction – if I may be allowed to say so, racially (die Rasse nach).*²¹

This quotation is a fine example of Schmitt's rhetorical diversity. In a well-intentioned reading, the reference to the 'greenness of trees' can be understood as a reference to the famous words of Tertullian, that is, to the concept of the 'naturally Christian soul,' *anima naturaliter christiana*.²² Schmitt, however, is probably not referring to Tertullian, but rather to the historical embeddedness of existence, and his words can be understood as a confession. At the same time, the second sentence can be counted among those with which we, in Central and Eastern Europe, are all too familiar, especially in the specific context in which the person states their 'non-Jewish' descent. A more benign reading of this confession is also possible, of course, if we do not interpret the statement referring to lineage in relation to the controversial distinction between 'Jew

²⁰ Contemporary theologians were not favorable to Schmitt's idea. The Lutheran Karl Barth, the catholic Ernst Michel, or Hans Barion rejected Schmitt's 'political theology.' On the debate of Schmitt with his greatest opponent, the Catholic convert Erik Peterson, see G. Geréby, "Political Theology versus Theological Politics: Erik Peterson and Carl Schmitt", *New German Critique*, vol. 35, no. 3 105 (2008), pp. 7-33.

²¹ Quoted by H. Quaritsch, *Positionen und Begriffe Carl Schmitts*, Berlin 1989, pp. 33-34; and R Mehring, *Carl Schmitt zur Einführung*, Hamburg 1992, p. 169.

²² Tertullian, *Apol.* 17. PL 1: 377A.

and Christian.’ Theologically, however, the more indulgent understanding is also extremely problematic, and as such has a retrospective impact on the first sentence. It is not only that, in the given historical period, it is highly questionable to leave the expression ‘racially’ without further clarification, but it also remains obscure how this reference is related to another famous statement by Tertullian, according to which *Christians are made, not born*; this is explained by Augustine as meaning that *a person can become a Christian not by birth, but only by conversion*.²³

According to Christianity’s own interpretation, it is only possible to convert to the Church, which, theologically, means the following: a person *becomes* a member of the Church not by birth, but exclusively through faith – that is, no one is born a Christian. It is only possible to profess – that is, *accept and follow* – the confession of faith expressed using the Hobbesian formula (‘Jesus is the Christ’) that was so dear to Schmitt’s heart, but, based on the definition of faith, one cannot *be born* into the utterance of this statement. This fact is apparent in the constitutive concept of the Church itself. The *ecclesia* calls forth, or summons, a person from their life before faith, from paganism or from the Old Testament, like Paul, and it invites or calls on them to join the Church. The Church as a *people* does not come into being on the basis of bloodline, but is established through the sacraments, and above all by baptism, the liturgy, and the Eucharist.

From a theological point of view, descent exists only in the case of Jews as the Chosen People, for whom the theology of the Covenant establishes blood descent on the basis of the promise made to Abraham: *Then I will make my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers*.²⁴ The ‘increasing’ of the chosen people, however, is likewise a theological promise, not a natural outcome, as demonstrated by the alternative of the Church.

The above quote is not merely an element of Schmitt’s thinking that has been taken out of context. In *Römischer Katholizismus und politische Form*, Schmitt reflects that Catholics are more attached to their ‘mother country,’ as it were, than Protestants, who have a different relationship to the land.²⁵ Quoting Max Weber’s theory of disenchantment, but evaluating it in the opposite sense, Schmitt essentially claims that the Protestant separation of nature and grace paved the way for the technological rationalization of the world. In a similar way Romanticism forced nature back into the domain of mysticism, while in the sphere of nature, severed from grace, it created alienated, materialistic, potentially ubiquitous industrial culture. By contrast, Catholic peoples, who do not separate nature and grace, develop organically with the lands they inhabit, remaining faithful to them and establishing cities that merge into the land with natural humanitarianism.²⁶

This theory, sketched in broad brushstrokes – or, in its slightly more refined form: this ‘big narrative’ – not only illustrates the nostalgia felt by Schmitt for the landscape

²³ Tertullian, *Apol.* 18. PL 1:378 C. valamint Augustin. *De Peccat. Meritis et Rem.* c. 9.

²⁴ Gen 17:2.

²⁵ C. Schmitt, *Römischer Katholizismus...*, pp. 14-15.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 14 sq.

of Tuscany or Andalusia, but also demonstrates Schmitt's desire to elaborate an idealized counterpoint to industrial society. Rather than providing a historical or sociological description, Schmitt formulates an ideological presupposition. From a historical perspective, Schmitt's narrative ignores, for example, the Huguenots of Southern France and the Lutheran peasants of Mecklenburg, as well as the Hungarian Protestants and the Protestant communities of the American Midwest. These rural populations were far from building an industrial civilization. In a similar way, Schmitt's vision also neglects classic counterexamples, such as the predominantly Catholic industrial regions of the Ruhr Valley, Northern Italy, or Catalonia. This *a priori* picture, which is both historically and sociologically inaccurate, is based on the presupposition according to which Schmitt identifies the possibility for the organic unity of people and land with Catholicism, which does not recognize any separation between grace and nature. However, the division, or lack of division, between nature and grace, *natura* and *gratia*, is an opposition that in fact emerged only after the Reformation and was previously unknown. The famous principle stated by Thomas Aquinas that *gratia non tollit naturam sed perficit* ('grace does not destroy nature, but perfects it') expresses the pre-Reformation principle of the goodness of the created world. Divine intervention and the appearance of grace do not, therefore, necessitate the destruction of nature, since grace is not in opposition to nature. Nor indeed could they be in opposition, since nature, by virtue of creation, is, from the very beginning, the manifestation of God's grace.²⁷

What is innovative in Protestant theology is not that it challenges this fundamental statement, but that it questions whether the salvation of humans can be achieved without the grace of God that comes from beyond and above nature. According to Protestantism, the possibilities inherent in created nature are in practice sufficient only for sin. This debate, however, is not about nature in general, but about the natural potential of humans. Thus, while Schmitt exaggerates the Protestant viewpoint in the interests of contradicting it, he also oversimplifies the Catholic viewpoint. The Catholic approach does not deny the necessity of grace either, but regards the relationship between God and humans as closer and more committed. It in fact interprets the role of human responsibility, and the possibilities for it, even more broadly than Calvinism, which is based on the notion of strict separation, or the Lutheran Reformation, which was built on the idea of salvation through faith alone. Schmitt thus transforms the theological difference that is expressed in the relationship between God and human beings into a difference that is materialized in the relationship between nature (land) and humanity (peoples).

The concept of 'nature' is not that of innocence, that is, it does not essentially allude to the emotive image of 'cherry blossom.' Its relative definition defines a theology in relation to God, or rather grace, while thereby characterizing a historical period. When Schmitt disregards the fact that, in patristic thought and in the Middle Ages,

²⁷ *The dogma of Original Sin promulgated by the Council of Trent is not radical in any simple way. In contrast to the Lutheran understanding, the dogma asserts not absolute worthlessness but only distortion, opacity, or injury [of the human nature] and leaves open the possibility of the natural good.* (C. Schmitt, *Political Theology*, transl. by G. Schwab, Chicago-London, 2005, p. 57.)

the concept of 'nature' meant first and foremost divine and created nature, and in the context of the latter emphatically human nature, he is relegating to parentheses the fact that the question is originally related to the extent of the loss suffered by human nature as a result of original sin. Did this nature become entirely corrupt, as stated by the elderly Augustine and later Calvin, or rather was its ability to fulfil its natural destination corrupted by original sin and the resulting mortality? As a consequence of Schmitt's distortion, no mention is made of the collective nature of original sin or of the significance of redemption in salvation history. Instead, however, he does suggest the connection between people and 'land' – that is, it ultimately becomes a prop supporting the concept of *völkisch*, or folk.

In light of the above, Schmitt's 'Catholicism', in its slide towards ethnicity, is anything but the universal Church summoned from the peoplehood of Early Christianity. We can observe its relevance to the ultramontane political Catholicism of the *Action française* in one of his extremely characteristic historical analyses in his book *Leviathan*, also in relation to the issue of anti-Semitism:

Since the Congress of Vienna, the first generation of emancipated younger Jews broke into the mainstream of European nations. The young Rothschilds, Karl Marx, Börne, Heine, Meyerbeer, and many others occupied, each in his circle of activity [Operation-gebiet], places in the fields of economics, journalism, the arts, and science. Stahl-Jolson was the boldest in this Jewish front. He penetrated the Prussian state and the Evangelical church. The Christian baptismal sacrament provided him not only with a "ticket of entry" into "society," as was the case with the young Heine, but with an identity card that admitted him to the sanctuary of the still respectable German state. From high governmental positions he was able to confuse ideologically and paralyze spiritually the core of this commonwealth, kingship, nobility, and the Evangelical church. He knew how to convey to Prussian conservatives and to the king the necessity to designate "constitutional" kingship as the salvation from parliamentary monarchy. He thus focused on the inner political enemy, namely "constitutionalism" upon which the Prussian military state collapsed in October 1918 under the strain of World War I. Stahl-Jolson, in accordance with the line developed by his people, used a deceitful manner to mask his motivation, which became all the more horrible the more desperate he became to be somebody other than he actually was.²⁸

In his own copy of the work, Schmitt's contemporary, acquaintance, and one-time admirer, the Turin-born conservative Catholic philosopher of law Alessandro Passerin d'Entrèves, marked this paragraph with a heavy line in the margin, adding the comment '*porco!*' (swine!). Passerin d'Entrèves's comment is apposite. This is the lowest point in Schmitt's text. Not only because he is claiming that Friedrich Julius Stahl-Jolson (1802–1861), a once widely respected conservative Prussian lawyer and politician who had died 70 years earlier, had *deliberately* contrived to bring about the collapse of the Prussian state, more or less implying Stahl-Jolson's prophetic foresight or demonic tutelage.

²⁸ C. Schmitt, *Der Leviathan in der Staatslehre des Thomas Hobbes. Sinn und Fehlschlag eines politischen Symbols*, Hamburg 1938, p. 108. English: *The Leviathan in the State Theory of Thomas Hobbes: Meaning and Failure of a Political Symbol*, transl. by G. Schwab, E. Hilfstein, Chicago 1996, p. 70. I thank Nina Prentice, who allowed me to use the copy of her grandfather.

Nor only because of the gesture of insulting ‘constitutionalism’ in 1938, thereby adding a new stylistic gesture to the ‘leadership principle,’ or because, by using the expressions ‘front’ and *Operationsgebiet*, he is legitimizing by stylistic means the internal war being waged against Jews, the opportunity for which he had already established in 1932 with his concept of ‘internal political opposition.’²⁹ The most sinister rhetorical flourish of the ‘Christian’ Schmitt is rather connected with the baptism of Stahl-Jolson and of the creators of the ‘Jewish front’ in general. Alluding to the example of Heine, Schmitt insinuates that, in their efforts towards assimilation, these Jews in fact received baptism through deceit and insincerity. They saw it as a disguise that would entitle them to benefits, while they continued to preserve their original Jewish ‘mentality.’ On the subject of baptism, however, as a scholar well versed in canon law Schmitt should have been well aware that canon law does not recognize the concept of the ‘Jewish race,’ while it does recognize the indelibility of baptism. Having received baptism, the Jew is just as Christian as anyone else, and any eventual apostasy or ‘secret Jewishness’ – as we know from Spanish history – is an issue for Church law rather than a racial, that is, secular matter.

Apparently in harmony with this attitude on Schmitt’s part is the fact that, during the wave of conversions in the 1920s, when many people appealed to him as someone who publicly and emphatically professed himself to be Catholic, he regularly dismissed such petitions in the case of both Protestants and Jews. While his conduct is entirely consistent with an understanding of Christianity based on origins, it is fundamentally inconsistent with the teachings of Christianity on the sacrament of baptism. This being so, it is still possible to regard Schmitt a ‘19th-century Catholic,’³⁰ as Quaritsch did in 1986, by emphasizing his ‘non-liberal Catholicism,’ although this leaves a great deal unsaid. Erik Peterson, whom we discuss below, was not a liberal Catholic either, and yet not only did he not write anything like the sentences above, but he also knew why it was not *permissible* for a Catholic to voice such sentiments.

THE POLITICAL AND THE GRAND INQUISITOR

Let us return for a moment to Schmitt’s enigmatic comment, quoted above, that he considers himself to be closer to the role of inquisitor than to a *j’accuse*-style indicter.³¹ Schmitt also mentions elsewhere that the enigmatic figure of the Grand Inquisitor in Dostoevsky’s novel *The Brothers Karamazov* was a symbol of key significance for him.

In the tale, the Grand Inquisitor, whom Dostoevsky intimates to be a Jesuit,³² stands on the side of Satan against Christ, following the realization that he can identify the

²⁹ See C. Schmitt, *Der Begriff des Politischen*, ch. 5, especially p. 31.

³⁰ H. Quaritsch, *Einleitung...*, p. 21.

³¹ C. Schmitt, *Ex captivitate salus*, p. 11.

³² The ‘Jesuit element’ is an important concept since according to the grand historical schemes of Schmitt it is the antagonistic counterpart of Protestantism. Jesuitism is associated with the power on land, while Protestantism is associated with maritime power, powers originating from each other. See C. Schmitt, *Land und Meer*.

sociological weakness of Christ's message. The vast majority of the human race is not up to the task, that is, they are far too weak to wait until the Second Coming. The salvation of the majority of humanity would not, in practice, be possible based on Christ's original responses to Satan's temptations. Human beings are afraid of freedom. In order to relieve them of their intolerable burden, the Grand Inquisitor takes away human freedom in order to ensure their happiness. The formula is as follows: people firstly want to eat, and this being the case, the Grand Inquisitor is able to ensure social order at the cost of freedom, because this is the precondition for bread. Hence, having one's fill of bread is incompatible with freedom. Christ, however, rather than taking away people's freedom, expands it even further. But humans are incapable of bearing such a burden. Weak, powerless, wicked and rebellious as they are, humans can only be made happy by miracles, mystery, and authority – or in other words, power. Towards the end of the tale, Dostoevsky's Grand Inquisitor talks about the secret aspiration of conquerors, a unified empire that extends throughout the world. The authority of the universal state, and the universal peace that goes with it, however, are impossible without authority over souls and without bread. The Church, according to the Grand Inquisitor, has taken up Caesar's sword, and in so doing has of course denied Christ. At this point Dostoevsky has him say something extremely striking: the Grand Inquisitor prophesies an era of chaos and cannibalism, thus of sin and violations taken to their extremes, but he also foretells that, in the end, the beast of humanity will crawl back to the Church, which will take its seat upon the beast's back, raising the cup engraved with the word 'Mystery.' The Church alone has knowledge of the mystery that saves humanity from itself.

The language and imagery are apocalyptic and are a direct allusion to Revelation 17.³³ Dostoevsky's tale can also be read as an independent commentary on this passage. The Church, which alone has knowledge of the mystery, as an institution whose very task it is to bring about the happiness of humanity, must shoulder the accursed burden of rectifying the error of its founder. To do so, however, it must turn against the teachings of its founder, exterminate his followers, and even regard Christ himself as heretical. This is suggested, for example, by the reference to the woman sitting on the beast's back being 'drunk with the blood of the saints.'

In the intellectual context of the early 20th century, the tale of the Grand Inquisitor was one of the most important elements in the reception of Dostoevsky.³⁴ Schmitt interprets the challenge in such a way that he deliberately aligns himself on the side of the Grand Inquisitor, in opposition to Dostoevsky. He had already referred to this

³³ *So he carried me away in the Spirit into the wilderness. And I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast which was full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns. The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls, having in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the filthiness of her fornication. And on her forehead a name was written: mystery, Babylon the great, the mother of harlots and of the abominations of the earth. I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus. And when I saw her, I marveled with great amazement.* Rev 17:3-6.

³⁴ M. Dahlheimer, *Carl Schmitt...*, p. 103.

problem in the 1924 work *Römischer Katholizismus*: For Schmitt, anarchism that satanizes form – thus rejecting the Church that emerges as a secular power – is in reality atheism.³⁵ The Grand Inquisitor acknowledges that he has given in to Satan's temptations, since he is aware that *human beings are by nature evil and abject, cowardly rebels who have need of a master, and the priests of the Roman Catholic Church alone have sufficient courage to take upon themselves the entire burden of damnation that goes with such power*.³⁶ For Schmitt, in this tale Dostoevsky projects his own potential atheism onto the Roman Catholic Church. The anarchist, of course – by definition – denies the possibility of *arkhé*, or authority, and by so doing also ultimately denies the authority of God. It makes no difference that he denies authority by alluding to its evilness and inhumanity, when it is an inevitable aspect of the secular world and its rejection would result in 'the most evil inhumanity.'

Among the post-war observations contained in the *Glossarium*, Schmitt quotes the statement by Jacob Burckhardt, according to which 'power is in itself evil,' adding that the remark contains *more atheism and nihilism than Bakunin's entire oeuvre. Who knows today that this very sentence means "God is dead"?*³⁷ According to Jan Assmann's explanation, since for Schmitt there is *no authority other than God*,³⁸ anyone who regards authority as evil is in fact denying the existence of God.³⁹

Later on in the *Glossarium*, Schmitt returns to the image of the Grand Inquisitor. He compares Dostoevsky's concept with Hobbes's experiment. According to Schmitt, the famous formula summarizing the essence of Christianity, 'Jesus is the Christ,' lies at the margins of Hobbes's conceptual system, or indeed perhaps even beyond the margins. With his elevation of Christ into a cultic figure, Hobbes is merely pursuing on more scientific grounds what the Grand Inquisitor does: to render harmless Christ's message in the social and political sphere, or, in other words, to 'de-anarchize' Christianity.⁴⁰ Schmitt poses the following riddle: Who comes closer to Dostoevsky's Grand Inquisitor: Hobbes's sovereign, or the Roman Church? According to Schmitt, the Reformation and the Roman Church are intertwined in a single tenor. Everyone is defined by their enemy, he claims, adding here the first line of the famous enigmatic distich: *The enemy is our own question given form*.⁴¹

According to Schmitt authority is the necessary form of human existence. In Chapter 7 of the *Concept of the Political*, we find the explanation for this interdependence.

³⁵ C. Schmitt: *Römischer Katholizismus und politische Form*, p. 44.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ C. Schmitt, *Glossarium*, 3.10.48, p. 201.

³⁸ Romans 13:1.

³⁹ J. Assmann, *Herrschaft und Heil. Politische Theologie in Altägypten, Israel und Europa*, München-Wien 2000, p. 24.

⁴⁰ C. Schmitt, *Glossarium*, 23.5.49, p. 243.

⁴¹ Ibid. Concerning the epigram 'Der Feind ist unsre eigne Frage als Gestalt // und er wird uns, wir ihn zum selben Ende hetzen,' and its arcane meaning, see B.A. Laska, *Katechon und Anarch*, p. 24 sq and 41 sq.

The anthropology of the distinction between friend and enemy coincides perfectly with what is attributed to the Grand Inquisitor in *Römischer Katholizismus*: human beings are, by their very nature, evil. The terminology used by Schmitt in relation to human beings directly quotes the Grand Inquisitor: humans are ‘undisciplined’, ‘corrupt’, and ‘restless,’ that is, erratically changing beings.⁴² This corresponds to the theological dogma of the ‘sinfulness’ of humans. *There is thus a clear methodological connection between theological and political presuppositions*, according to Schmitt.⁴³

The other role of the Grand Inquisitor adopted by Schmitt, as we have seen, is to ‘withhold’ chaos. The concept of ‘withholding’ has a theological dimension as well. This enigmatic term is used by the Apostle Paul in 2 Thessalonians 2:6, when he talks about how the appearance of the *man of lawlessness, the man doomed to destruction* is prevented by what is *holding him back*.⁴⁴ (Dostoevsky’s tale also clearly incorporates this passage into its theology, alongside the Book of Revelation.) In keeping with the above, according to Schmitt the Grand Inquisitor, or rather the Church, is the *katechon*, the ‘one who withholds,’ in the form of a person, or, taken in the neutral, general sense, ‘that which withholds’ in the form of a thing or impersonal institution that protects the world from anarchy and from the shallow, empty, and thus inhuman and godless formlessness of existence without the political.⁴⁵ Towards the end of his life, Schmitt stated in a conversation with Jacob Taubes, *anyone who failed to see that the Grand Inquisitor was right about the sentimentality of Jesuitical piety had grasped neither what a Church was for, nor what Dostoevsky, contrary to his own conviction, had really conveyed, compelled by the sheer force of the way in which he posed the problem*.⁴⁶ According to Schmitt, the separation of the political and the sacred, and of secular and spiritual power, has catastrophic consequences. The reestablishment of original unity, however, can be accomplished only by the church of the Grand Inquisitor as the organ of secular power, or rather it can be achieved by the sovereign leader secularized as decision maker through the political theological analogy of the one and only sovereign God. In this way, that which ‘holds back,’ or ‘restrains,’ can be, in Schmitt’s view, only the secularized state, which can be created from both its secular and spiritual directions, which, as a secular

⁴² C. Schmitt, *Begriff des Politischen*, p. 42.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

⁴⁴ *Let no one deceive you by any means; for that day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshipped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God. Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things? And now you know what is restraining, that he may be revealed in his own time. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only He who now restrains will do so until he is taken out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming.* 2 Thess 2:3-8.

⁴⁵ It was probably Erik Peterson, his friend in Bonn, who called his attention to the theological significance of the concept of the *katechon*. H. Quaritsch, *Complexio oppositorum*, p. 230. B. Nichtweiss, *Erik Peterson. Neue Sicht auf Leben und Werk*, Freiburg i. Br.–Basel–Wien 1994, p. 740.

⁴⁶ J. Taubes, *Ad Carl Schmitt. Gegenstrebiges Fügung*, Berlin 1987, p. 15 (Great Inquisitor) and p. 73 (*katechon*).

sovereign, is the only suitable means of establishing the politics that are essential for the maintenance of human society. In this way, the 'one who holds back' is the state that personifies the human predicament and the political, as well as the sovereign, who personifies the state, and, of course, the ideologist of the state.

In Schmitt's interpretation, there is yet another peculiar twist connected with the indeterminateness of the theological role of the 'one who holds back.' The 'one who holds back' clearly plays a role in salvation history. The question is whether that role is negative or positive. Is the role of the one who holds back the revealing of the man of the end of days sanctified or endured? Before we reply, we should remember that in Schmitt's interpretation, this role is defined *in opposition to the world of Christ*, but yet *as a part of it*. As Schmitt stated: *I believe in the catechon: As a Christian, it is for me the only possible way to understand history and to find it meaningful.*⁴⁷ Schmitt is not saying that what he believes in is the *corrected* Christianity of the Grand Inquisitor, the temporal state that reunites the sacred and the secular.

THE CHURCH

When Schmitt emphasizes the rationalism of the (Roman Catholic) Church, what he ultimately finds exemplary is the construction of a *secular* institution, whose distinguishing feature, as we have seen, is the unification of nature and grace. Schmitt defines this as legal and institutional rationalism, which differs essentially from scientific rationalism. The latter – and here once again we recognize a concept that is taken from Weber – is what separates grace and nature, and considering the latter as an entirely autonomous domain, he places it below economic/industrial/technical thought, in which rationalized production is associated with irrational consumption.⁴⁸ The Church, however, is an 'eminently political' institution,⁴⁹ which, precisely because of its political character, cannot countenance the separation of the two spheres. The essence of the political, however, is, on the one hand, representativeness or public display, while on the other hand it is authority and inner conviction. This internal strength is built on the specific representation that the Church, as a public 'greatness,' depicts the human community, or *civitas humana*, and the concrete and personal historical relationship between the incarnation and sacrifice of Christ.

It is this principle that ensures for the Church the possibility of outward form, or representativeness. Representativeness is governed by the concept of personal authority, which alone lends dignity to the representing and the represented, and which differs essentially from the impersonal relationships of a corporation.⁵⁰ The triple manifestation of the form that lies at the foundations of the political is the *aesthetic form of the*

⁴⁷ C. Schmitt, *Glossarium*, 19.12.47, p. 53.

⁴⁸ Idem, *Römischer Katholizismus...*, p. 20.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 22.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 29.

*artistic, the juridical form of law, and the splendor, as a form of power, of world history.*⁵¹ Based on this concept of the Church, Schmitt demonstrates that there can be no possible alliance between the Catholic Church and ‘capitalist industrialism’ until capitalism takes on an explicitly political, that is, state organizational and as such itself representative, form. Pending an alliance between throne and altar, there can be no alliance between ‘throne and office’ or ‘throne and factory’ until they achieve an equivalent form. The alliance between ‘throne and altar’ is irreconcilable with the alliance between ‘state and economic considerations.’

The key to Schmitt’s understanding of the Church is its spatial character. *The church of Christ is not of this world and its history, but it is in this world. This means that it is localized and opens up a space; and space here means impermeability, visibility and the public sphere.*⁵² Schmitt consistently rejects the possibility of separating the ‘two powers,’ the spiritual and the secular. The two powers are located in a common space, not in two separate, disconnected spaces. The historical space of the public sphere, where all sociological forms must appear as social institutions, does not allow for the version of religion as a ‘private matter.’ Schmitt theoretically excludes the consignment of religion to the private sphere, which is essentially the founding principle of the secular state.⁵³ The Carolingian-age *Laudes* begins with *Christ conquers, Christ reigns, Christ commands.*⁵⁴ The Church that represents such Christ is inevitably an institution that constitutes the same world along with other human institutions, such as kingdoms.

The understanding of the Church as a political institution and as a historical entity (‘greatness’) again points to a theological concept. However, since the *Laudes regiae* of the Carolingian age did not emerge before the 8th century, we again face here a phenomenon peculiar to the West.

There are many ways in which the Church can be a representative institution that belongs to the public sphere. The ‘alliance of throne and altar’ appears as nothing other than a historical contingency. The very notion of alliance has already been laid claim to: There is an alliance between God and people, or between God and humanity, but not between kingship and church, as it is shown by the origin of Biblical kingship in 1 Samuel 8.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 30. Translation in: W. Styfals, S. Symons (eds.), *Genealogies of the Secular: The Making of Modern German Thought*, New York 2019, p. 170.

⁵² C. Schmitt, *Politische Theologie II*, p. 50. Translation: *Political Theology II: The Myth of the Closure of Any Political Theory Carl Schmitt*, transl. by M. Hoelzl, G. Ward, Cambridge–Malden, MA 2016, p. 79.

⁵³ Schmitt’s rejection of the separation of the secular and the sacred shows up as the main argument against the West in the works of the ideologue or radical Islam. Sayyid Qutb. Ld. P. Berman, “The Philosopher of Islamic Terror”, *The New York Times*, 23 March 2003.

⁵⁴ Schmitt alludes to the Carolingian acclamation: *Christus vincit, Christus regnat, Christus imperat*. This formula, the *Laudes regiae* (= *Laudes Hincmari*), often attributed to Hincmar (†882), had been present already in the 8th c. in the so-called ‘Ambrosian’ liturgy. The widespread acclamation was used in a coronation liturgy first for Charlemagne, but after that it became part of the coronation liturgies in Britain, France, and other royal ceremonials. See L. Duchesne (ed.), *Liber Pontificalis*, t. II, Paris 1892; E.H. Kantorowicz, *Laudes Regiae*, Berkeley 1946.

According to Schmitt, the role of ‘the one who withholds,’ or the Grand Inquisitor, makes intelligible, on the one hand, the fact that, under the heroic burden of the pressure of this role, moral responsibility must be renounced in the interests of establishing an order that keeps the world together. Schmitt systematically eliminates the concept of responsibility: he considers morality unacceptable due to its implicit individuality. In his *Römischer Katholizismus*, Schmitt had already stated that all feeling and sentiment are trite.⁵⁵ Going even further, in the sense of the position he expresses in *The Concept of the Political*, he rejects the moral, justice-related evaluation of war: the necessary and sufficient precondition for one nation to go to war against another is that it considers the other to be a threat.⁵⁶

As a lawyer, Schmitt apparently did not want to see in the famous passage in the Gospel of St. John the eschatology that opposes what exists: *My kingdom is not of this world*.⁵⁷ There are many passages in the New Testament with a similarly political character: *Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.”*⁵⁸ *Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power.*⁵⁹ Thus it is the incompleteness of salvation history, the awaiting in the present for the end of days, and not the intention to prolong it, that stands behind the famous lines in *Hebrews*: *For here we have no abiding city, but we look for the city to come*⁶⁰ or *But our citizenship is in heaven, and we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ,*⁶¹ which is echoed by all Church theology, beginning from the martyrologies. In the words of Speratus, spokesman for the Scillitan martyrs, *I recognize not the empire of this world!*⁶² Speratus is expressing what Tertullian said using a different formulation: *We look upon ourselves as citizens of the world.*⁶³ The Old Testament image is concealed, but it is spelt out in Philo, disguised in Hellenistic terminology. The world is related to God as a city is related to a law-giver. This relationship, however, can exist exclusively between one city (the world) and one law-giver (God).

In this final period of history, between the Resurrection and the Second Coming, nationhood, secular power, and history are not significant concepts for Christianity in the sense that they are no longer of consequence in terms of salvation history. Only one moment is important: the *eschaton*, or the end of time. In biblical thinking, nationhood

⁵⁵ C. Schmitt, *Römischer Katholizismus...*, p. 44.

⁵⁶ See F. Grossheutschi, *Carl Schmitt und die Lehre vom Katechon*, Berlin 1996, p. 113.

⁵⁷ Jn 18, 36.

⁵⁸ Mt 28, 18.

⁵⁹ 1 Cor 15, 24.

⁶⁰ Hebr 13, 14.

⁶¹ Phil. 3, 20.

⁶² J.A. Robinson (ed.), *Acta Scillitanorum martyrum sive Passio Sperati et sociorum, The passion of S. Perpetua*. Texts and Studies 1.2, Appendix, Cambridge 1891 (repr. Nendeln, Liechtenstein: Kraus, 1967, pp. 113, 22).

⁶³ Tertullianus, *Apol.* 38. PL 1:465C.

is not a 'natural' condition, but something that developed in the wake of the Fall of Babel, and which can thus be seen as a punishment. The Church that came into being in the wake of Christ's act of redemption proclaims the return of God's people from this separated nationhood, living under sin, to a universal (Catholic) unity.⁶⁴ When Schmitt refuses this unity alluding to *nature*, he does so in the name of a profoundly non-biblical concept.

For Schmitt, the notion of the homogeneity of the final days is not acceptable, because in that case he would have to ignore visible history. Instead, Schmitt elaborated the historical theology of great 'historical forms.' More than a simple periodization of historical time, he means substantive periods, which are thus in some way significant in salvation history. This can be seen from the fact that Schmitt alludes to the Trinitarian theology of history espoused by Joachim de Fiore – and to Hegel – and notably to the fact that every new historical period needs political-theological legitimation.⁶⁵

At the same time, paradoxically, the conceptual assumption of the 'progress' of theology is in itself an intervention in theology. It is absolutely not self-evident that the religious institutional system, and thus the methodology used for the external description of theological changes, that is, a secular terminology – independent of the fact that it also has theological roots, since a philosopher qualified in theology developed the expansion of the objective spirit by generalizing the concept of salvation history – is projected back or called to account in a religious system. Within Christianity, there is no concept of development, since the period between the Incarnation and the Second Coming is not relevant from the point of view of salvation history. This period is the final age of salvation history, the 'third age,' *tertia aetas*, the 'new law,' *nova lex*, the end of which will coincide with the Last Judgement. This explains why Thomas Aquinas, referring to Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, rejects the theology of history proposed by Abbot Joachim of Fiore. Between the old law and the 'celestial country' there is only the new law of the Gospel.⁶⁶ Nothing can divide this single period, neither the 'period of the spirit' nor the theological fiction of the 'eternal gospel' that surpasses the New Testament.⁶⁷

POLITICAL THEOLOGY AND MONOTHEISM

There is something dangerously appealing in the concept of 'political theology,' a term introduced by Schmitt in 1922. In his analysis of sovereignty, which is also fundamental to secularized political science, and of the concept of the decision, Schmitt endowed this fascinating compound term with theoretical significance, and ever since it has acted

⁶⁴ E. Peterson, "Das Problem des Nationalismus in alten Christentum", in *Frühkirche, Judentum und Gnosis. Studien und Untersuchungen*, Roma–Freiburg–Wien 1959, pp. 51-63.

⁶⁵ C. Schmitt, *Politische Theologie II*, p. 93.

⁶⁶ Thomas Aquinas 4SN ds. 1. q. 1. a 2. r.1. and STheol 3a. q. 61 ar.4 r.1.

⁶⁷ H. Barion, *Kirche und Kirchenrecht. Gesammelte Aufsätze*. Herausgegeben von Werner Böckenförde, Paderborn–München–Wien–Zürich 1984, pp. 602-604.

as a magnet for the apocalyptic tendencies of political thinking of both the right and the left.⁶⁸ Identified with the sovereign lawgiver, the creator from nothing, the concept of the sovereign who is capable of ‘miracles’ in the declaration of a state of emergency provided the opportunity for the introduction of a secularized image of God.

In keeping with this concept, Schmitt presents his own activities as the *concealing of holy goods*, the protection of the Church’s treasures (*Bergung heiligen Gutes*).⁶⁹ In this self-definition, what is apparent above all is that he is again defining as a secular task something that, based on its content, would have almost a prophetic function. In his observations written after the war, Schmitt talks of how the modern lawmakers of the day, *when they brought the holy vessels from the church to the state, did not do so with the intention of desecrating or destroying them. They wanted to save what could be saved from the devastation of the wars of religion. They did not intend to commit blasphemy. They were doing no more than attempting to conceal the holy goods. Their intention was good and honourable, even if the historical consequences turned out otherwise.*⁷⁰

The concept of ‘political theology’ raises the possibility of revoking the Reformation that separated religion, as the private sphere, from the world, as the public sphere, as well as the modernity symbolized by Reformation. At the same time, Schmitt regarded this separation as the principal criterion, and simultaneously the most dangerous element, of ‘Jewish thought.’ Schmitt’s great realization is that of the opportunity for original reunification, which, furthermore, takes place not by the revocation or re-awakening of the past, but in a new dimension. This new dimension is nothing other than the theory of secular politics. Schmitt finds a place for theology precisely in the establishment of a secularized state, and in this train of thought he is able to ensure with a new methodology that the ‘essence’ of religion is preserved without its religious appearance. ‘Political theology’ thus achieves something enormous, in so far as it provides an opportunity to answer the fundamental question that emerges in the guilty conscience of the Enlightenment: How can the religious be preserved in the modern, secularized world? So far so good, but this question leads directly to another: Among the various antagonistic components, which will eventually take control over them all?⁷¹

Jan Assmann summarises Schmitt’s political theology as follows: *behind the thesis that all essential concepts of political science originate from theology lies the postulate that in the beginning spiritual and worldly power, salvation and sovereignty, religion and politics,*

⁶⁸ The early reception of Schmitt’s *Political theology* included the Dadaist Hugo Ball (1886-1927), the conservative canon lawyer Hans Barion (1899-1973) or from an opposite side Walter Benjamin (1892-1940). After the 1960s the new German, French and American reception is of a similarly composite character, from Leo Strauss (1899-1973) to Jacob Taubes (1923-1987), or Giorgio Agamben. J. Taubes, *ibidem*, p. 14. sköv.

⁶⁹ C. Schmitt, *Ex captivitate salus*, p. 72.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.* See also F. Scholz, “Die Theologie Carl Schmitts”, in A. Schindler (ed.), *Monotheismus als politisches Problem? Erik Peterson und die Kritik der politischen Theologie*, Gütersloh 1978, p. 168.

⁷¹ It is hardly by chance that until recently the Anglo-Saxon reception of Schmitt was minimal. The powerful version of Atlantic modernity relied on the Protestant separation of private religion and secular polity. Schmitt questions precisely this axiom, and therefore had to be kept under the table.

basically formed one single unity, and the modern division of power between church and state is an illegitimate aberration.⁷² According to Assmann, Schmitt's conceptual analyses were ultimately intended to demonstrate that it was the Jews who destroyed this original unity.⁷³ It is striking, however, that the introduction of the concept does not in itself offer an unequivocal solution to the *direction* of the relationship between the two spheres. The structural analogy might just as well lead to the discovery of a new place for religion as to the perfect accomplishment of secularization. If, according to its political essence, it is combined with theology, then the direction of their association becomes the deciding question: Which one of them influences the other? Does the existing analogy between politics and theology point to the inevitability of theology, or, on the contrary, does theology turn out to be nothing more than a tool for the legitimization of the political? If the political assumes the structure of theology, then the secular becomes sacred, to all intents and purposes. This reasoning might be taken as a kind of argument for natural theology.

However, in principle, the analogy works in the other direction, too: What happens if it is the political structure that defines the structure of theology? This latter position is that adopted by Jan Assmann, who has recently attempted to demonstrate, based on a range of historical material, the ways the political structure provides a key to the understanding of the theology of a particular period. Turning on its head Schmitt's famous statement, Assmann represents the viewpoint that *every essential concept of theology is a political concept moulded into theology*.⁷⁴ Since Schmitt did not rule out this latter aspect either, the concept of 'political theology' exerts an exceptional attraction for political thinking of both the right and the left, since by raising the possibility of a secularized context for theology, it offers the most striking and most productive conceptual tool for the interpretation of the nature of secularization.

This *complexio oppositorum* points to the most important dilemma. Does political theology have a theological dimension, and if so, what kind? Does the new dimension, that of secular theologization, not prove to be more problematic than it appears at first sight? Or, to pose the question more precisely: What is the theological framework of presupposition in Schmitt's political theology? Can it be regarded Christianity? Does this extremely powerful concept offer an adequate or a false perspective from the point of view of Christian theology?

Erik Peterson, Schmitt's former friend, a scholar of Church history and patrology, explicitly denied this possibility in his famous book written as early as 1935. Peterson contradicted Schmitt in two respects. On the one hand, he denied the possibility of constructing a secular analogy of Trinitarian theology; and on the other hand, he denied the possibility for a secular empire to have a bearing on salvation history. In his analysis of the historical-theological debate concerning the Roman Empire, Peterson even rejected the *katechon* of the Grand Inquisitor. In his first precept, Peterson refers

⁷² Ibid., p. 24.

⁷³ J. Taubes, *Ad Carl Schmitt*, p. 73.

⁷⁴ J. Assmann, *Herrschaft und Heil*, p. 29.

to the Trinitarian theology of the Cappadocian fathers, and primarily to the five famous orations of Gregory of Nazianzus. In countering Schmitt, Peterson quotes the relevant religious typology of the second chapter of the third theological oration, although he might just as well have quoted the fifth oration or even St. Gregory of Nyssa.⁷⁵

In the third theological oration, Gregory summarizes Christian theological teaching about the unity of God in the context of the Arian debates emphasizing the absolute monarchy of the Father. Gregory distinguishes between three principal theological opinions: The first opinion is anarchy, which claims that there is no sovereign god. The second is polyarchy, which presents a plurality of supreme deities, that is, the divine world having several governing principles of equal rank; and the last is monarchy, where there is a single supreme god. 'With the first two the children of Greece amused themselves, and may they continue to do so.' Anarchy means a lack of governing principle, thus, for example, a world governed by chance, exemplified by the world of the Epicureans and Atomists, for instance. According to Gregory, polyarchy, with its factions, is no better, as it involves incessant conflict among the gods, as, for example, in the divine world depicted by Homer. Indeed, both are anarchic and lacking in order. Characteristic of both is the absence of order and the stable bonds of mutual relationships. The third possibility is monarchy, and here Gregory alludes to Plotinus, for example. In reality, however, monarchy in itself would not preclude conflict, since the individual can also come into conflict with itself, in so far as *unity establishing plurality is self-discordant*.⁷⁶ Christians differ from all these, because although they value monarchy the most highly, this monarchy is not reduced into a single person. The monarchy of the Christian is *a 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. In this case, although it is distinct with respect to number, yet it is not divided into three individuums*. This trinity has no corresponding example in the created world. In thinking about the origins of the Trinity, one must put aside all experience and observation. Gregory refers to philosophers who compared the 'overflow of goodness' with 'an overflowing bowl,' but he rejects this image as inadequate. A physical image is incapable of expressing the birth of the Son and the origins of the Spirit that are outside time, immutable, and insubstantial.

Peterson makes use of this train of thought to demonstrate that for Gregory, political theology is impossible. In the writings of Gregory, it is precisely the possibility of such an analogy between the created world and the divine world that is lacking for Christians, an analogy that is given in any monotheistic religion, despite all the potential differences. According to Peterson, political theology can be established in the case of the divine hierarchy of Homer, the metaphysical monotheism of the Greek philosophers, Jewish monotheism as represented by Philo, as well as the Arian Christians (i.e., those who do not think in terms of Trinitarian theology). However, it is not the case for the orthodox Christianity of the established Church.

⁷⁵ This is the third of the famous *Theological Orations: Orat. 29. De filio. (Oratio theologica 3.) c. 2.*

⁷⁶ Gregory's allusion is possibly to Plotinus, *Enneades* V.2.1.

For a theology that accepts the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, the divine peace of the Trinity can have no analogy in the natural world. The peace and harmony between the three persons of the Trinity as described by Gregory goes beyond all possible comparison. There can be no natural, secular example of the peace of the Trinity, since the relationship between the world and God worshipped as the Trinity is not natural, but it is a personal relationship built on Creation and the Incarnation of the Word. Thus, the Trinity cannot, in principle, be imitated by immanent means.⁷⁷ Human will cannot bring about this relationship nor can it appear of itself. From the perspective of 'political theology,' this also means that it cannot emerge as 'historical greatness.' This same idea, the Christian rejection of the theology of 'monarchy,' can be found underlying chapter 17 of the fifth oration, in which Gregory argues with a fellow theologian who essentially acknowledges the three persons of the divinity but does not dare to say that they are 'of one essence.' This theologian refers to the fact that 'one essence' means the common essence of several things that differ in number, thus the 'three persons of one being' in the Nicene Creed could not stave off the charge of tritheism, and therefore, with its use of the concept of 'consubstantiality,' the Nicene Creed itself would recognize polyarchy or polytheism. Gregory responds to this strategy by saying that the abandoning of consubstantiality would be the kind of victory gained by *those who hang themselves for fear of death*. He goes on to say: *For to save yourselves trouble, you have championed monarchy and thereby denied the divine nature*. Thus, Gregory regards the rejection of the apparently obvious idea of monarchy to be the correct option, that is, in keeping with the typology of the third oration quoted above.

This concept appears almost incomprehensible to *present-day Western* Christian ears. It is not by chance that the *Orations* of Gregory were not translated into Latin in the Middle Ages, nor that accessible modern translations give a biased misrepresentation of his latter argument: by replacing 'you embrace' with 'you reject,' they have rendered the argument intelligible for their Latin eyes, and have given it the opposite meaning.⁷⁸

Mistranslations by translators with an excellent command of the language cannot be accidental. As Freudian slips, they illustrate the symbolic but profound significance

⁷⁷ A misguided criticism of Peterson's patristic arguments was published by A. Mrówczyński-Van Allen, "Beyond political theology and Its liquidation: from Theopolitical monotheism to Trinitarianism", *Modern Theology*, vol. 33, no. 4 (2017), pp. 570-593. Unfortunately the author mixes up terminologies and misses the main points of Peterson's position.

⁷⁸ The first Latin translation of the *Theological Orations* was done by Jacobus Billius in 1589. It was followed in 1571 by the Basel edition of Leuvenklavius. A decisive event in the reception happened in 1778 when the most modern edition of the times, the Maurist edition (by the Benedictine Abbey of St. Maur), supplemented the Greek text with Billius' translation. Then Abbé Migne, in his immensely popular *Patrologia Graeca* series, also printed the Billius translation (1857-66). The Jesuit H. Hurter, in his *Bibliotheca SS. Patrum* Latin series, again adopted Billius' version in 1875. Billius version thereby became standard, and even the translation of Frederick Williams misreads the text precisely in the way Billius did. F.W. Norris, *Faith Gives Fullness to Reasoning. The Five Theological Orations of Gregory Nazianzen*, Leiden–New York–Kobenhavn–Köln 1991, p. 244-245. The widespread modern confusion of the terms 'monotheism' (instead of monarchy) and 'atheism' (instead of 'anarchy') shows that the translators have difficulties in imagining the times when the theological and the political were not yet separated.

of this problem. Katalin Vidrányi frequently referred to the Western Latin ‘cryptomarchian’ tendency.⁷⁹ This hidden ‘monarchianism,’ which emphasizes God as one indivisible being in contrast to the Trinity, is also apparent, for example, in a famous argument used by Thomas Aquinas. ‘*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 government by one. (...) as all things desire good, so do they desire unity (...). Therefore the intention of a ruler over a multitude is unity, or peace. Now the proper cause of unity is one. For 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 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 (Metaphysics xii): “Things refuse to be ill governed; and multiplicity of authorities is a bad thing, therefore there should be one ruler.”*⁸⁰

Let us compare this argument with the theological orations of Gregory. It is not the case, of course, that Thomas Aquinas is professing Arian theology in any sense of the word; but it is the case that for him the Unity is primary and the Trinity exists alongside it, while Gregory clearly maintains unity alongside the primacy of the Trinity. The two tendencies separate two worlds: the patristic world and the world of Western Christianity. Here, therefore, we can agree methodologically with Schmitt on two points: on the one hand, it is clear from the analyzed example that in the decision, in the choice between two possible textual interpretations in the present case, it is possible to perceive the theological form; and on the other hand, *metaphysics* is in fact *the most intensive and the clearest form of expression of an epoch*.⁸¹

This reasoning is the keystone of Peterson’s argument. It points to the fact that there is no *analogia entis*, no analogy of being, between the internal relationship of the Trinity and any kind of created trinity. The order of the cosmos is indeed what it is on the basis of a sovereign decision, and not on the basis of an internal relationship or metaphysical order. The theological argument means that secular power cannot be legitimized with the help of ontological analogy. The cosmos, the order of the created world, is not determined by some kind of superior metaphysical law, but only by the creative will of the Trinity.

We might even go further: the biblical legitimization of political order takes place precisely in opposition to political theology. In this respect I do not agree with Peterson’s

⁷⁹ Katalin Vidrányi was my teacher, a brilliant scholar who published very little during the communist era. I have worked out her hint in G. Geréby, “Hidden Themes in Fourteenth-Century Byzantine and Latin Theological Debates: Monarchianism and Crypto-Dyophysitism”, in M. Hinterberger, C. Schabel (eds.), *Greeks, Latins, and Intellectual History 1204-1500*, Leuven–Paris–Walpole, MA 2011, p. 183-211.

⁸⁰ See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* 1.103.3. c., at <<https://www.newadvent.org/summa/1103.htm>>, 12 March 2021. Also *Contra Gentes* 1. 42. n7.

⁸¹ C. Schmitt, *Politische Theologie II*, p. 56.

interpretation of Philo with respect to Jewish political theology. In the eighth chapter of the first book of Samuel, when the people demand a king to rule over them in place of the judges, God tries to dissuade them. God does not tell the people that, yes, they have at last understood the cosmic analogy. On the contrary, the people refer to the example of the nations around them, and they want a similar arrangement for themselves, that is, an arrangement based on the analogy of the phenomena of the world. In this way, therefore, the dogma of the Cappadocians, the orthodox image of the Trinity and the Old Testament relationship between the people and God all exclude the possibility of political theology, as Jacob Taubes appears to be clearly aware of.

Peterson's other argument is directed against the eschatology of the Grand Inquisitor and his image of the Church. We have seen what Schmitt regarded as important in the form of the Church as institution: the model of aesthetic, legal, and 'world historical' power. In contrast, Peterson considers the Church's eschatological mission its crucial feature. The Church is indeed a model, in this he agrees with Schmitt, in so far as it bears public witness to its affiliation in the liturgical acclamations as God's people. At the same time, the Church is aware that in the last moment it will cease to be, along with its sacraments, because in the heavenly Jerusalem there will be no baptism, no confirmation, and no forgiveness of sins, only one heavenly liturgy, of which the Church on earth merely celebrates an 'earthly prototype.'

Peterson analyzes at length the patristic debate in connection with the providential nature of the Roman Empire. Both Hippolytus⁸² and Augustine, the former radically and the latter more subtly, refuse to concede that the empire had any kind of theological substantiation. *This world in its present form is passing away*, says Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians.⁸³ No earthly institution can consider itself to represent the perfection of the end of days now. In a symbolic summary, Peterson quotes a saying of the 4th-century 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 the monarch of the whole earth.*⁸⁴

One might add to Peterson's weighty arguments that the precept is connected with the fundamental question of politics, the distinction between friend and foe. Schmitt rightly says that the ultimate, founding motif of the political is raised in the question *Quis iudicabit?* (Who decides?). Schmitt's question in fact lays the foundation for the introduction of the concept of sovereignty. He may also be right in establishing the analogy that in the decision-making structure is presupposed by his political concept, sovereignty is the equivalent of God. The problem, however, is the question of authority, especially in a biblical context. Is it in fact possible for human beings to arrogate this authority to themselves? If we regard the most important elements of Schmitt's concept of God to be sovereignty, creation from the void, and the power to work miracles, then

⁸² Hippolytus, *In Daniele* IV. 9.

⁸³ 1 Cor 7:31.

⁸⁴ Gregory of Elvira, *Tractatus (Ps.) Origenis*, Paris 1900, p. 195, 13. Quoted by E. Peterson, *Göttliche Monarchie*, p. 563; *Der Monotheismus*, p. 70. See C. Schmitt, *Politische Theologie II*, p. 46.

indeed an earthly sovereign as a political definition, and thereby as the founder of the state, may be the earthly replica of God.

However, this decision, taking the biblical context as given, is not a human task. The world has already decided once: and in the wake of the decision against God the community of sin came into being. There is a decision, but this was just one decision, that of the world, or, more accurately, of humanity. The sovereignty of humans, however, is only required but is not sufficient for the decision on the relationship between God and the world. But there is another actor in the story as well. And here we arrive at another key theological concept in Greek patristics: Divine philanthropy.⁸⁵ Although God could do so, since humans decided against him, yet he still does not abandon his creation. God decides for humanity. He did this once with creation itself, and he did it a second time, according to the patristic theologians, and moreover with the greatest of gestures, the Incarnation. This is what is meant by the concept of *philanthropy*. God, however, decided for philanthropy: He is *the one and only mankind-lover*. (Theology thus borrows a term that is well-known and established as an attribute of Hellenistic rulers.) In light of this essential decision, it is not possible to decide over friend and enemy only here on earth. A human decision cannot represent the decision of God, even at the cost of structural similarity. God decides between friend and enemy.

After the second world war, Schmitt made the following observation in his diary concerning the elimination of the Jews, which by that time was common knowledge: *As God allowed hundreds of thousands of Jews to be killed, he simultaneously saw the revenge that they would take on Germany; and that which he foresees today for the avengers and those demanding restitution, humanity will experience in another unexpected moment.*⁸⁶ This concept of God, expressed in this dispassionate image, considers only the natural, but not the revealed, order of things, or, more precisely, it disregards the *predetermined* divine order in the revelation and clearly ignores the conceptually different commandments of the New Testament – *Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world*⁸⁷ – and, ultimately, the Day of Judgement.

CONCLUSION

We have examined Schmitt's theological position with respect to the implicit consequences of his fundamental legal and political ideas. He characterizes this position in his diary, recalling his relationship with his former friend Theodor Haecker: *This is the secret key to my whole intellectual and scholarly existence: the battle for the essentially Catholic intensification (against neutralizers, aesthetic dreamers, against abortionists,*

⁸⁵ Bishop D. Kristitch, *On Divine Philanthropy. From Plato to John Chrysostom*, Athens 1983.

⁸⁶ Schmitt, *Glossarium*, 19.11.47, p. 45. Translation in E. Ben Ze'ev, R. Ginio, J. Winter (eds.), *Shadows of War: A Social History of Silence in the Twentieth Century*, Cambridge 2010, p. 85.

⁸⁷ James 1:27.

*desecrators of corpses and pacifists). Theodor H. did not accompany me on this path to Catholic intensification (...).*⁸⁸

In the case of world historical and salvation historical problems, the results of Schmitt's 'Catholic intensification' were rather peculiar. A little earlier before the observation in the *Glossarium* quoted above, he talks about the Tower of Babel. *Great strengthening from Konrad Weiss again, Creature of the Word: the Babylonian tower of neutralising linguistic unity.* "Today even the confusion of language is better than the Babylonian unity," which means: anarchic chaos is still better than nihilistic centralisation and constitution. Referring to the medieval mystery play *Ludus de Antichristo*, Schmitt adds: *The katechon is recognisable therein that it does not strive for the unity of the world but rather lays down the emperor's crown.* Here, he is alluding to the fact that, according to the *Ludus*, the emperor of the end of days places his crown at the foot of the cross in Jerusalem.⁸⁹

Schmitt's 'Christianity' is the immanent theology of an unredeemed world, to which every image and central concept is subordinated and made comprehensible. The world is sin and linguistic confusion, and the world of the consequences that go with it. In the world, racial characteristics are stronger than the sacrament of baptism, the presupposition of the fundamental goodness of human nature is false, and, by analogy, transcendence, or God's sovereignty, is the emerging immanent meaning of secular political structures. The Grand Inquisitor is the ideologue of this world and the ruler of the *katechon*, that which holds back the apocalypse, which is identified with anarchy.

In my view, the substantive examination of Schmitt's Catholicism presents some peculiar features. One cannot find in it the concepts of the Trinity, nor of divine philanthropy, compassion, mercy, and forgiveness, and especially the remission of sins. Similarly, the possibility of the figure of Christ and his Church as a mystical body, and of the idea of God's universal people, are lacking. Schmitt's far-reaching and lucid rhetoric is the embodiment of an extraordinarily erudite *gnostic* thinking and world view that were built on esoteric sources and were essentially characteristic of the German cultural environment of the day. This, in contrast to the explicit profession of Christianity, projects a non-Christian image of society and history arising from a heroic morality and an organic metaphysics; an image that is Pagan, since it departs from the idea that the world is unredeemed. Certainly, this is not the historically well-known gnosis, but a kind of its modernized version, which, characteristically for our times, disguises what are in fact powerful myths as secular concepts.⁹⁰ According to Schmitt's myth, the world continues to be evil – but we cling to it as to the domain where heroic deeds are possible. The important thing is not peace, which would come about as 'entertainment' as a result of 'economic thought,' but division maintained by means of the political, and thus the

⁸⁸ C. Schmitt, *Glossarium* 16.6.48, p. 165. T. Rohkrämer, *A Single Communal Faith? The German Right from Conservatism to National Socialism*, New York–Oxford 2007, p. 187, n. 15.

⁸⁹ Ibid. The Myth of the Last Emperor: P.J. Alexander, "The Medieval Legend of the Last Roman Emperor and Its Messianic Origin", *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, no. 41 (1978), pp. 1-15.

⁹⁰ This is the view of Erik Peterson, quoted approvingly by Schmitt. B. Nichtweiss, *Erik Peterson*, p. 740.

possibility of battle, in which, at least for the few, there emerges the possibility of heroism, which he considers to be truly human and worthy of human beings. Schmitt is able to think of peace only 'from within,' that is, from the unredeemed world. *I do not know if this condition of the Earth and humanity will come to be, and if yes, then when. It does not yet exist for the time being.*⁹¹ In *The Concept of the Political*, he rejects the peace that can be expected from a unified world empire as the substantive society obliterated by means of the world of 'entertainment,' in which only individual strategies can be conceived while the 'strategy of the peoples' will be absent. Schmitt rejects such a world – which he identifies with liberalism and democracy – with manifest disgust. The world that must be maintained is a political 'pluriverse,' where truly worthy human life, the human world built on the differentiation between friend and enemy, is truly possible.

The divine philanthropy that manifests in the relationship between God and humanity, sacrifice and redemption, the Church with its eschatological mission and the judgement of the end of days, the peace of the Trinity that is without earthly parallel, the ineffable and unparalleled unity of the two natures, the plan of the Lord of History that surpasses human understanding, necessarily bring with them the separation of the secular and the spiritual, the duplication of the swords of power. Thus, when we talk of Schmitt's 'Catholic intensification,' we are obliged to acknowledge that Schmitt wants nothing other than to step back behind this division. In Schmitt's understanding, the task of law is the *katechon*, the withholding.⁹² Against his wishes, however, this activity of 'obstruction' is linked to the Antichrist, whose activity has already begun, *For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; but the one who now holds it back will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way.*⁹³ If, however, the myth believed by Schmitt, and of which he had personal experience, the Grand Inquisitor's myth of atheist theocracy, comes to an end here, if he could rightfully forget that, despite the coming of the 'son of lawlessness and destruction,' finally 'the Lord will overthrow him with the breath of his mouth and destroy him by the splendor of his coming,' then indeed, as neatly put by Jacob Taubes, *we breathe our last western breath.*⁹⁴ But this myth has not come to an end.

The theological elements of the 'political theology' expounded by Schmitt, thus the concepts of the *katechon*, the 'decision,' the 'exception,' and the differentiation between friend and enemy, at least as they are defined by Schmitt, if they have any theological perspective at all, then this perspective cannot be placed within the framework of orthodox Christianity.

In the present study, I have attempted to demonstrate that, as regards its essence, the Schmittian perspective that transcends orthodoxy is something usurped and used for the sacralization of the political.⁹⁵ Schmitt uses the myth of the Grand Inquisitor to justify the 'corrected Christianity' of the theology thus created, and in the meantime he

⁹¹ C. Schmitt, *Der Begriff des Politischen*, p. 36.

⁹² F. Scholz, "Die Theologie Carl Schmitts", pp. 168-169.

⁹³ 2 Thessalonians 2:7.

⁹⁴ J. Taubes, *ibidem.*, p. 73. Taubes identified the figure of Great Inquisitor in Schmitt, *ibidem*, p. 15.

⁹⁵ F. Scholz, "Die Theologie Carl Schmitts", pp. 149-169.

need feel no remorse, since after all, Christianity was for him 'Judaism for the people.'⁹⁶ On this point, however, we should not forget about the spiritual relationship, long suspected by many, between Schmitt and Charles Maurras. Maurras's intellectual position is expressed most pertinently, even if somewhat simplistically, in the following epithet that has been attributed to him: *Je suis catholique, mais je suis athée* (I am a Catholic, but I am an atheist).

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⁹⁶ J. Taubes, *ibidem*, p. 25.

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