Research Article

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The Metaphysical Contention of Political Theology

Abstract: The question of the exact role of theology in Schmitt’s political theology remains undecided. Several authors have raised this question and distinct answers have been given. In order to reach an accurate representation of the political–theological dimension in Schmitt’s work, I will attempt an interpretation which takes into account not only Schmitt’s more widely known theses, but also the perceived esoteric and unsaid aspects of his work. Against Heinrich Meier’s prominent thesis, in his The Lesson of Carl Schmitt, of the strict theological nature of political theology, my thesis is that Schmitt gives precedence to the political over theology and that political theology is a theology and metaphysics of the political. Starting from Peterson’s theological objections, centered on Trinitarian dogma and eschatology, I will reconstruct the trail of political theology throughout Schmitt’s work in view of its epitome in the notion of a Trinitarian stasiology and in the figure of the katechon. It is the connection between these two themes which defines Schmitt’s positive and polemical political theology, which can be designated as a katechontic and metastatic political theology. The katechon itself will be defined as the metapolitical and transcendental condition of possibility of the political. The Nomos of the Earth will also be a necessary reference point for the correct understanding of the connection between theology and politics, given the theme of “detheologization,” as well as Schmitt’s lifelong engagement with the problem of the state in the work of Thomas Hobbes.

Keywords: political theology, metapolitics, stasis, katechon, Trinitarianism, eschatology

1 Introduction

What is theological in Schmitt’s conception of political theology? What role does theology play in a specifically political theology. Is political theology a theology in any meaningful sense of the term and, if so, in what way?

These questions have been raised about Schmitt’s political theology and different types of answers have been given.¹ I will attempt here to deal with the presuppositions of this problem in Schmitt’s work

understanding of the problem of a Christian undeclared, political use, by pretending to dictate its own terms to politics, it has the opposite depoliticizing effect. It is only in this mediated way that theology has a proper political form, since in its immediate, but will see, this has to be understood, ultimately, in accordance with a type of historical thinking congruent with theology and jurisprudence, expressed by the idea of a politicizing effect in Schmitt’s thinking serve a fundamental purpose of politicization, not of depoliticization. But it needs to be stressed that this is not a mere inversion of Meier’s position, first, because, for Meier, the theological foundation of politics means that politics is ultimately neutralized and obliterated, while in this interpretation the reverse is not true, i.e., theology is not entirely subsumed in politics, and, second, because the way the two domains relate to each other is complex and without a direct causal precedence of one over the other. The fact that theology itself has a politicizing effect in Schmitt’s thinking does not mean that theology is “instrumentalized” by politics, but is due to the basic structural affinity that Schmitt identifies between theology and jurisprudence, expressed by the idea of a “political form” inherent in theology itself. As we will see, this has to be understood, ultimately, in accordance with a type of historical thinking congruent with the eschatological shape and orientation of the Christian aeon in which we live, according to Schmitt. It is only in this mediated way that theology has a proper political form, since in its immediate, but undeclared, political use, by pretending to dictate its own terms to politics, it has the opposite depoliticizing effect.

My point of departure will be the debate between Schmitt and Erik Peterson, in particular, Peterson’s understanding of the problem of a Christian political theology which would constitute the basis for his rejection of Schmitt’s political theology. This debate has been abundantly discussed, but it will be necessary to briefly analyze some of its aspects, given its importance for Schmitt’s articulation of his final political–theological position around the two points of contention of eschatology and Trinitarianism. Peterson’s critique was the first attempt to redirect the debate on the meaning of political theology to the question of its theological presuppositions and to argue against the possibility of political theology on the basis of eschatology and Trinitarianism. Building upon this basis, this will allow us to perceive how Schmitt, led by Peterson’s objections, ultimately reveals his own metaphysical conception of political theology, which, I claim, can be understood as a synthetic recapitulation of his whole work and of its fundamental purpose. In this sense, the two fundamental axes of this political theology are the katechon and Trinitarian stasiology.

In the search for the integral and positive meaning of political theology in Schmitt, I reject the methodology, exemplified by Montserrat Herrero, which approaches Schmitt’s oeuvre in a fragmentary manner and postulates the existence of different “political theologies” without any synthetic overall meaning, with the exception of political theology understood as a descriptive scientific rubric under the heading of a “sociology of juristic concepts.” In this interpretation, it is affirmed that there is the general scientific

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2 The whole approach rests on a contradiction, which the author enunciates thus: “Schmitt did not promote ‘affirmative political theology’ as a way to practice political theology, even if he practiced several political theologies beyond the initial
account and different tentative political theologies, each one of them based on a specific political–theological analogy, including a “political theology of the sovereign,” a “political theology of state’s representation,” a “political theology of revolution,” and the “political theology of the katechon.” This scheme is helpful to establish a contrast with my own reading of Schmitt, since here I argue, precisely, how all of these supposed different political theologies are in fact different aspects of the same fundamental position. I claim that it is a misperception and a categorical mistake to understand these different thematizations as unconnected analogies or genealogical projects, when, in fact, their unity can be demonstrated precisely by showing how Schmitt’s positive political theology is a theology of the political. Ultimately, it is simply disingenuous to maintain that there is no specific positive scope or polemical purpose in Schmitt’s political theology and that political theology is just a purely scientific project. This is not to deny that there is a scientific and descriptive import in political theology, understood as a theological genealogy of modern political concepts, but it is unreasonable to assert that this is its only meaning.

Böckenförde’s already classical scheme of the three different types of political theology, “juridical,” “institutional,” and “appellative,” where only the first could be properly applied to Schmitt’s project, again in the sense of a descriptive sociology of concepts, which Herrero follows, is also insufficient to describe what exactly Schmitt’s positive and polemical type of political theology is.¹ I claim that this specific argumentation was typical of an initially apologetic phase of Schmittian scholarship which is no longer feasible. Meier, who never once in his book refers to Böckenförde or to his typology, used a specific Straussian idea of an esoteric “art of writing” in order to detect in Schmitt a theological foundation for his thinking. Even though I also consider Schmitt’s positive political theology to be an esoteric and unsaid position, this can be explained not by any sort of obfuscating strategy on the part of Schmitt, but by appeal to the notion of “metapolitics,” where the prefix “meta-” is rigorously understood in all its implications, which will allow us to evidence the performative nature of Schmitt’s theoretical positions and concepts. In order to do so, I will also briefly engage with the work of Matthias Lievens, who applied this concept to Schmitt’s body of work in a productive manner. The understanding of Schmitt’s project as a “metapolitical struggle,” a struggle for politicization itself, against all forms of depoliticization, is key to understanding his own engaged and polemical type of political theology.

In Section 3, I will show how political plurality depends on the conceptual unity of the “political entity,” which is itself defined by the concept of the political, and how the state, as the political agency of the jus publicum Europaeum, became the fundamental instance of politicization in modern jurisprudence and, thus, the primary form of the historical dispensation of the political in modernity, while at the same time being a force of dethelogization. The theme of dethelogization, developed in The Nomos of the Earth, renders eminently problematic the thesis of the theological foundation of Schmitt’s thinking. In Section 4, I argue how “metapolitics” represents the most appropriate methodological approach to and explanation of Schmitt’s esoterism. Not only this, but also Schmitt’s metapolitical struggle, defined as the struggle between the political and the unpolitical, or as the struggle for politicization, constitutes the very decisive trait of his political theology in its polemical sense. This metapolitical struggle is also defined, in figurative terms, as the struggle between the katechon and the Antichrist, wherein the katechon, by prolonging Schmitt’s early idea of the “political form” in a different register, comes to stand for the very transcendental condition of possibility of the political. Next, since Hobbes’s name will recur as a major landmark in Schmitt’s final answer – Political Theology II ends with reference to Hobbes – I will also analyze the way in which the problem of political theology was posed in Schmitt’s 1938 Leviathan book, as well as in

¹ See Herrero, “Carl Schmitt’s Political Theology,” 30. Théodore Paléologue has a similar approach, even though he considers the figure of the katechon to be the pole of attraction of all of Schmitt’s attempts at a positive political theology. See Paléologue, Sous l’Oeil du Grand Inquisiteur.

³ This one constitutes the theme of Herrero’s contribution to the present issue. It is unclear, though, in what way “political theology of revolution” is a befitting designation for the position that Schmitt develops in Political Theology II, as the author pretends, and how the paradigm of stasis or civil war, defined theologically, relates to the concept of the political. This last point will be developed here.

⁴ See Böckenförde, “Political Theory and Political Theology.”
subsequent references to Hobbes, where we can observe a radical shift in Schmitt’s conception of the problematic of the Hobbesian state. This shift is observable in the 1963 Hinweise to the Concept of the Political, as well as in the overlooked, but crucial, 1965 essay Die Vollendete Reformation. Without taking this into account, Schmitt’s final political–theological position is incomprehensible. This analysis will allow us to understand how the themes of the state and of the katechon, as the containment of civil war and disorder, relate to the theological paradigm of stasis, which will be explored in Section 6. The relation and inner coherence of the themes of the katechon and stasis constitutes the main contribution of this article. It is the connection between the katechon and Trinitarian stasiology, which defines Schmitt’s positive political theology, which is, at the same time, katechontic and stasiological, or, more properly, metastatic. It is the nexus between the notions of political form, the katechon, and stasis, which defines Schmitt’s political–theological synthesis, as a theology of the political, implicitly presented in Political Theology II as the summation and epitome of his entire work. Since the presentation of this nexus requires a synoptic view of some of Schmitt’s main themes developed throughout his work, my argumentation will be relatively lengthy and as much as possible exhaustive.

2 Monotheism, Trinitarianism, Eschatology

One way to understand Peterson’s critique is that he considers Schmitt’s political theology as a normative enterprise, according to which, in a secularized context, an analogy could be established between divine or theological monarchy and human or political monarchy, an analogy that would allow the legitimation of political sovereignty, founded in a purely structural way and sharing the same metaphysical structure of divine sovereignty. This critique already contained in nuce what would become the oft-repeated imputation that Schmitt’s secularization theorem stands for a covert way of grounding modern politics in theology, whether on the basis of its historical and genealogical filiation in theology or on the basis of structural analogies between theological concepts and political concepts. This was the implicit meaning of Peterson’s genealogical reference, in Monotheism as a Political Problem, to Arianism, which served as a critical device for a problem contemporary to Peterson, namely that of the instrumentalization of religion by the state or the use of religion for the purposes of legitimizing political power. This reduction of the theological realm to the political realm is what underlies the Petersonian understanding of the notion of “political theology,” which he criticizes in the essay.

For Peterson, the representative of Arian political theology was the imperial advisor Eusebius of Caesarea. Unlike his teacher Origen, who understood the pax Augusta as a providential means for the spreading of the Gospel, Eusebius reinterpreted it as the realization of a unity which was analogous to the monotheistic divinity of the Christian God. This unification was the result of the abolition of national plurality, which implied the constant threat of war and sedition and, therefore, the Roman Empire had already realized the eschatological peace promised by the prophets. Where a pluralistic world implies a polytheistic metaphysics, with the end of the disparate rule of the nations, polytheism loses its political condition of possibility. In this sense, the Roman Empire in its monarchical form was already structurally Christian and it was with Constantine that its monotheistic potential came to be fully realized. Moreover,

6 See Peterson, “Monotheism as a Political Problem,” 93.
7 “Monotheism is the metaphysical corollary of the Roman Empire, which dissolves nationalities. But what began in principle with Augustus has become reality in the present under Constantine. When Constantine defeated Licinius, political monarchy was reestablished and at the same time the divine Monarchy was secured.” Ibid., 94.
Christianity was more metaphysically appropriate as an imperial religion, since it was formally consistent with unitary monotheism. According to Peterson, in his subordination of theology to politics, Eusebius had made a “political choice” for the Roman Empire. Eusebius’ theology would thus be a political theology, structurally similar to pagan political theology, since it conceives of monotheism as a result of a political–metaphysical complex, whereby political realities make possible, through a metaphysical analogy, theological realities. From this point of view, Christian eschatology yields to historical realization and theology is politicized.

In Peterson’s understanding, the primary consequence of the political–theological structure of Arian monotheism is the subordination of the Church to the Empire and, subsequently, the subordination, absorption, or instrumentalization of theology by political power. This structure also grounds the possibility of political totalitarianism, primarily because it has as its central effect the loss of the “eschatological proviso” of the Church, by equating the goals and domains of religion and politics.

For Peterson, this monotheistic political theology would come to an end due to orthodox Trinitarian doctrine, which robbed the idea of divine Monarchy of its political–theological character. This was expressed in a particularly acute way by Gregory of Nazianzus, who “laid to rest monotheism as a political problem” and theologically dissolved the “linkage of the Christian proclamation to the Roman Empire.” As Peterson summarizes it, for Saint Gregory, “there were three options about God: anarchy, polyarchy, and monarchy. The first two assumptions unleashed disorder and revolt in God, and ultimately dissolution. Christians, on the other hand, confessed the Monarchy of God. To be sure, not the Monarchy of a single person of the godhead, for this bore the seed of schism within itself, but the Monarchy of the triune God.” Moreover, since the Trinitarian conception of unity possesses no analogy with the created order, for Peterson, all attempts at founding a political order on the basis of the Trinitarian dogma would be ipso facto impossible. With Trinitarian theology, the derivation of metaphysical monotheism from the imperial monarchy is abolished and the metaphysical sanction of imperial monarchy by a monotheistic theology is abolished as well.

Besides Saint Gregory’s condemnation of purely monotheistic monarchy in the name of the Trinity, Peterson saw another condemnation of Christian political theology in Augustine’s critique of the Augustan peace, which had not really put an end to wars and civil wars, contrary to the assertion of the panegyrists, such as Eusebius, and could not in any way be interpreted as the fulfillment of the eschatological peace prophesied in the Old Testament. This peace could only be realized in the kingdom of heaven at the end of time and as a gift of grace within the Church.

As Schmitt would later summarize it, Peterson’s critique of political theology was articulated according to two axes: Trinitarian theology and eschatology. For Peterson, 1) a correct understanding of the Trinitarian dogma and 2) the recognition of the eschatological dimension of Christianity forbid any political realization of the divine monarchy and invalidate from the outset any political theology. According to Peterson, the dogma of the Trinity and the notion of eschatological peace mark, in the Christian regime, the radical and insurmountable separation of the theological and the political.

As we will see – and this is key to the understanding of Schmitt’s final form of political theology – Schmitt’s answer was strictly equated with these two critical axes, even to the point of proposing a distinct interpretation of the Nazianzene’s words and making it a singular point of contention. Yet, for Schmitt, the core of Peterson’s critique was in fact related to eschatology.

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8 Ibid., 104.  
9 “[...] the doctrine of the divine Monarchy was bound to founder on the Trinitarian dogma, and the interpretation of the Pax Augusta on Christian eschatology. In this way, not only was monotheism as a political problem resolved and the Christian faith liberated from bondage to the Roman Empire, but a fundamental break was made with every ‘political theology’ that misuses the Christian proclamation for the justification of a political situation.” It was, of course, as a footnote to this last sentence that Peterson stated the following: “To my knowledge, the concept of ‘political theology’ was introduced into the literature by Schmitt, Politische Theologie (Munich, 1922). His brief arguments at that time were not systematic. Here we have tried to show by a concrete example the theological impossibility of a ‘political theology’.” Ibid., 233–4.  
10 “[Peterson’s] treatise comes to an end in a very edifying but also over-hasty manner, which disguises and veils the real problem by portraying Eusebius, not so much as one suspected of Arianism on account of his dogmatic but incorrect
be intimately bound to the problem of eschatology. But, in order to understand the meaning and scope of Schmitt’s final reply to Peterson in Political Theology II, which would reframe the problem of political theology, we need first to define what exactly was at stake in Schmitt’s concept and theory of the political and in what way it relates to political theology. Since the scope of this article is limited to the function of theology in political theology, I will not address Schmitt’s “scientific” critique of Peterson’s essay, which performed the more external role of a methodological refutation of some of Peterson’s contradictions, but, as previously stated, I will focus on the esoteric debate and on the true contention at play therein.

3 Pluralism, the State, and Detheologization

Another less explored facet of Peterson’s critique of Schmitt’s political theology regards the problem of nationalism and pluralism. To some extent, Peterson’s enumeration of the different types of political theology, Jewish, Pagan, and Arian tried to force Schmitt, as a political theologian, to see his own position as a reflection of these three types or to reject political theology altogether, if he was to remain a Christian. The pagan model of national pluralism, in particular, raises the problem of whether Schmitt’s political theory can be considered nationalist and therefore pagan.

Heinrich Meier shows clearly that the fundamental issue for Schmitt is not nationalism. Nationalism would be, according to Meier, a specific occasion of what he calls a historical mission or dispensation of political theology, thought of as the nexus of divine revelation and providence in history. For Meier,
Schmitt’s thought would be characterized as responding to a call for historical action, having as its purpose the ordering of human politics to theological ends. Schmitt’s political positions, whose immediate goal would correspond to a strategy of repoliticization, in accordance with his concept of the political, would have as their true purpose and mission the affirmation of divine sovereignty and the reassertion of a moral and theological enmity between political types compatible with this affirmation, even in secular contexts and arrangements, and political (or unpolitical) types structurally incompatible with divine sovereignty.

In my view, Meier’s thesis regarding historical missions as strategies of repoliticization is correct, but not because politics in Schmitt is subordinate to theology, but, on the contrary, the concept of the political is more fundamental than theology. His assertion in the preface to the 1934 second edition of Political Theology that “the political is the total,”¹⁶ which he maintained in later editions of the book, does not have any other meaning. In his reply to Peterson, Schmitt not only argues that Peterson’s attempted theological liquidation of political theology is actually a political act, but also asserts, more fundamentally, that the very dimension of the political is present at the heart of the Trinitarian dogma.

Schmitt would agree with the association between nationalism and polytheism, i.e., that what is at stake in nationalism is a form of political–theological or, more precisely, political–mythological pluralism.¹⁷ Moreover, the worldview of nationalist pluralism could be referred to what Schmitt, in the 1933 edition of the Concept of the Political, calls the “agonal” metaphysical position, according to which political distinctions could be neutralized in a medium of generalized homogeneity and equivalence. But in Schmitt’s own metaphysical view, a polemical–political view that from the 1960s onward explicitly becomes a stasiological view, the friend/enemy distinction constitutes a non-dialectical unity of tension, not reconcilable in a homeostatic unity reducible to sameness, but defined by a split internal to identity, in which the neutralized dialectic of the same/other takes the fundamental and irreducible form of the friend/enemy distinction. For Schmitt, this metaphysical structure, which in Political Theology II is presented as immanent to the dogma of the Trinity, is neither a simple unity, nor a mere dualism, nor a pluralism in itself absolute, but a “stasis of the one against itself.”

According to a widespread reading of Schmitt, his thought would be mainly characterized as pluralism sans phrase, a radical form of agonal thinking which would value political plurality above all else, but a conflictual plurality, erected to the status of norm and irreducible to mere social or liberal pluralism.¹⁸ But this view ignores that Schmitt’s conception of a political pluriversum, of a plurality of equally sovereign nation-states, in the context of his theory of international law, cannot be reduced to a form of geopolitical realism, whether descriptive or normative, which would overlook its strictly conceptual and metaphysical dimension. For Schmitt, the essential of the political pluriversum is located in a metaphysical structure inherent to the concept of the state and state sovereignty, which constituted the central agency of the jus publicum Europaeum, a structure which pertains to the conceptual systematicity of jurisprudence.¹⁹

As Schmitt writes in the Concept of the Political:

The political entity presupposes the real existence of an enemy and therefore coexistence with another political entity. As long as a state exists, there will thus always be in the world more than just one state. A world state which embraces the

¹⁶ “We have come to recognize that the political is the total, and as a result we know that any decision about whether something is unpolitical is always a political decision, irrespective of who decides and what reasons are advanced. This also holds for the question whether a particular theology is a political or an unpolitical theology.” Schmitt, Political Theology, 2.

¹⁷ For Schmitt’s discussion of Sorel’s theory of myth and Mussolini’s “myth of the nation,” see Schmitt, The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy, 76.

¹⁸ This view was typified in Rasch, “Conflict as a Vocation.”

¹⁹ Already in one of his early works, The Value of the State and the Significance of the Individual, Schmitt had cast the specifically conceptual thrust of the state: “For a philosophic inquiry, the state is neither an apparatus that, under the observance of certain formalities, issues forth commands which humans accept as statutes not to be further derived, nor a power complex that compels its factual recognition and that is otherwise rational to no higher degree than any other superior power. The state, according to its idea, becomes the bearer of a task, its grandeur rests in the fact that it is nothing other than this task, its dignity is derived from the law [Recht] and consists in the exclusivity with which it is seized and suffused by the law.” Schmitt et al., Early Legal-Theoretical Writings, 198.
entire globe and all of humanity cannot exist. The political world is a pluriverse, not a universe. In this sense every theory of state is pluralistic, even though in a different way from the domestic theory of pluralism.²⁰

As it is plain here, Schmitt defines plurality by unity and not unity by plurality. Schmitt does not start from the empirical existence of a plurality of states or political entities in order to define the reality of the state, but, on the contrary, deduces this plurality from the unity of the political entity. Plurality itself is presupposed by the unity of the political entity since this unity is constituted by the friend/enemy distinction, which defines the concept of the political.²¹

Meier either did not pay enough attention or did not understand this aspect of Schmitt’s thought and the real fascination that the conceptual coherence of jurisprudence exerted on Schmitt. As an attempt at refuting a famous passage from Ex Captivitate Salus where Schmitt states “I am a jurist and no theologian,”²² Meier presents Schmitt’s self-characterization as “a theologian of jurisprudence”²³ in the Glossarium as a simple acknowledgement of his theological grounding and heritage.²⁴ But Meier neglects the specific way in which Schmitt defines the political—theological analogies between law (Recht) or order or Nomos²⁵ and God throughout his work, in a manner that law (Recht), order, and Nomos are sacralized as such, whereas natural law is rejected.²⁶ Schmitt does not reject natural law on the basis of a Kierkegaardian type of fideism, as Meier argues, understood as an irrationalist voluntarism against attempts to rationalize the divine command operative in history – a rationalization that would be akin to legal normativism in its attempt to eradicate the irreducible moments of decision and exception – but on the basis of a sacralization of law (Recht) and order as such, distinct from a natural or substantial law referred to its position by divine will.²⁷

In his book, Meier almost entirely ignores The Nomos of the Earth, which is one of Schmitt’s most systematic jurisprudential works – only comparable to Constitutional Theory (also for the most part ignored by Meier).²⁸ In general, Schmitt’s theses on Nomos, war, and international law could only be ignored by

²⁰ Schmitt, The Concept of the Political, 53. The translation, for some reason, elides the first sentence in this passage, which presents the point even clearer: “Aus dem Begriffsmerkmal des Politischen folgt der Pluralismus der Staatenwelt."
²¹ Böckenförde proposes a similar idea with regard to constitutional theory, namely that the political is foundational for the political unity which guarantees the existence of a constitution. Here I consider the concept of the political foundational for political theology, in the sense that political theology is a theology of the political. As I will argue, my focus on the concept of the political, as it relates to political theology, concerns less the distinction between friend and enemy, than the “metapolitical” possibility of a distinction between the political and the unpolar. See Böckenförde, “The Concept of the Political.”
²² Schmitt, Ex Captivitate Salus, 71.
²³ Schmitt, Glossarium, 23.
²⁴ See Meier, The Lesson, 204.
²⁵ “Nomos, like “law” [English in the original], does not mean statute, rule, or norm, but rather Recht.” Schmitt, On the Three Types, 50.
²⁶ Jean-François Kervégan interprets in a similar way Schmitt’s self-designation as “a theologian of jurisprudence.” This position would be based on the sacralization of order, authority, and legitimacy, over and above mere legality. For Schmitt, the decisive distinction would not be that between legal naturalism and legal positivism, but that between legality and legitimacy, which would reach its epitome in the distinction and opposition between law (Gesetz) and Nomos. For Kervégan, Schmitt’s “theology of jurisprudence” cannot be equated with a theological position, given that jurisprudence developed as an answer to the fact that, with the early modern civil wars of religion, theology had become a factor of disorder. See Kervégan, “¿Qué significa ser un teólogo de la jurisprudencia?” On the sacred character of Nomos and order, see Palaver, “Carl Schmit on Nomos and Space;” and Ojakangas, “Carl Schmitt and the Sacred Origins of Law.” Even though Ojakangas argues here from the perspective of the “theological twist” in Schmitt studies, i.e., in general agreement with Meier’s interpretation, his definition of sacred order in Schmitt’s thought can be understood in an immanent manner.
²⁷ Early in his work, in a particularly acute analogy, Schmitt had already compared the state with Christ and the law (Recht) with God: “The giving up of timeless correctness and the reception of a moment of indifference with regard to content are the consequence of the ἐνθρόπωμης [hominization] of the law [Recht], the sacrifice that must be offered because a pact was made with the powers of the real world of appearances.” Schmitt et al., Early Legal-Theoretical Writings, 214.
²⁸ For a critique of Meier that takes into account Schmitt’s position in The Nomos of the Earth, see Ojakangas, “A Terrifying World Without an Exterior.”
Meier, since they are entirely contrary to his own thesis of the political–theological core of Schmitt’s work, understood as founded on revelation and on the obedience of faith.²⁹ In fact, the state as the agency of the spatial order of the *jus publicum Europaeum* could be seen as one specific historical dispensation in the realization of the political. But its specific accomplishment was the *detheologization* of international law.³⁰ So how could this mission be political–theological, in the sense that Meier understands it? Meier does not refer to the historical role of the state in establishing a non-discriminatory concept of war, which distinguishes enemies from criminals, but only to Schmitt’s temporary allegiances against depoliticization, such as political Catholicism, nationalism, plebiscitary democracy, and fascism. These examples, even though correct, are tendentious insofar as they associate Schmitt’s metapolitical struggle with specific ideologies and tend to reduce the concept of the political to empirical political engagements, whereas the historical mission of the state as such is an eminently formal example of the struggle against depoliticization and its most fundamental modality as a means of the rationalization of war, of its hedging (*Hegung*), and containment.

### 4 Metapolitics and Metastasis

The cryptic, enigmatic, and esoteric dimension of Schmitt’s work, the impression that some of his works give of allusively addressing matters that are not explicitly stated, is due to the tense simultaneity of descriptive and polemical aspects in his political and political–theological theory. At stake in Schmitt’s concept of the political is not only the capacity to describe the political character of actual relations, in the sense of the distinction between friend and enemy, but also, more eminently, the politicizing effect of such description, which is itself generative of the political.³¹ The concept of the political is itself political and it is the specific power of the concept to pose the political, not with regard to the content of a given distinction between friends and enemies, but to the *possibility* of the political as such.

According to Matthias Lievens, this tension between the descriptive and the polemical or political effect of the concept of the political can be characterized as “metapolitical.”³² Even though this designation is not employed by Schmitt himself and is problematic as a representation of Schmitt’s theoretical self-presentation, I agree that it has explanatory potential and utility, especially to illuminate those aspects of Schmitt’s work which remain esoteric and unsaid. This designation can only be adequate insofar as the prefix *meta-* implies self-referentiality – the metapolitical is itself political – and does not mean an explicitly formulable meta-level constituted as a distinct – apolitical, non-polemical – domain from that of the base-level descriptive theory.

The conceptual distinction between the political and the metapolitical is particularly useful in leading the analysis of Schmitt’s work away from an unproductive line of questioning which tries to identify who or

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²⁹ For an attempt at applying Meier’s thesis on Schmitt’s works on Nomos and international law, see Koskenniemi, “International Law as Political Theology.”

³⁰ “It was Gentili who succeeded in creating a new concept of war based on the sovereign state – on the *aequalitas* of the *justi hostes* – rather than on the justice or injustice of the reasons for war offered by either side. ... This was the first clear form of the juridical, as opposed to the theological treatment of international law. *Silete theologi in munere alieno!* Exclaims Gentili in order to remove theologians from discussion of the concept of war and to rescue a non-discriminatory concept of war. The state was established as the new, rational order, as the historical agency of dethelogization and rationalization.” Schmitt, *The Nomos of the Earth*, 159.

³¹ Hohendahl, despite maintaining that there is a normative element in Schmitt’s work – although he admits that this term is not employed by Schmitt – nonetheless perceptively calls attention to a further “performative moment”: “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.” Hohendahl, “Political Theology Revisited.”

what exactly was Schmitt’s political enemy qua enemy of the political – whether it was liberalism, communism, anarchy, or even Judaism. Since the politicizing effect of the concept of the political itself does not apply to political relations at the level of content, but at the level of form or possibility, Schmitt’s political theory cannot be situated within the field of empirical political relations – or, simply said, politics – or reduced to a specific ideological position among others. The metapolitical struggle, as Lievens calls it, cannot be reduced to a struggle within the political domain qua politics, such as, for instance, conservatism versus progressivism, but is a struggle for the possibility of the political as such, against all forms of depoliticization.

But this self- or “meta-referential” dimension of his theory means that the positions and concepts which Schmitt develops in his works can be read as applying to the theory itself and to its performative effects. It is precisely because the metalevel of the theory does not constitute a separate domain, distinct from the base-level descriptive texture of his works, that the concepts which are elaborated at this base-level are also reflected on Schmitt’s own theoretical position. In Schmitt, the metapolitical is itself political and does not constitute a separate sphere, and while it remains unsaid, it exhibits itself in its theoretical position.

In the particular case of the Theory of the Partisan, which deals with the post-war paradigm of civil war, analyzed by Lievens, the position of the partisan is reflected on Schmitt’s actual metapolitical engagement, which, according to the hegemonic theoretical coordinates of postwar twentieth century international law, is itself in a position of partisanship.³³ The theoretical and conceptual coordinates of the current “global civil war” not only place every political actor in the position of partisan, it also inevitably place the theory of the political itself in a position of asymmetry, which reflects one of the most decisive empirical characteristics of the partisan. Stasis becomes metastasis and the theoretician of the state finds himself in the position of arguing for the foundations of the concept of the state beyond the state.³⁴

The metapolitical struggle between the political and the unpolitical raises the problem beyond mere recognition, since the unpolitical is unwilling to recognize the political, i.e., to recognize the concept of enmity and war as such. The transcendental, metapolitical enmity is not an empirical enmity between friends and enemies, but the enmity between the political and the unpolitical. This struggle between the political and the unpolitical assumes the ultimate form of a metastatic contention, characterized by a transcendent asymmetry.

Contrary to the empirical type of civil war that Schmitt constantly returns to, exemplified by the religious civil wars of the seventeenth century, which were driven by conceptions of just war from both sides, where the enemy was morally disqualified and condemned, with terribly destructive consequences, the asymmetry in question here is between an unpolitical position which does not recognize the other as enemy and a political position which recognizes the other as an enemy and poses

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³³ The performative function of the metapolitical in Schmitt was not entirely perceived by Lievens. Lievens’ polemic against the supposed inherently depoliticizing effect in Schmitt’s rejection of the “third enemy,” as the “real enemy” which disturbs the requirement of territorialization in Schmitt’s concept of the political, preserved by the state form, is only possible due to the omission of this metareferential aspect in Schmitt’s theory. But even here Lievens makes a conspicuous mistake by constantly naming the partisan as the “real enemy,” when Schmitt’s actual postulate is that the partisan relates to his own enemy as a real enemy and therefore poses real enmity. On this point, see Schmitt, Theory of the Partisan, 65. Furthermore, Lievens does not address Schmitt’s distinction between the defensive, telluric, partisan, and the revolutionary partisan, and seems to constantly have the second in mind, when the actual difference is that the first poses real enmity, while the second poses absolute enmity. See Lievens, “Carl Schmitt’s Metapolitics,” 127–30.

³⁴ The word “metastasis,” normally used in Greek to mean removal, change, displacement, and transportation, has a peculiar philological history. Among many occurrences in antiquity, including in Plato’s Laws 856c and Aristotle’s Athenian Constitution 41.2, with the meaning of implementation and change of political constitution, as well as “revolution,” it appears in Thucydides’ The Peloponnesian War 4.74 in the unusual expression ek stásis métástasis (ἐκ στάσεως μετάστασις), which describes an event in which the Megaric pro-Spartan party regained power after a previous insurrection by the pro-Athenian party. In Thomas Hobbes’ translation, this expression was rendered by a prosaic “change of government made upon sedition,” while in a 1881 translation by Benjamin Jowett, it became a more daring, although relatively anachronistic, “counterrevolution.” Quintilian, in his Institutio Oratoria 7.4.13, defines metastasis as a rhetorical trope which consists in denying adversaries’ arguments and turning the arguments back on them.
enmity as such. The unpolitical is averse to recognition, be it in terms of recognizing or being recognized as a political position, it can only relate to the political in the form of stasis and absolute enmity.

Within the Christian historical aeon and in the horizon of the eschatological time inaugurated by the Christ-event, this metastatic struggle takes the form of the enmity between secular (un)political messianism and the katechon.³⁵ This does not mean that Schmitt is a strict Christian thinker driven by faith in revelation, but that he considers the Christian historical–eschatological horizon unsurpassable in the shaping of metapolitical relations and positions. Ultimately, (un)political messianism, for Schmitt, is essentially identical with the spirit of technicity and its activist metaphysics. But precisely since it is spirit and metaphysics it is also eminently theological, albeit in the form of an anti- or counter-theology. In the political–theological drama of the Christian aeon, the struggle between the political and the unpolitical is configured as the struggle between the katechon and the Antichrist.³⁶

The metastatic struggle between the political and the unpolitical acquires a political–theological guise through a specific ambivalent relation and inversion, whereby it is the unpolitical which manifests itself as an eminently theological position, given that it is unable to recognize the legitimacy of its enemy and reduces the enemy to something whose very existence is unjustified.³⁷ This inversion is due to the fact that for Schmitt what is fundamentally at stake in Christianity and its historical configuration is not its theology but its political form. Initially, Schmitt defines this political form as a feature of the Roman Catholic Church, but from the 1930s onward this political form will be defined by the concept of the state – depicted by Hobbes as a “mortal God” – consistent with the spatial order of the jus publicum Europaeum. Nonetheless, the state does not coincide with the political form as such, in its absoluteness, but only with one of its historical specifications, albeit the most decisive one and the one with the highest level of historical formality, which expresses what for Schmitt was the fundamental and primary metaphysical neutralization of the theological. The contingency of the state form became patent with the dissolution of the jus publicum Europaeum and the Eurocentric Nomos of the Earth. Schmitt’s absolute political form, understood as the metapolitical and transcendental condition of possibility of the political as such, is not the Catholic Church but the katechon. The political form is, thus, also metastatic in the etymological sense of over and beyond the state.

The Christian political form of the katechon is not, as Meier believes, essentially defined by the dogma of the original sin, politically translated in the attitude of anthropological pessimism which postulates the inevitability of political enmity, but by its eschatological horizon.³⁹ This relates to the problem of messianism and millennialism. Schmitt’s initial emphasis in the Concept of the Political is on the dangerousness and dynamic character of human beings, politically analogous to the theological dogma of original sin, as a determinant of the inevitability of enmity and war. Later, starting with the Leviathan book, the emphasis will shift to the impossibility of the millennial realization of heaven on Earth, understood as a state of total

³⁶ For Lievens, the metapolitical struggle results in a proliferation of enemies: “In a certain sense, the kind of metastruggles Schmitt wages are present in each political struggle, which, as a consequence, must be a multidimensional event. As a result, from the very beginning, the political could not be considered as ‘pure’ as Schmitt wanted. There were always already different types of enemy, or meta-enemies involved. There is always a ‘plurivocity’ of enmities, pace Schmitt.” Lievens, “Carl Schmitt’s Metapolitics,” 128. For Lievens, this means that the multiplication of enemies overturns Schmitt’s dualism of the friend/enemy distinction, purportedly able to secure, “place,” and contain enmity. In fact, for Schmitt, the metapolitical struggle, instead of resulting in a proliferation of political enemies, reassigns enmity to a transcendental enmity, which converts the multiplicity of possible political enmities into a metastatic contention that, in political–theological terms, is precisely configured by the struggle between the katechon and the Antichrist.
³⁷ “The theologians tend to define the enemy as something that must be destroyed. But I am a jurist, not a theologian.” Schmitt, Ex Captivitate Salus, 71.
³⁸ For an analysis of the relationship between the state, the jus publicum Europaeum, and the katechon, see Arvidsson, “From Teleology to Eschatology;” and Langford and Bryan, “Beyond the Jurist as a Theologian of Legal Science.”
³⁹ See Meier, The Lesson, 12–4, 78–98.
depoliticization and eradication of all enmity. The preeminent Christian eschatological axiom is that “my kingdom is not of this world” (John 18:36).

Contrary to Peterson’s basic thesis that Schmitt’s theological–political decision is fundamentally anti-eschatological, Schmitt retains the horizon of eschatological openness against its abolition in millenialism. Moreover, in Political Theology II, the struggle and difference between the katekon and (un)political messianism will reach its apotheosis in its stasiological prototype within the Christian theological dogma of the Trinity itself. The preliminary enunciation of this metaphysical contention is theological:

But what is still needed is a word about the criterion for the political and for a political theology; that is, about the distinction between friend and enemy. Peterson in his teaching on the Christian Trinity refers decisively to a passage in Gregory of Nazianzus (Oratio Theologica iii 2) which revolves around this formulation: The One – to Hen – is always in uproar – stasiazon – against itself – pros heauton. Right in the middle of the most precise formulation of this difficult dogma, we find the word stasis in the sense of ‘uproar.’ ... With this concept an intriguing contradiction of a dialectical nature emerges. Stasis means in the first place quiescence, tranquility, standpoint, status; its antonym is kinesis, movement. But stasis also means, in the second place, (political) unrest, movement, uproar and civil war. ... At the heart of the doctrine of Trinity we encounter a genuine politico-theological stasiology. Thus the problem of enmity and of the enemy cannot be ignored.

Yet this does not mean that the political form is derived from the theological concept, rather that the theological concept is itself the absolutization of the political in its highest level of intensity, reaching into the metaphysical as the crystallization of a metapolitical and metastatic contention.

5 That Jesus is the Christ

Before we further analyze this point, we will have to elucidate the role of Hobbes in Schmitt’s political theology. In 1938, making Helmut Schelsky’s words his own, Schmitt identifies political theology with potestas indirecta:

With the picture of the leviathan, “Hobbes challenges every theory of state fraught by religion, assuming thereby a place among the great political thinkers. ... But “the deep meaning of his concept of the leviathan” consists of the concreteness of the “earthly” and “mortal” god who is totally attuned to the political deed of man, who, time and time again, must bring him out of the “chaos” of a “natural” condition. In this way Hobbes led “his historically timely struggle against political theology in all its forms.” The leviathan is the big symbol of this battle. However, according to Schelsky’s conception – and in the precise sense of his conception of theorists of political action – the success of the struggle depends on whether the myth of the leviathan forged by Hobbes constitutes a faithful restoration of the original unity of life, whether the leviathan withstood the test of being the politico-mythical image battling the Judeo-Christian destruction of natural unity, and whether he was equal to the severity and malice of such a battle.

This equation of political theology with potestas indirecta was the expression of a polemical attitude toward the Catholic Church (and Catholic authors like Maritain and Peterson), from which he had lapsed, but simultaneously of a cautious distancing from the concept of political theology, given his precarious

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40 This idea had an earlier precedent in the book on Däubler’s Nordlicht, see Schmitt, Theodor Däublers “Nordlicht,” 61–8. This theme would reappear in Schmitt, Roman Catholicism and Political Form, 14–5.
41 Commenting on Dostoyevsky’s legend of the Grand Inquisitor, Schmitt speaks of “the pagan nature of the notion that Christ could appear (in experimental fashion, so to speak) one or many times between His historical existence and His glorious return on the Day of Judgment.” Schmitt, Roman Catholicism and Political Form, 32. Compare this with what Schmitt would later write about Hobbes: “Hobbes expected the kingdom of Christ on earth only for the end of times. The shouters and fighters of the English civil war, whom Hobbes had in mind, considered themselves citizens of this kingdom of Christ, which for them had already dawned and, as it turned out, was even already a political magnitude capable of civil war.” Schmitt, “Die Vollendete Reformation,” 55.
42 Schmitt, Political Theology II, 122.
political situation. Helmut Schelsky had published an article in 1938, in reply to Schmitt’s 1937 article The State as Mechanism in Hobbes and Descartes, which contained many of the same ideas that would be developed in the 1938 book. In his article, Schelsky strongly criticized “political theology” (but not Schmitt by name) and presented Hobbes as a defender of politics against religious intervention. Schmitt explicitly agreed with him in his book.

But there is another contention at stake in this matter. In 1938, Schmitt’s reading of Hobbes served as a way for him to critically identify political theology with potestas indirecta and to reject every form of political theology in the name of the total state, defined by an “original unity of life” between politics and religion. Later, in 1965, in Die Vollendete Reformation, a crucial but neglected essay, he radically changes his view and sees Hobbes as the major exponent of political theology instead. This change implied a fundamental restructuring of his political-theological project, which he would articulate in 1969. Only with reference to the broader debate on the notion of political theology does this change become intelligible. His position on Hobbes, reworked in 1965, would constitute a decisive element in his final conception of political theology in Political Theology II.

The shift between 1938 and 1965 vis-à-vis Hobbes pivots around the notion of political theology, which, I claim, Schmitt disavowed for some time. I claim, as well, that Schmitt’s equation of political theology with potestas indirecta – against which he, like Hobbes, was resolutely opposed – was in fact his first answer to Peterson, even though the latter’s name was not mentioned. His polemical defense of the “pagan” unity of politics and religion must be read in the same manner, against the “Judeo-Christian” attempts at radically separating the two domains. In this sense, “political theology,” as potestas indirecta, becomes an illegitimately politicized theology, a theology which intervenes in political matters while disavowing its own political position. This would correspond to Schmitt’s critique, in the 1934 preface to Political Theology, of a theological position which pretends to decide on what is political and unpolitical and on its own position as unpolitical. If my claim is correct, in 1938, “political theology” specifically designated this position and it could be read as an inversion and use of Peterson’s argument against himself, where now Peterson’s own position would be the representative par excellence of political theology as potestas indirecta. Later, after Schmitt rehabilitated the notion of political theology, this understanding of the notion would constitute one of its aspects, but no longer the only one. The same criticism was directed at Peterson, but it became an attestation of the inevitability of political theology and no longer a motive for its rejection.

In his previous work, it was not clear whether the Leviathan-state could be identified with the katechon – the upholder of Christian order, political form, and the restrainer of eschatological dissolution. His last word on Hobbes will consist precisely in this idea, grounded in the major axis of his final interpretation, namely that “Jesus is the Christ.”

44 Since 1934, Schmitt was increasingly criticized by the regime, either as an anti-völkisch thinker of the state, as a Hegelian, a philosemitic, or as someone who wanted to subordinate the Third Reich to Catholicism with his concept of political theology. Rosenberg’s Mitteilungen zur weltanschaulichen Lage (Reports on the ideological situation) contained a 14-page confidential dossier on Schmitt, dated 8 January 1937, where it was written that his theories would lead to the submission of the National-Socialist state to the political power of the Catholic Church and that they constituted an attempt at guaranteeing the supremacy of the theological decision over the political forms. See Noack, Carl Schmitt, 206. Ironically, the regime had a similar view of Schmitt as Heinrich Meier would later have. See Meier, The Lesson, 149, 176.

45 For more on the debate between Schelsky and Schmitt and its implications for Schmitt’s theses on Hobbes, see Palaver, “Carl Schmitt, Mythologue Politique.”

46 This would become manifest in Nomos of the Earth, with the defense of the deetheologization and rationalization operated by the concept of the state in the jus publicum Europaeum, as we have seen.

47 “Hobbes opposed the typically Judeo-Christian division of the original political unity. The distinction between the secular and spiritual power was, according to Hobbes, alien to the heathens because religion was to them a part of politics; the Jews brought about unity from the side of religion. Only the Roman papal church and the power-thirsty Presbyterian churches or sects thrive on the state-destroying separation of the spiritual and secular power. Superstition and misuse of alien beliefs in spirits arising from fear and illusion have destroyed the original and natural heathen unity of politics and religion.” Schmitt, The Leviathan in the State Theory of Thomas Hobbes, 10.

48 His late esoteric dialogue with Hans Barion also reveals an attempt at proposing the state as the sole possibility of upholding Christian order in the world against all indirect powers, even against what both Schmitt and Barion perceived as the new
What does “Christian order” mean? Attention is required here, because there is no return to substantial conceptions of divine right or natural law in Schmitt. His idea of order is spatial, based on the containment of war made possible by the *jus publicum Europaeum*. Hobbes was, for Schmitt, the exemplary author of the *jus publicum Europaeum*, since he was the one who conceptually elaborated its fundamental agency in the *Leviathan*, namely the modern sovereign state. For Schmitt, Hobbes’ idea of the state was originally devised in order to put an end to religious civil war – and by “religious civil war” we have to understand the type of a war based on theological positions, whether religious or secular. The sovereign decision is that which puts an end to disorder, not by appeal to any substantial and transcendent ideas of truth and law, but as a purely war based on theological positions, whether religious or secular. The sovereign decision is that which puts God present in public worship.

But then, how to understand Schmitt’s following affirmation in the 1963 notes (*Hinweise*) to *The Concept of the Political*:

The much admired system of Thomas Hobbes leaves a door open to transcendence. The truth that “Jesus is the Christ”, which Hobbes so often and so emphatically stated as his faith and confession, is a truth of public faith, public reason, and public worship in which the citizen participates.⁴⁹

As Schmitt goes on to expand:

But this is not to raise the individual-psychological question of Thomas Hobbes’ subjective conviction, but the basic systematic problem of his whole political doctrine, which by no means closes the door to transcendence. It is the question of the interchangeability or non-interchangeability of the sentence, *that Jesus is the Christ*.⁵⁰

Do we have here, in 1963, an admission by Schmitt of a transcendent order on which the state is grounded in a substantial way? This is not the case. There is no retreat from his theory of decisionism. How then to reconcile Schmitt’s decisionism and this idea of an openness to transcendence based on Christian faith? This is precisely where the notion of the *katechon* comes into play. A key to understanding this lies in a decisive passage from the *Glossarium* from 1949:

The most important sentence of Thomas Hobbes remains: Jesus is the Christ. The power of such a sentence is still effective if it is pushed to the edge of the conceptual system by which thought is structured, yes apparently even pushed outside of the conceptual sphere. This deportation (*Abschiebung*) is a process analogous to the cultification (*Verkultung*) of Christ, undertaken by Dostoevsky’s Grand Inquisitor. Hobbes enunciates and scientifically grounds what Dostoevsky’s Grand Inquisitor does: rendering Christ’s effect in the social and political domains harmless; to de-anarchize Christianity, while leaving it with a certain legitimizing effect in the background and, in any case, not to do without it. A clever tactician does not forego anything, unless it is completely unusable.⁵¹

It is not unreasonable to entertain the hypothesis that the way in which the reference to the Grand Inquisitor is employed, while not entirely discarding its importance, reflects a certain cynical attitude toward Christianity that Schmitt would later abandon. In his later work, the figure of the Grand Inquisitor will be replaced by the figure of the *katechon*. In the 1963 *Hinweise*, Schmitt explicitly rejects the idea that Hobbes’ affirmation of the Christian truth consisted in a tactical declaration.⁵² Still, the notion that the Christian truth must be de-anarchized and pushed to the extreme edge of the conceptual system,
while maintaining a legitimizing effect, retains its validity. In this sense, the defining action of the Grand Inquisitor is transferred to the *katechon*.

In Schmitt’s thought, the *katechon* is an eschatological notion whose function consists in the restraintment of disorder. The most extreme form of disorder for Schmitt is total war, of which civil war is the paradigm. In *Political Theology II*, Schmitt clearly admits the potentially subversive effect of Christianity when directly applied to the social and political domains as an attempt at bringing about the kingdom of heaven on earth, of “immanentizing the eschaton,” to employ Eric Voegelin’s expression. This “revolutionary” potential of Christianity – the false Christ which comes before “His glorious return on the Day of Judgement” – is that which needs to be staved off by the Grand Inquisitor. It is this (un)political messianism and millennialism which, translated in eschatological and political–theological figures, signifies, for Schmitt, the reign of the Antichrist.

Schmitt’s primary faith is in the *katechon* as the metapolitical and metastatic condition of possibility of the political. The belief in Christ lies at the extreme edge of the conceptual system and is politically neutralized. The Hobbesian state has the truth of Christ embedded in it at the outermost edge. Since its effect is katechontic, since it averts civil war/total war – by containing it metastatically within itself – it has the Christian eschatological truth embedded in it. The sovereign state in itself is Christian in a politico–theological sense, i.e., according to the political form of the Christian *aeon*, not in a theocratic nor hierocratic manner. That is why the question to be asked, according to Schmitt, is if the truth of the state (“that Jesus is the Christ”) can be replaced by other truths, ideologies, or “values.” But this truth is not a declared belief, it is a structural truth of the state, an axiomatic truth of public reason and jurisprudence. This is also why decisionism is not negated, the order of the state is not determined by substantial or material contents, as in the case of the traditional divine right of kings or natural law, the decision is purely formal. But the fact of order and sovereignty and the mutual recognition of sovereign states, as an inheritance of the *jus publicum Europaeum* and of the *jus reformandi*, are historically Christian, that is to say, katechontic.

### 6 Mortal God

Peterson’s two verdicts on the impossibility of political theology had been: 1) Trinitarian theology is not monotheist in the political–theological sense and 2) the “eschatological reserve” of Christianity cannot be suppressed by the historicization of the kingdom of God. Schmitt does not sacralize history nor reject eschatology. Eschatology is retained under the dynamic form of the different dispensations and historical missions which, without ever coinciding with it, embody the *katechon* as a metapolitical and metastatic agency – as a “total historical presence.” For Schmitt, no particular form can fully realize the *katechon*, there is only a multiplicity of variable and contingent historical–political forms which embody it.

With regard to Trinitarian theology, we have seen how Schmitt inscribes the stasiological figure of his friend/enemy distinction within the Trinity. But Schmitt goes one step further in the systemic exposition of his political–theological position when relating Trinitarianism to eschatology. When proposing his own interpretation of Goethe’s enigmatic dictum “*Nemo contra deum nisi deus ipse,*” he refers to the Gnostic distinction between a just and severe God of creation and a loving God of salvation at enmity with each other. Against Blumenberg, Schmitt asserts that the Gnostic dualism is not overcome by modernity and its

53 “I believe in the *katechon*: it is for me the only possibility as a Christian to understand history and find it meaningful. (...) The place has never been unoccupied, otherwise we would not be present anymore.” Schmitt, *Glossarium*, 63.

radical process of detheologization and depoliticization, on the contrary, it is only intensified in an extreme *stasis* and war of annihilation between tradition and modernity, which has its prototype in the enmity between the God of creation and the God of salvation. Modernity, as the secularized political–theological position of the God of salvation, culminating in the absolutely liberated this-worldly spirit of technicity, wages a war of absolute enmity on tradition and, subsequently, on theology and on every political form determined by the friend/enemy distinction. But in doing so, it reveals itself as a counter-theology, which is incapable of perceiving the dialectical opposition which determines it and incapable of taking its destructive work to the end and conceptually destroying its own unquestioned position in the process.

For Schmitt this position is itself only possible within Christian eschatology and possesses its political–theological principle in a type of political and revolutionary Christology which assumes a messianic guise by seeking the realization of the kingdom of God in this world. The divinization of man is presupposed by the humanity of God in Christ, which is perceived metaphysically and political-theologically as the archetype of Man divinized, from whom proceed all forms of divinity and God himself as products. Yet, for Schmitt, this radical form of theologized humanity – as the extreme result of the modern process of detheologization – is also the most extreme form of depoliticization, whose consequence is the reduction of all divergent views to the status of inhumanity and infra-humanity.

The Gnostic dualism – corresponding to the absolute position of the friend/enemy distinction – is implicitly present in the Trinity, with the distinction between Father and Son, which is dialectically conceived as the opposition and *stasis* between God and Man. Yet, for Schmitt, this *stasis* of the two natures is overcome by their metastatic unity in the second person, the God–Man Christ. The Gnostic revolutionary potential of the Son is neutralized by the union of two natures in Christ – the principle itself of political theology.

In eschatological terms, this metastatic unity presents itself in the guise of the *katechon*. The *katechon* is two-sided, it doubly relates to the two political–theological features of Christ: it simultaneously “contains” the revolutionary and messianic *stasis* and it “contains” the kingdom of God, never realized in this world. The *katechon* relates both to the Antichrist and to Christ in his *parousia*, since by holding back the reign of the Antichrist, it simultaneously prevents the final coming of Christ. The human and the divine aspects of Christ are reflected in the split between the political and the theological, which is united in the *katechon*. This unity is not a dialectical union of reconciliation but a bipolar double movement of containment and containment. Metastasis, as a *metastase* (in Latin, *status* has the same formation as the Greek *stasis*), is simultaneously contention and containment – containment by contention and contention by containment.

55 “The main structural problem with Gnostic dualism, that is, with the problem of the God of creation and the God of salvation, dominates not only every religion of salvation and redemption. It exists inescapably in every world in need of change of renewal, and it is both immanent and ineradicable.” Schmitt, *The Political Theology II*, 125.
56 If *stasis* corresponds to the Gnostic dualism, metastasis corresponds to its containment in Christ, whereby “a dualism of two natures, God-human, becomes a unity in the second person.” Schmitt, Ibid., 125.
57 Miguel Vatter mentions a similar interpretation in reference to Meier, see Vatter, “The Political Theology of Carl Schmitt,” 259–60. For more on the debate between Blumenberg and Schmitt on this point, see Vatter, “Only a God Can Resist a God,” for a discussion of the stastological and Gnostic paradigms, see Herrero, *The Political Discourse of Carl Schmitt*, 168–74, and for an extensive analysis of the relation between monarchy and stasis, see Gourgouris, “Political Theology as Monarchical Thought.”
58 Schmitt had claimed, in a 1969 letter to Ernst Feil, that: “the problem of political theology concerns an inherently Christian problem, which, only through the Reformation (namely, through the battle for the *jus reformandi*) reached the historically concrete stage of reflection on which I operate. Expressed theologically, it is a Christological problem and immanent to Christian theology of the Trinity as such: the two natures of the actual God-Man as a single person. Those you named (beginning with Varro and Augustine...) did not know it.” Quoted by Meier, *The Lesson*, 202, n.48.
59 Massimo Cacciari, in his brilliant *The Withholding Power*, defined the figure of the *katechon* according to its essential trait of “containment,” in the simultaneous double sense of holding back and containing within. See Cacciari, *The Withholding Power*.
60 Peterson wants to uphold the absolute separation between the two domains, but, where the doctrine of the Trinity is concerned, an absolute separation would only be possible in the abstract, given that the second person of the Godhead represents the perfect unity of the two natures, the human and the divine.” Schmitt, *Political Theology II*, 82–3.
As we have seen, Schmitt understands the confession of faith in Christ in a political–theological manner as the truth of the Hobbesian state, i.e., of the “Mortal God.”⁶¹ The state as a mortal god is the secularization of the corpus mysticum of the Church as corpus Christi. What Schmitt designated as the “transposition of concepts” from the Church to the state⁶² has its vanishing point in the transference of the representation of the person of Christ by the Church to the transcendent truth of the state as mortal god.⁶³ This is, for Schmitt, the result and presupposition of the massive metaphysical transference from theology to jurisprudence. What is common to the Church and to the state is the eschatological horizon in which their juristic concepts operate. For Schmitt, this is the political–theological truth of the Christian aeon inaugurated by the Christ-event which persists in the epoch of secularization.

7 Conclusion

In his assumption of a fundamental dualism between political theology and political philosophy and in an attempt to safeguard the atheological essence of political philosophy, Meier exaggerates the theological aspects of Schmitt’s thought, to the point of conceiving of him as a theologian first and foremost. All the authors and researchers who see Schmitt as a jurist would be gullible to the mystification and strategic obfuscation that Schmitt would have operated to hide the fundamentally theological content of his thought and work. Furthermore, even though he ostensibly rejects what he calls the “confessional classification,” Meier’s thesis is ambiguous. It is unclear whether he regards Schmitt’s political theology as being grounded in the traditional Catholic faith or in a more singular faith in a providentialist theology of History, abstractly based on Christianity and on the event of the Incarnation. At no point does Meier discuss the issue of determining whether and how this last view can be considered theological in a rigorous sense of the term. Finally, and most importantly, Meier’s thesis is abrupt and does not give sufficient importance to the turns, the shifts, the advances and retreats, and the complexities of Schmitt’s political theology. This lack of forethought becomes evident in his reductionistic theological understanding of political theology.

The proof a contrario that Schmitt is not a theological thinker, but a political thinker, and that political theology needs to be understood, at its core, as a theologization and a metaphysics of the political is visibly manifest by the fact that Schmitt’s crowning theological speculation relies on bending the words and the meaning of Saint Gregory of Nazianzus’ sentence on monarchy and stasis. In the passage referred to by both Peterson and Schmitt, Gregory does not state that “the one” is “always” in uproar against itself as a defining

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⁶¹ Jacob Taubes understood well what was at stake in this political–theological homology. As Christoph Schmidt puts it: “Taubes follows Schmitt and his disciple Hans Barion when he re-projects the Leviathan on his model in the Corpus Christi, in order to stress the analogy between the mortal god Leviathan and the mortal Christ. ... The Leviathan is the secularized Christ. ... The state represents the event of humanization, the becoming human, which is made possible by the state, the Leviathan. Re-projected onto Christ: the state is Christ become human.” Schmidt, “The Leviathan Crucified,” 6, 7. Recall n. 25.

⁶² See Schmitt, Political Theology II, 117.

⁶³ In Roman Catholicism and Political Form, Schmitt had declared: “the Church is a concrete personal representation of a concrete personality. ... it has the power to assume this or any other form only because it has the power of representation. It represents the civitas humana. It represents in every moment the historical connection to the incarnation and crucifixion of Christ. It represents the Person of Christ Himself: God become man in historical reality. Therein lies its superiority over an age of economic thinking.” Schmitt, Roman Catholicism and Political Form, 18–9. In the same book, he had already referred to the homology between Catholicism and jurisprudence: “In the social world, secular jurisprudence also manifests a certain complexio of competing interests and tendencies. ... Owing to its formal superiority, jurisprudence can easily assume a posture similar to Catholicism with respect to alternating political forms in that it can positively align itself with various and sundry power complexes, provided only there is a sufficient minimum of form ‘to establish order.’” Ibid., 29–30. But Schmitt still considered that this homology had a limit: “But despite all this affinity in form, Catholicism goes further because it represents something other and more than secular jurisprudence – not only the idea of justice but also the person of Christ – that substantiates its claim to a unique power and authority.” Ibid., 30. I claim that, in his final political–theological position, the homology, in the horizon of eschatology, became total.
trait of the orthodox dogma of the Trinity.⁶⁴ Gregory’s affirmation is negative and conditional, the stasis that he refers to is not a characteristic of the orthodox dogma of the Trinity, but of a specific heretical interpretation of the Trinity, one where the monarchy is “limited to one Person.”⁶⁵ For the Church Father, the idea of the divine monarchy limited to one person was the heretical doctrine of Eunomius, a form of extreme Arianism that entirely denied the consubstantiality of the Trinity and thus introduced factionalism and division within the Trinity. Eunomianism was the doctrine where the monarchy, God as the “one principle,” would be limited to the “one person” of the Father, thereby excluding the Son and the Holy Spirit from the divine essence and generating a plurality and division of essences, as well as relations of opposition and subordination within the Trinity.⁶⁶

Schmitt projects the political in its stasiological figure onto the theological dogma of the Trinity and presents it as the core of the doctrine, according to his own understanding. The conspicuous absence of the Holy Spirit in his theological speculations shows, as well, that his crypto-ditheist view of the Trinitarian dogma was conditioned by the Gnostic dualism, in which he saw the stasiological climax of his own concept of the political. In doing so, he radically rejected Peterson’s assertion – and of all orthodox Trinitarianism – of an absence of analogy between God and creation. Metapolitics is converted into metaphysics, and stasis, as the extreme intensity of the political, is erected to the theological status of the absolute as metastasis. This metastatic principle shows itself as the structure of the katechon, the true Schmittian credo and symbolo pisteōs, whereby contention becomes the principle of containment. And, ultimately, this principle is identified with Christ, as the unity of divine and human, understood as a complexio oppositorum, a metaphysical unity of two without dialectical synthesis.

Even though Schmitt misrepresented the Trinitarian dogma in order to raise the concept of the political to a theological status, his conception of the katechon maintained an effective relation with the Christian theology of history. Yet, the decisive question – and it was a question that plagued Schmitt to the end – is whether the relegation of the parousia to the outermost edge of the political, thus deprived of every real political effect, could make Schmitt a “hastener against his will.” The only way in which Schmitt could conceive of the immediate, non-represented, presence of Christ in this world was exactly that of (un)political millennialism or messianism, as the political ideal of the realization of the kingdom of God on earth. Because of this, Schmitt’s katechon can indeed be seen as indistinguishable from the Grand Inquisitor, who, in “containing” evil, keeps away the advent of the parousia and thus risks becoming the enemy of Christ. But whether the katechon is the friend or the enemy of Christ remains an open question, at least until final judgment.

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⁶⁴ It is clear that the way Schmitt presents this short statement reflects in a theological manner his own speculations on the dialectic of identity and alterity, as developed in Ex Captivitate Salus and in his private writings, see Schmitt, Ex Captivitate Salus, 71.

⁶⁵ “But Monarchy is that which we hold in honor. It is, however, a Monarchy that is not limited to one Person, for it is possible for Unity if [it is] at war with itself [stasiazon pros heauto] to come into a condition of plurality,” Gregory of Nazianzus, “Select Orations,” XXIX, 301.

⁶⁶ The text from Saint Gregory’s Oration 29.2 should be compared with Oration 23.6, where he develops a similar theme. There, the Eunomian doctrine of the monarchy of God, limited to the Father, is depicted as a monarchy where God would be unwilling to share his divine essence due to envy and fear. Due to envy, because God the Father would be unwilling to share his honor with a connatural person, due to fear, lest the one sharing the same essence would take on a hostile and belligerent element. For an analysis of this theme, see Bray, “Gregory Of Nazianzus’ Trinitarian Argument,” 2020.
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