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## Political Theology

Saul Newman

Political theology is a burgeoning field of academic scholarship. Yet, as a concept, it is notoriously difficult to define. In broad terms, it refers to the relationship between theology and politics, particularly the way in which ideas, categories, symbols, rituals and practices that derive from theological sources – in a number of different religious traditions – have informed, and continue to inform, ways of thinking about and practising politics, even, and especially, in our modern secular age (see Taylor 2007). Indeed, secularism – another ‘essentially contested’ concept (see Asad 2003) – is the social condition that gives political theology its meaning and significance. In other words, the long process of secularization that has defined the history of European modernity – the institutional separation of the religious and political spheres and the consignment of religion to the more modest realm of private belief – can also be understood in terms of the translation of theological ideas into secular institutions and practices, in such a way that they continue to leave their trace on our political experience (see Lefort 2006). In this sense, political theology is a certain way of understanding not only secularism, but also has come to be known as the post-secular condition (de Vries and Sullivan 2006; Habermas 2008), characterised by the ‘return’ of religion in contemporary societies and its implications for the public sphere and the democratic way of life.

The question of the interconnection(s) between the theological and the political has been approached from a wide range of perspectives, often yielding very different conclusions about the nature of this relationship. Political theology spans a whole series of discussions in social and political theory, continental philosophy and theology about the theological origins and underpinnings of modern political institutions (Kahn 2011), the role of religion in contemporary political discourse and public life, the idea of civil religions (see Bellah 1967), arcane debates in twentieth century German jurisprudence (Schmitt 2005), the philosophy of religion and the history of consciousness (Löwith 1949; Blumenberg 1985), historical studies of medieval and early modern conceptions of sovereignty (Kantorowicz 1997) and investigations into the politico-theological controversies in Christianity, Judaism and Islam, along with other religions (see Cavanaugh and Peter Scott 2019). There is political theology done by theologians and religious scholars (see Hovey and Phillips 2015) and there is political theology done by political and social theorists (see Esposito 2015; Losoncz and Singh 2010) – and often what seems like a resounding non--dialogue between them.

This diversity of approaches notwithstanding, we can say that political theology is a way of thinking about the place of the sacred in contemporary politics – whether this is understood in terms of the ongoing influence of religious discourses and institutions in public life, or as the structural void or ‘empty place’ left vacant by the collapse of the theological world and the assimilation of theological concepts into modern secular political ideas like sovereignty, democracy and the nation state (Newman 2019). In particular, political theology is a way of coming to terms with the problem of political legitimacy – that is, the terms in which our political institutions can continue to justify themselves. Political theology provides a certain language – often lacking in political theory, particularly analytical political theory – to grasp different modes of secular political experience and discourse that are often, in an oblique way, theologically inflected.

### History of the concept

The origins of the term political theology derive from pre-Christian antiquity. The Roman scholar Marcus Terentius Varro drew a distinction between what he called *theologia civilis* (or *politika*), on the one hand, and *theologia mythica* and *theologia naturalis*, on the other; in other words, between civic or political religion – the cult images which formed the founding myths and religions of Rome and which therefore had a *political* function - and mythical and natural religions. The term appears again, much later and in a very different context, in Benedict de Spinoza’s *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (2007), which was written amid the religious conflicts of the seventeenth century. There is the attempt to separate philosophy, as a space of reason and free enquiry, from religious faith and scriptural determination, which often led to superstition and blind obedience (see Strauss 1982). This separation, Spinoza argued, should be preserved by the state and protected from intrusion by fanatical clergy. Yet, while his thinking points towards a form of separation between religion and politics, church and state, Spinoza nevertheless acknowledged the political utility of religion in promoting allegiance to the state.

In the nineteenth century, we find the term re-emerging in the most unexpected of ways. The Russian anarchist, Mikhail Bakunin, used it as a term of abuse against the Italian statesman Giuseppe Mazzini, whom he reproached for illegitimately mixing together religion and politics. According to Bakunin, Mazzini’s republicanism and his revolutionary role in the formation of the Italian state was marred by his Christianity and religious idealism. In the eyes of Bakunin, Mazzini had fallen victim to a theological abstraction that led him to turn against the cause of human emancipation and revolutionary socialism. Thus, Bakunin charged Mazzini with being a ‘political theologian’ and the ‘last high priest of religious, metaphysical, and political idealism which is disappearing.’ (Bakunin 1871) Bakunin’s atheistic assault on political theology – that is, on the close relationship between

religion and politics and between the church and state, as well as on all transcendental and idealist philosophies that were for him a disguised form of theology (see also 1882) – serves as the critical point of departure for the figure with whom the concept of political theology is today almost irretrievably associated.

### Carl Schmitt's *Political Theology* I and II

The German jurist and political theorist Carl Schmitt wrote his now famous text, *Politische Theologie*, in 1922 (2005) amidst the turmoil and political instability of the Weimar Republic, and it can be read as a response to the problem of political legitimacy. For Schmitt, this instability was indicative of the deeper crisis of modernity, in which atheism, capitalism, revolutionary politics, technology and materialist philosophies of immanence all worked to neutralize the political domain and to deny modern societies a place of transcendence once provided by religion (see Schmitt 2007a). Indeed, the constitutional liberal state was itself an embodiment of this nihilism and loss of political meaning – it had become, in the eyes of Schmitt, a mere administrative machine without genuine political substance and without a transcendent dimension that would act as a point of legitimacy for public order. What was missing in the modern age was the ‘spirit’ of sovereignty that was essential to any genuine political order. It was this conclusion that led Schmitt to affirm an authoritarian and ‘decisionist’ account of sovereignty and which explains, at least in part, his attraction to Nazism some years later.

Schmitt's concern is to understand the conditions of secularism and the threat it poses to politics, as well as to find new sources of political authority and legitimacy. As a ‘student of Weber’, Schmitt accepted the secularization hypothesis, although rejected its liberal conclusions. Schmitt's own version of the secularization thesis is summarized in the following oft-quoted passage (2005: 36):

All significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularized theological concepts not only because of their historical development – in which they were transferred from theology to the theory of the state -, whereby, for example, the omnipotent God became the omnipotent lawgiver – but also because of their systematic structure, the recognition of which is necessary for a sociological consideration of these concepts. The exception in jurisprudence is analogous to the miracle in theology.

Schmitt proposes a ‘sociology’ of political and juristic concepts based on a series of analogies with theological categories. He draws a structural parallel between the absolute authority of God and the absolute authority of the sovereign; similarly, the state of exception – in which the legal constitution is suspended by the sovereign's decision – is akin to the God's miracle that suspends the laws of

nature. By highlighting these structural analogies, Schmitt is not so much reflecting on the persistence of religion in politics, but rather pointing to the place of transcendence left vacant by the collapse of the theological world in the sixteenth century and the way that secular political concepts of the state have subsequently struggled to fill this void. Once again, religion and theology are present in modernity precisely in the form of their absence - an absence that nevertheless leaves an indelible trace on our political experience. As theological authority diminishes, there are a series of displacements and substitutions of its conceptual categories, which find their way into the historical understanding of sovereignty and create a place of transcendence that allows a political order to be instituted. Thus, in the seventeenth century – in the age of deism, in which natural law supplanted the miracle – it was still possible to think of God as the sovereign architect of the world; Hobbes's Leviathan was after all a 'mortal god'. And even in the eighteenth century, the age of Enlightenment rationalism, one finds theological ideas creeping into, for instance, Rousseau's divine-like Legislator. However, this way of thinking becomes increasingly impossible in the nineteenth century, which Schmitt characterises as the age of immanence, where the world comes to coincide entirely with itself and there is no longer space for transcendence, in either a theological or political sense. Thus, in the modern concept of democracy, in which the division between ruler and ruled is eclipsed, as well as with modern liberal concepts of the state, in which the sovereign coincides absolutely with the state and the state coincides absolutely with the law, the traditional idea of the sovereign as standing above society becomes untenable.

However, Schmitt is doing more here than simply diagnosing a problem. He is offering a solution - the state of exception - whereby the sovereign exerts its authority by suspending the constitutional order and declaring a state of emergency in response to an existential threat to the state. For Schmitt, this unilateral authority – this right to decide in exceptional situations - is at the very heart of the concept of sovereignty: 'Sovereign is he who decides on the exception.' (2005: 5) In other words, sovereignty, as a juristic concept, always inhabits the position of exception in relation to the norm – the normal legal order which it exceeds and, in exceeding it, also founds and determines it. The exception can never be wholly accounted for by the norm, nor can it be seen as deriving from it. This paradoxical logic emerges as part of Schmitt's critique of liberal constitutionalism, which sought to rein in the sovereign exception through the rule of law; and, more specifically, in his debate with the neo-Kantian positive legal theorist, Hans Kelsen who sought to identify the state with the law and developed a theory of positive law as wholly derived from a self-contained, self-referential series norms with nothing outside it. The problem with these theories, according to Schmitt, was that in trying to rule out the exception, they failed to acknowledge the way in which legal norms and rules actually presuppose an exterior that grounds them, constitutes their limit and has the authority

to apply them to specific situations; an authority to decide when and how a norm is applied. It is the sovereign exception that therefore guarantees the law. This is why, for Schmitt, the exception, while related to the legal rule, is nevertheless preeminent over it: 'The exception is more interesting than the rule. The rule proves nothing; the exception proves everything' (Schmitt 15).

Why is Schmitt so insistent that the sovereign has this exceptional authority? This is not only a juridical question, but an urgent political question, one that is in part answered, albeit it in an oblique way, in the later part of *Political Theology*. Here Schmitt discusses a series of counter-revolutionary Catholic legitimist figures like de Maistre, Bonald, and particularly Donoso Cortes. Cortes, writing, like Schmitt, in a time of political decadence in the wake of the 1848 revolutions, also claimed that sovereignty was necessarily absolutist, coming to the conclusion that the only way of preserving the purity and sanctity of the sovereign decision in the wake of the final collapse of the old monarchical order was dictatorship, something that Schmitt elsewhere endorsed as an alternative to parliamentary democracy (see 2000). Like Schmitt, furthermore, Cortes had nothing but contempt for liberalism, seeing in it only the hypocrisy of the bourgeoisie and the inability to make decisions. Liberal politics was nothing but a debating chamber that postpones the decision, drowning it in endless deliberation and equivocation. Yet, it was in revolutionary anarchism that Cortes saw, and even admired, a true enemy. The anarchist, in his absolute rejection of God and the state, is the curious mirror image of the reactionary: both recognise that the state is an absolutist concept, one to affirm it, the other to abolish it (Schmitt 2005: 55). Furthermore, this absolutism on both sides was based on their diagrammatically opposed understandings of human nature: for the reactionary, man was inherently evil and corrupt, and therefore had to be reined in by a strong state; while, for the anarchist, man was inherently good and could therefore be trusted with freedom and self-government. So here we have a sort of politico-theological war between two kinds of 'extremisms': between a radical conservatism that affirms absolute sovereignty and a strong, authoritarian state; and an atheistic revolutionary anarchism that seeks to overthrow the state in the name of the materialism, nature and the immanence of life.

In Schmitt's 'concept of the political' (see 2007b), it is the existential struggle between 'friend' and 'enemy' that turns religious organisations into political organisations and religious conflicts into political conflicts. And yet this notion of the political has to rely in turn on a theological dimension for it to have consistency and intensity. In other words, the fact that the existential struggle that gives meaning to political life has to be couched in theological terms, as a kind of apocalyptic war in which everything is at stake, shows that 'the political' relies upon a theological supplement to give it shape. Indeed, as Heinrich Meier argues, the question of faith – faith in divine revelation – is central

to Schmitt's theory of politics. Faith, and the obedience it commands, is what unites a political community and enjoins them to war and sacrifice (see Meier 1998: 76).

Schmitt's model of political theology, which was aimed at re-establishing political legitimacy through a theologically-charged, authoritarian – and one could say *monotheistic* (see Gourgouris 2016) – account of sovereignty, was not without its critics. Political philosopher, Leo Strauss, for instance, pointed to the incommensurability between theology and political philosophy: while the former was a matter of faith in, and obedience to, the message of divine revelation, the latter was about free and rational enquiry into the collective conditions of existence (see Strauss in Meier 2006). The Jewish philosopher, Jacob Taubes, in whose thinking on St Paul (see 2003) we find an alternative, messianic horizon that allows a much more radical reading of theology, characterised Schmitt as the 'apocalyptic prophet of the counterrevolution', something that took on a terrible significance in the later context of the Nazi revolution which Schmitt supported. Both he and Schmitt were apocalyptic thinkers, but Schmitt thinks 'from above', whereas he (Taubes) thinks 'from the bottom up' (2013: 13). Philosopher of history, Hans Blumenberg, who questioned the secularization thesis in favor of the radical novelty and self-assertion of the modern world, also questioned Schmitt's sovereign state of exception, an idea that he believed was out of step with the modern world. According to Blumenberg, Schmitt merely borrows out of date metaphors from an earlier theological language to justify his idiosyncratic version of sovereignty. Schmitt was therefore not so much a 'political theologian' but a political theorist making a rhetorical case and calling on theological images to affirm a strong sovereign.

Yet, perhaps the most serious critique of Schmitt came from Catholic theologian, Erik Peterson, who in his 1935 essay, 'Monotheism as a Political Problem' (2011), sought to demonstrate the theological illegitimacy of political theology. Here he shows that any kind of analogy between earthly and divine sovereignty, such as Schmitt draws, is contradicted by early Christian theology. In particular, the idea of the triune God in the Trinitarian doctrine of Gregory of Nazianzus in the fourth century AD, contradicted the idea of a divine monarchy, at least one that could be translated into earthly terms. Therefore, the idea of a single sovereign ruler simply had no basis in theology. Moreover, the attempt within Christianity to use theological ideas to justify certain political formations could not be accepted on the basis of Christian eschatology. In this way, Peterson sought make political theology impossible by pointing out the illegitimacy of translating theological concepts into political concepts. The parallel Schmitt drew between metaphysical and political concepts – which depended on the idea of divine monarchy - was a Hellenistic translation of Jewish monotheism, and was thus more pagan than Christian: 'Only on the basis of Judaism and paganism can such a thing as "political

theology" exist.' (105)

It was some of these criticisms that led Schmitt to respond in his very last work, *Political Theology II: the Myth of the Closure of Any Political Theology* [1970]. Here Schmitt accused Peterson of a fundamental misunderstanding of political theology. In hanging his whole critique on Eusebius' misuse of theology to legitimize the empire of Constantine the Great, Peterson mixes up what was essentially an intra-Christian struggle with a politico-theological relationship (2008: 64). Moreover, Peterson's critique of monotheism and its serving as the theological basis for monarchy, applied only to the monarch as an individual person, not to the idea of sovereignty as a *juridical* person, which is what Schmitt is principally interested in. As a *political* theologian, Schmitt wants to pull theology onto a political terrain. Indeed, he wants to show that even within theology itself, insofar as it was influenced by the old Gnostic dualist doctrine, there is an immanent *stasis* or conflict, which can become politicized (126). There can be no pure theology pitted against an impure politics. As for Blumenberg, to whose critique Schmitt devotes less attention, he accuses him of a kind of aggressive assertion of idea of modernity as constituting an absolute novelty and a radical break with the past that requires no legitimization beyond its own conditions. Once again, the problem, as far as Schmitt is concerned, is that in this new age of immanence and radical innovation, celebrated by Blumenberg, there is no space for transcendence and therefore no real grounds for legitimacy.

#### Political theology after Schmitt

While Schmitt's thought continues to serve as the point of departure for most investigations into political theology, subsequent approaches – within political theory, continental philosophy, and theology – have led to a significant broadening out of the concept. After the Second World War, and in the wake of Auschwitz and the Vatican's collusion with the Nazi regime, theologians - many of whom were inspired by the example of Lutheran pastor and anti-Nazi dissident Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who was executed in a concentration camp – put forward more radical interpretations.

The 'liberation theology' of Johann Baptist Metz (see 1998), as well as Latin American theologians like Leonardo Boff and Gustavo Gutiérrez (see 1998) drew on Marxist theory and the philosophy of the Frankfurt School to develop a form of political theology that spoke to movements of resistance, emancipation and social justice, particularly in the Global South. German theologian Dorothee Sölle (1983) condemned fundamentalism and blind obedience as 'Christo-fascism' and questioned the notion of God as absolute and all-powerful – an idea that translated, she argued, into political oppression and authoritarianism. Thomas JJ Altizer proposed a form of radical theology based on the idea of the 'death of God' in secular modernity, an event that freed Christian theology from

obedience to the idea of divine authority and church doctrine (see 2012; see also Vattimo 2007: 27-47).

In taking account of the radical implications of secularism, Protestant theologian Jürgen Moltmann developed a form of eschatological Christian theology based on the idea of hope embodied in Christ's resurrection - one that was, at the same time, strongly influenced by critical social theory and theologies of liberation (Moltmann 1967). Moreover, in Moltmann's view, Schmitt's sovereign-centric political thinking was not really a political theology at all, in the sense that it had nothing to do with any genuine Christian theology. Rather, it was a *political religion*, that is, a religion of power, a way of justifying, using the garb of theology, an absolutist sovereign state. In opposition to Schmitt, Moltmann (1999) put forward a new kind of political theology that seeks a more public role for the church in resisting state domination and supporting secular movements for emancipation and racial, social and environmental justice:

So the aim of the new political theology is to strip the magic from political and civil religion, and to subject to criticism the state ideologies which are supposed to create unity at the cost of liberty. In this way it places itself in the history of the impact of Christianity on politics, which means the desacralization of the state, the relativization of forms of political order, and the democratization of political decisions. (44)

More recent interventions in radical political theology have sought to demonstrate its relevance to new social movements of emancipation and economic and racial justice, like Occupy and Black Lives Matter (see Miller 2019), being influenced by ideas of radical democracy (see Robbins 2011) and critical race theory (see Lloyd 2012). These new approaches tend to emphasise a theology of immanence rather than transcendence, and, although they go beyond a liberal paradigm of politics<sup>1</sup> and beyond conventional ideas of political representation and civic engagement, one could not imagine a form of political theology more different from Schmitt's. Indeed, to return to Schmitt's old foe, the anarchist, one can even refer to anarchistic forms of political theology that draw on both Jewish (see Martel 2012; Löwy 2017)<sup>2</sup> and Christian traditions (see Christoyannopoulos 2011). Philosopher and theologian, Jacques Ellul (1991) argues that, notwithstanding the anti-clericalism of

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<sup>1</sup> Coming from a different perspective, theologian and philosopher John Milbank has criticised liberalism and modern secular reason for its nihilistic 'positivism', developing an alternative radical Christian orthodoxy based on Augustinian theology (see Milbank 1990).

<sup>2</sup> For a more extensive discussion of Jewish political theology, including from some of the more messianic and mystical traditions – represented by the thought of Franz Rosenzweig, Martin Buber, Gershom Scholem, Gustav Landauer and Walter Benjamin - see for instance Jacobson (2003), Rosenstock (2010) and Rashkover and Kavka (2013).

early anarchist movements and ideologies, there are important resonances between Christianity and anarchism: if authority can only come God, then this automatically de-delegitimizes any claim to authority by secular political institutions like the state, and releases us from our obligation to obey them. Christianity, if taken seriously, turns us into conscientious objectors to state authority and violence.

Central to what we might call the new political theology, in its various articulations, is therefore a different relationship between the theological and political. While Schmitt drew structural parallels between theological and political categories to justify an authoritarian form of state sovereignty, new political theologians tend to argue for a greater prominence of theology in politics, but in a way that is compatible with secular and democratic society and which works in solidarity with social justice movements. This reflects a long theological tradition of engagement with political issues and progressive causes such as the Civil Rights and anti-war movements - from Social Gospel in the US to prominent public theologians like Reinhold Niebuhr, John Howard Yoder and Max Stackhouse. In arguing for a more active role for church organisations in public life, the new political theology can be characterised as a form of 'public theology' (see Cady 1993; Breitenberg 2003; Graham 2013; Kim and Day 2017).

#### Eco-political theology

Political theology has also taken an interest in environmental questions. Moltmann sought to incorporate ecological concerns into a theocentric – as opposed to anthropocentric – form of thinking: the earth is not man's property but God's, and while humans have stewardship of the earth, they do not have the sovereign right to exploit it irresponsibly and without regard to all its other non-human inhabitants (see Moltmann 1985). Moreover, this non-anthropocentric way of thinking also decentres the idea of a sovereign anthropomorphic and transcendent God. Rather, God should be seen as immanent within nature, as living within his own house and as part of his own creation. The emphasis of Moltmann's eco-theology is on our contingency and our entanglement with the earth and with natural ecosystems, upon which our survival depends, to which we therefore have obligations, and whose rights we must therefore respect. More recent approaches have drawn on elements of 'process theology' (see Cobb and Griffin 1979; Whitehead 1979) and the 'new materialism' or 'object-oriented-ontology' in continental philosophy (see Bennett 2009) in order to respond to the implications of the Anthropocene age and the environmental crisis. In emphasising our immanent connectedness and entanglement with natural and non-human worlds, it often presents a pantheistic political theology that departs not only from Schmitt's anthropomorphic and transcendent way of thinking (see Keller 2015). Central here is the increasing awareness, brought on by the looming environmental crisis, of the common world we share with nature and

with non-human life forms, such that we can no longer think of ourselves as autonomous individuals ontologically separated from these ecosystems. This is a realisation that can inspire new forms of interspecies cooperation, and indeed new conceptions of political community (see Latour 2017).

### Economic theology

An important development in scholarly debates on political theology has been the focus on the economy as a sphere of concepts, practices and institutions that also have deep theological roots. In displacing Schmitt's sovereign-centric paradigm, *economic theology* seeks to understand the economy as a form of governance over life that often competes with the authority of the nation state, particularly in the time of global networked capitalism (see Newman 2019). Similar to the concerns of political theology, economic theology refers to a secularization of theological concepts. Max Weber famously pointed to the relationship between Protestant ascetic spirituality and the values of profit accumulation, austerity and the 'work ethic' found in modern capitalism which, he argued, were motivated by a sense of religious duty and calling rather than simply by greed or utilitarian considerations (see 2001). More recently, philosopher Giorgio Agamben – in an attempt to displace, or at least supplement, Schmitt's transcendent sovereign-centric paradigm of political theology - has investigated the theological roots of liberal government based on ideas of the economy of salvation and God's providence (an idea we find in Adam Smith for instance). Tracing this back to the early church fathers in the second and third centuries, Agamben (2011) shows how the idea of a 'divine economy' developed as a way of defending Trinitarian doctrine and church orthodoxy against Gnostic and Arian heresies: here the ancient Greek concept of *oikonomia*, as the management or administration of the household (*oikos*), was translated in theological terms as the 'divine plan of salvation' and a 'mystery of the economy', and deployed as a way of explaining the idea that God could be both three persons and one at the same time. In Agamben's analysis, this introduces a kind of division within the order of both heavenly and earthly power, between a sovereign who 'reigns but does not govern' and a governmental-administrative machine that governs life in an immanent way through the economy.

### Applying political theology today

This diversity of approaches to political theology suggests that the concept can be applied to an understanding of a broad range of phenomena in social and political life. I have shown that political theology refers, at one level, to the problem of political legitimacy – something the contemporary liberal secular order is experiencing an acute crisis of. When, for instance, religious fundamentalists demand a much closer integration of religious values with laws, or when right-wing nationalist

populists demand a repatriation of powers from anonymous global networks and liberal elites in the name of the 'will of the people' and the idea of a homogeneous cultural identity, or when people generally express a distrust in political institutions and representative democracy, they are displaying, in one form or another, the desire for sovereignty, for some point of legitimacy that can ground the social order and give meaning to political life, even if this is largely illusory. This is a desire that emerges from what I have called the absent place of the sacred in secular societies that is the chief concern of political theology. This crisis of legitimacy has been accelerated by the Covid-19 pandemic and its dramatic consequences for public health, the economy, and the future shape of democracies. Some commentators, including Agamben, have argued that with the extraordinary and arguably disproportionate restrictions imposed by democratic states to combat the virus, we are witnessing nothing less than the Schmittian state of exception, one that would have permanent effects on political life (see 2020).

On the other hand, the pandemic has also accelerated many countervailing tendencies that can be seen in the explosion of protests around the world, particularly in reaction to police violence, racial injustice and the ecological crisis. Not only do movements such as Black Lives Matter reflect, in a different way, the crisis of political legitimacy, but they also symbolise a new kind of intersection between the theological and the political. Church groups and religious organisations often take part in these protests – thus evoking a more public role for religion - and what are largely secular movements employ rituals, rhetoric, discourses and symbols that derive from religion and theology (see Kidwell 2019). Particularly striking here is the theological language of the Apocalypse and the millenarian 'end of days' narrative employed by climate justice movements like Extinction Rebellion (XR). Here, political theology, in its more politically progressive form, can help us to apprehend the ways in which the line between the secular and the religious is often blurred, in productive ways, in contemporary social movements and forms of protest.

Political theology thus provides a language for understanding a diverse range of political and social experience, for which there is often no recourse from more familiar forms of political theory. In reflecting on the place of the sacred in political life, and in bringing theological ideas to bear on political institutions and practices – often in a critical way – political theology opens up a new horizon for political and social thought.

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