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Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Limits of Political Theology

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Abstract

This article demonstrates how Hans Urs von Balthasar's theology of love, which he claims is the only "credible" alternative to older theological conceptions whose organizing principles are no longer plausible justifications for belief, cannot operate as a political theology. This impossibility raises questions of credibility for the field of political theology as a whole. To demonstrate this challenge, the article compares Balthasar's theology to three major concepts of Carl Schmitt's political theology: the friend–enemy distinction, sovereignty, and the totality of the political. Although Balthasar does not discuss Schmitt specifically, the logic of his theory offers a compelling response on all three counts. The article concludes by arguing that the political value of Balthasar's theology lies in its self-limitation—by refusing to offer a prescriptive political theology, Balthasar leaves room for both the humble human limits of politics as well as the potential for political creativity and freedom undertaken in love.

Keywords: Hans Urs von Balthasar, Carl Schmitt, political theology, revelation, sovereignty, modernity, liberalism, love

Despite its recent popularity, political theology faces a twofold credibility problem. On the one hand, for those who do not find religion credible in general, political theology seems quixotic at

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best and dangerous at worst. On the other hand, the sincerely religious may object that the politicization of theology instrumentalizes, misappropriates, or profanes the sacred. As a project, it straddles uncomfortably the divide between revelation and reason, sacred and secular, heaven and earth. Naturally, then, it faces barriers of skepticism from partisans of both sides.

Part of the problem stems from the tendency of political theologies to be both descriptive *and* prescriptive—usually overtly so.[1] A merely descriptive or analogical theory, in which theology provides a political thought-experiment, would be easy enough to entertain. Similarly, political theology understood as a diagnostic tool for religio-political phenomena—sectarian violence, tribal ideological dynamics, or the political behavior of religious subcultures—seems helpful enough.

But a prescriptive political theology will stand or fall on the credibility of the particular theology behind it, rather than on the appeal of its political application—if the two can even be separated.[2] This paper proposes to explore this problem by way of Hans Urs von Balthasar's work on the modern theological crisis, *Love Alone Is Credible*.[3] In this book, Balthasar traces the long history of Christianity's attempts to justify belief in its claims through two distinct epochs. The first one, which lasted from the birth of Christianity through the High Middle Ages, could be characterized as broadly "cosmological" in its method of self-justification: credibility was established in terms of the objective natural laws of a still-enchanted cosmos and the presumption that natural philosophy and Christian theology could successfully be synthesized. This theological vision collapsed under its own weight as it became increasingly difficult to distinguish between the synthesis and a mere natural religion. This failure led to the second epoch, the "anthropological" one, in which faith tried to locate justification for belief in the human person, particularly in the light of a subjective human reason divorced from its previously acknowledged divine source. The failure of this second method of justification has left belief in a crisis of credibility, to which Balthasar proposes a theology of love as the only viable way forward.

There are several implications here for political theology. First is the extent to which the historical ebb and flow of credibility of faith in Balthasar's historical narrative mirrors Carl Schmitt's "secularization" thesis rather well in its broad strokes, if not in its terminology or more narrow concerns.[4] At the very least, it seems to agree with the general sense, as Robert Yelle says regarding Schmitt, that "the evidence for the existence of sovereignty parallels the traditional mode of evidencing the existence of the deity."[5]

Nevertheless—and this is one of the main contentions of this paper—Balthasar's approach resists easy conversion into a prescriptive political theology in the Schmittean mode. If political theology consists, as Schmitt famously put it, of the secularization of *theological concepts*, then Balthasar's theology cannot be politicized because it is not composed of concepts.[6] Balthasar insists that love is not a concept; it cannot be conceptualized or captured by reason because it is beyond reason. "Genuine love is always inconceivable," he claims, and while Balthasar may have his work cut out explaining how something *inconceivable* can nonetheless be *credible* (indeed, the only thing credible), it is clear that the "love" at the basis of his theology is not the kind of thing that could operate as a political concept (*LA*, 52n1). For this reason, this paper begins from the presumption that Balthasar's theology cannot simply be made into or treated as a political theology.

However, the fact that Balthasar's monumental theology resists this kind of politicization raises some questions for political theology—regarding its credibility as well as the breadth of its potential applicability. If taken seriously, Balthasar's theology poses an especially formidable challenge to such all-encompassing visions of political theology as Schmitt's. Balthasar articulates a fundamentally different kind of theology than what these political theologians put forth and, furthermore, claims that this is the *only* plausible theology.[7] His terms are uncompromising: "Love alone is credible; nothing else can be believed, and nothing else ought to be believed" (*LA*, 101). This paper demonstrates this opposition by comparing Balthasar's theology to three major concepts of Schmitt's political theology: the friend–enemy distinction, sovereignty, and the

totality of the political. While Balthasar does not engage Schmitt directly in *Love Alone Is Credible* or any of the other works presented here, I argue that the logic of his theology offers a compelling rebuttal to Schmitt on each count.

This paper concludes by arguing that the political value of Balthasar's theology lies precisely in its self-limitation—by refusing to offer a prescriptive political theology, Balthasar leaves room for the humble human limits of politics as well as the potential for political creativity and freedom undertaken in love.

The Loss of Theological and Political Credibility

From its beginning, Christianity was presented by its apologists as a project of unification and fulfillment on a world-historical scale. The "Kingdom of God" was among the symbols employed to name and explain this project—although it was never understood as a static reign, but more of an unfolding, evolving, historical process of unification and conversion (*LA*, 16). Balthasar notes that it was possible for early Christian thinkers to understand their "kingdom" process this way "because these Christian thinkers took over the identity between philosophy and theology that had prevailed in the ancient cultures as a self-evident fact. Equally evident to them was the unity of the natural and supernatural orders" (*LA*, 16). It was only logical, then, that Christianity be understood not as the enemy of other philosophies or older religions but as the fulfillment and culmination of what truth those systems already contained. Furthermore, the natural world seemed to early Christians, as it had in various ways to "Plato, Aristotle, the Stoics, or Plotinus and Proclus," as if it were "permeated by the divine" and "sacred"; "one finds a living and spirit-permeated cosmos present everywhere behind the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation" (*LA*, 18, 23).

Because of the ubiquity of this unifying perspective, both within Christianity from its earliest days through the High Middle Ages and among all the prevailing belief systems of the ancient world, Balthasar contends that Christianity was able to establish its mature, philosophical-theological self-understanding in such a way that "the question whether revelation introduced a special

principle of unity was all but left behind" (*LA*, 18). Balthasar finds the culmination of this "world-logos" perspective in Nicolaus Cusanus's vision of the reconciliation of world religions in Christ, who embodies the truth "behind" each faith (*LA*, 26, 19).

But already by the time of Cusanus there were cracks in this elegantly unifying worldview. The problems were not entirely, or even fundamentally, intellectual; Balthasar notes it was institutional failures above all that damaged the credibility of the medieval Church (*LA*, 20). In response, Renaissance humanists embarked on a project to recover Christianity's "center and therefore its inner catholicity—and therefore also its credibility" (*LA*, 20). But this project resulted in an institutional failure of an even greater magnitude: the Reformation. The failure of ecclesial unity could not but call into question the assumptions of unity in the natural and supernatural world, the unity in, between, and behind various faiths, and the unity of philosophy and theology.

There were two reactions to the opening of this question. On the one hand, the humanists attempted to recover some sense of unity and coherence by substituting "nature" and "reason" for the older, more comprehensive "world-logos" and by replacing Cusanus's vision of the fulfillment of all things in Christ with skepticism and religious toleration (*LA*, 25–28). On the other hand, the loss of confidence in human reason—now that it could no longer confidently be understood as "permeated by the divine"—caused the reformers to insist on a "pure obedience of pure faith to the pure Word" of scripture, unaccountable to human reason and thus beyond the question of credibility (*LA*, 21).

Thus, the high medieval synthesis of all things reconciled in the unity of God in Christ disintegrated into an unconvincingly thin account of natural religion in competition with an unconvincingly strident account of absolute submission to *sola scriptura*. Balthasar muses that "there is perhaps nothing more disturbing in the intellectual history of the modern age than how imperceptibly the old view of the world passed over into the new: what was or appeared to be theology yesterday has turned today—who can say how?—into philosophy and rationalism," to the acclaim of the urbane

humanists and the dismay of the proto-evangelical reformers (*LA*, 23). In the wake of this "disturbing" change, reason and revelation, nature and grace, the political and the religious not only become separated but also seem to lose any possibility of reconciliation. Once this happens, all coherent credibility for belief seems lost—"the only things left were the external evidences of prophecies and miracles," while the "interior" aspect of spiritual experience and encounter "becomes solely a matter of Christian faith" in a subjective sense (*LA*, 30). Since the natural world was no longer "permeated by the divine," evidence for faith could be found only in alleged *disruptions* to the natural order, or *within* persons insofar as the "within" could also be separated from the "objective" natural world.

Balthasar calls the ancient and medieval perspective, in which the world is animated by the divine *logos*, the "cosmological reduction"; it was followed by an era characterized by what he names the "anthropological reduction."[8] If the "demythologized" natural world could no longer offer credible evidence for faith, then "the human being, who recapitulated the entire world in himself" might offer a plausible alternative (*LA*, 31). This line of thinking begins in the Renaissance but "culminates in Kant," who puts the moral dignity of the human person at the center of his rational and ethical considerations (*LA*, 33–35). Eventually, even the Church begins to take up this "modern" way of explaining itself, since it, at least, seems to provide some credibility (*LA*, 39). Furthermore, the anthropological approach seems to be in harmony with the older Christian tradition in which God is understood to work interiorly in and through the human person. But the relation was only apparent: "the tradition never set the *criterion* for the truth of revelation in the center of the pious human subject, it never measured the abyss of grace by the abyss of need or sin, it never judged the content of dogma according to its beneficial effects on human beings" (*LA*, 43, emphasis added).

One possible solution to this problem is to broaden the criterion from the atomistic individual to the person in community. Balthasar notes that here is where he encounters "the people who

most warrant our serious consideration," people with whom he clearly shares some sympathies (*LA*, 43). Marxists, socialists, personalists, and all those who find God, not in the center of the atomized person, but *between* persons in the I-Thou experience, belong to this group (*LA*, 44). And they do seem to have hit on a solution that leaves the criterion at the human level while transcending the subjective interior prison of the individual soul. Balthasar puts it thus:

> While everywhere else the anthropological reduction ends in a human being who understands himself and thereby also lays hold of the world and God—all the more so the more fundamentally the cosmos is robbed of its religious significance—here something like a reference beyond opens up: if God, the Wholly-Other, ever wishes to encounter man, the place he manifests himself cannot but lie in the person who remains ever "other" to me, in other words, my "neighbor." (LA, 46)

But Balthasar is not convinced that even this position, as closely as it might approach his own theology of love, is ultimately a credible account of a truly Christian faith. "Its inadequacy becomes apparent the moment we consider that two human beings, however different they may be from one another, nevertheless always encounter one another within the same 'nature'; for nature cannot be bracketed out from what it means to be a person" (*LA*, 47). Clearly God cannot be encountered as an object, or even a person, *within* the nature of which he is the creator. Revelation in the sense of "genuine personal self-disclosure" on the part of God "is possible only if God freely chooses to make himself intelligible to man in his Word by interpreting to him the Word that he speaks" (*LA*, 47–48).

According to Balthasar, there are, rarely, thinkers who are able to thread the needle and present a subjective account of faith that does not originate in and is not accountable to that subject as an individual—he offers Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky as examples in this category. But even for these thinkers, faith remains a credible

paradox—and the case that can be made for it is, at best, a case for its *possibility*, not *plausibility* (*LA*, 48–50). Thus, he notes that this anthropological attempt to offer a credible account for faith fails just as the cosmological one did before it. And now, "if we cannot verify God's Sign in terms of the world or in terms of man, then what else do we have?" (*LA*, 50).

What is remarkable, from the perspective of the question of political theology, is the extent to which this history of the credibility of Christian faith mirrors the history of political philosophy's attempts to ground and legitimate rulership (in the ancient and medieval world) and the sovereign state (in the modern era).[9] Cosmological appeals to nature as the ground of a just politics run right through the canon from Plato forward. Such appeals reach their zenith, likewise, in Aquinas's synthesis—the clearest example being his claim that a king's rule over a kingdom stands in relation, by analogy, to God's rule over the earth and reason's rule over the body.[10] The symmetry is seamless for Aquinas; the same criteria, the same *logos*, is operative in each case, and he has no trouble ordering its iterations hierarchically and linking them all systematically back to their source in God himself.

By the time of Hobbes, however, nature has come to be seen as an analogue for chaos rather than as the manifestation of God's orderly rule. Likewise, Hobbes has no confidence in reason's power over humanity's physical desires. Political authority is grounded, thus, not on the objective credibility of natural order but on the subjective *fear* of natural *disorder* and the urgent anthropological need for a solution to that problem. Any analogy between "that Mortall God" and the immortal one stems not from a shared logic of good order but from the similar experience of obedience ("peace and defence") on the part of their human subjects.[11] Rousseau, too, opposes reason and nature even as he finds nature more congenial; his General Will turns out to be no less absolute than Hobbes's Leviathan. But both thinkers, just like Locke and Mill and the other liberals, place the subjective individual experience (whether of passion, pity, nature, rationality, or freedom) at the heart of their attempts to legitimate political rule. The entire modern era of

politics—from the theoreticians down to the writers of modern constitutions—justifies political order in terms of human rather than cosmic nature.

Thus, even if it is true that the justification of political order has followed and mirrored that of theology, then to some degree—perhaps a lagging one—politics is facing the same sort of crisis of credibility. Clearly, polity or kingship justified by analogy to an objective natural order will no longer fly. But appeals to human or natural rights are also becoming difficult to justify on the grounds of subjective human experience alone. Like religious faith, these and similar political principles seem to be either subjective or arbitrary—matters of personal experience that exert no compelling normative claim on others or are the result of transitory agreement enforced by majoritarian power.

This "crisis of liberalism" is precisely the problem that political theology, at least in the Schmittean mode, seeks to address. One question, then, is whether the credibility of love that Balthasar proposes as the way forward for faith can also provide a credible political theology. The following section of this paper explains that theology of love and teases out its political dimensions. Nevertheless, Balthasar's ultimate answer to this question seems to be *no*, for both explicit and implicit reasons.

The remaining question will be what this *no* means for political theology. The final section of the paper suggests that although Balthasar's theology is resistant to politicization, this resistance raises important challenges to political theologies like Schmitt's at the same time that it helpfully reveals the proper ends *and* limits of both theology and politics.

A Theology of Love

Balthasar's solution to the credibility crisis of faith is a theology of love. This "love" is not reducible to a doctrinal creed or scriptural tenet, and it is much more than a subjective experience of emotion. In fact, it can be understood as a way of embodying both the subjectivity of the anthropological approach and the objectivity of the cosmological vision while going beyond both.[12]

The matter of credibility must be emphasized again: what is at stake in this "theology" is not some abstract definition of God but the claim of a *revelation* of God that ought to be *believed* by human beings. It is an understanding of revelation that "avoids the temptation to master God, while respecting"—and, in this work, demonstrating—"the certainty of God's revealedness in the world."[13] When Balthasar speaks of love, he is speaking of the whole form, content, and meaning of this revelation, as well as the human experience of it, and thus of the possibility of its epistemological "credibility." The centerpiece of this revelation is the person of Christ, especially in his incarnation and crucifixion, and what Balthasar explains as a theology of love emanates from this center.[14] As far as he is concerned, either this center is credible or nothing in Christianity is.

> If for a single moment we were to look away from [Christ] and attempt to consider and understand the Church as an autonomous form, the Church would not have the slightest plausibility. It would be plausible neither as a religious institution . . . nor as an historical power for order and culture in the sense of the Action Française and of the German Catholic Nazis. On the contrary, seen in this way it loses all credibility, and for this reason the Church Fathers often compared the Church's light with the light of the moon, borrowed from the sun and showing its relativity most clearly in its phases. The plausibility of Christianity stands and falls with Christ's.[15]

Balthasar's theology of love is expansive, and here it can only be sketched with emphasis on the aspects most relevant to the questions of credibility and political theology. The first significant aspect is that love—especially as seen in the incarnation and crucifixion—is not a philosophical or dogmatic proposition. Nor is it merely a sign or symbol. Balthasar speaks of it as an aesthetic *form* or dramatic *action*, using words that better capture the way love embodies conflicting aspects of reality simultaneously.[16] Art and

drama both capture the viewer's attention and retain the power to "move" the viewer internally because they make the abstract concrete, the imagined visible, the universal particular; they can hold the eternal still long enough to catch a glimpse. They do this in a way that is real—not merely symbolic—and thus credible; but at the same time no one mistakes a single work of art for the whole of beauty itself. Art embodies and communicates the transcendent without possessing or containing it.

Love operates the same way. The beloved experiences love concretely, but in that experience discovers that love transcends any particular expression. And although it can be experienced, it can never be reduced to rational explanation. The essence of love is that it is given or revealed in freedom; the one to whom it is given has no control over the giving, even if that person may choose how to receive the gift (*LA*, 52–53). Whatever doctrine, teaching, or "Logos" Christianity and the life of Christ might present to the world must be understood *as love*, and therefore as a revelation whose meaning exists on its own terms. "Divine" or "absolute" love is a "self-interpreting revelation-form," which, if it is believed, must be believed without being comprehended or, which is worse, reduced to graspable, dogmatic terms (*LA*, 55–56). "If the fundamental word of this Logos were not love . . . then the Christian Logos would have to stand as one of a series with the logoi of other religious wisdom teachings. . . . But if the fundamental word is not only 'love' but '*divine* love,'" then it cannot be confused with anything "man has always already understood"—instead, the only appropriate response is "to adore it from a reverent distance" (*LA*, 55–56).

Taking this as axiomatic, Balthasar presents the life and death of Christ through its lens. Human art and human love *are* merely signs that point beyond themselves to something they cannot contain, but Balthasar sees the self-interpreting revelation of Christianity as the form—the thing itself. This essence is especially apparent in the paradoxical aspects of the revelation of Christ: the assertion that the eternal God was born as a particular human, and the assertion that God's love and glory are displayed primarily in

Christ's unlovely, inglorious death by crucifixion. Both elements involved a moment of "obedience"—an important concept for political theology. Through obedience, Balthasar writes, Christ

> becomes the manifestation of God's eternal love for the world. But, for the same reason, he becomes the manifestation of his eternal majesty and kingship, which reveals itself most definitively in the servant's ultimate humiliation . . . . But if the kingship of the God who reveals himself as love comes to light precisely in the Son's humble obedience to the Father, then it is clear that this obedience is essentially love. . . . [F]ar more than that, it is the radiant paradigm of divine love itself: precisely in—and only in—the kenosis of Christ, the inner mystery of God's love comes to light, the mystery of the God who "is love" (1 Jn. 4:8) in himself and therefore is triune.[17] (*LA*, 87)

Thus, the role of obedience in Balthasar's theology does not signify the obedience of humankind to God but of God (the Son) to himself (the Father) in such a way that reveals the meaning of God's "self-interpreting revelation" to be "the radiant paradigm of divine love." Furthermore, he locates "revelation" *in* the life and death of Christ himself—not in some truth behind these events, and especially not in the Bible or Church authorities except insofar as these witness to this more fundamental revelation.[18] "The sole authority is the Son, who interprets the Father in the Holy Spirit as divine Love. For it is only here, at the source of revelation, that authority (or majesty) and love can—and necessarily do—coincide" (*LA*, 56).[19] Any "demand for obedient faith," then, cannot mean submission to lower authority or intellectual belief, but only a kind of preparation (*LA*, 56). This preparation can again be understood by analogy to art; to truly "perceive" a thing of genuine beauty, one must have some "training" or capacity "to distinguish it from mediocre art or kitsch" (*LA*, 75). But with regard to love, the openness to such preparation, "which raises him up to the revealed object and tunes him to it . . . must already be present at least in an inchoative way" (*LA*, 75).

Thus, the credibility of this theology of love is found, not in its concepts, nor in its claims to authority, but in the already present possibility of the beloved creature, created in love, to recognize love when he sees it:

> After a mother has smiled at her child for many days and weeks, she finally receives her child's smile in response. She has awakened love in the heart of her child, and as the child awakens to love, it also awakens to knowledge. . . . God interprets himself to man as love in the same way: he radiates love, which kindles the light of love in the heart of man, and it is precisely this light that allows man to perceive this, the absolute Love. (*LA*, 76)

This ability to perceive love and find it credible is not, therefore, a purely "human" capacity originating in the person, as the "anthropological reduction" would have it. The capacity for belief and the object of belief have the same source—and yet, there is still "work" for faith to do, for Balthasar recognizes the skeptical objection that this revelation of pure love "obviously presumes far too much. It is too good to be true" (*LA*, 101–2). To believe in it is "to believe against all the evidence of experience . . . against every 'rational' concept of God, which thinks of him in terms of impassibility or, at best, totally pure goodness, but not in terms of this inconceivable and senseless act of love" (*LA*, 101–2). But Balthasar has already demonstrated the extent to which the "evidence of experience" and "rational concepts" have failed as credible justifications for faith; to entertain this notion of faith as an alternative is, at least, to see that it is asking something of the believer far different than what would be expected. "Our self-gift *in* faith to an ever-greater love is always necessarily at the same time a self-gift *of* faith to its ever greater truth" (*LA*, 105, emphasis added).

Whether Balthasar has actually achieved his goal of articulating a more credible basis for faith in a new, post-anthropological era can safely be left open. The question that must now be undertaken is why Balthasar's solution to the problem of credibility of faith

cannot also work as a political theology. In other words, if his diagnosis of the roots of the historical crisis is valid for both faith and politics, then why is the solution to one unavailable to the other?

The first reason why Balthasar's theology of love cannot be put to work as a political theology is because political theology relies on shared or analogous *concepts*—in Schmitt's formulation, "all significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularized theological concepts"—and Balthasar insists that revelation in the form of divine love is not a concept.[20] Love, as has already been said, is "inconceivable" (*LA*, 52n1); but elsewhere Balthasar makes this even more explicit. Christian revelation "cannot be a communication of knowledge, a 'teaching', in the first place, but only secondarily. It must be in the first place an action that God undertakes" (*LA*, 70). The "content" of this action cannot be distilled out of the action into propositions, but "lies solely in God's presentation of himself to human beings" in that self-interpreting form discussed above (*LA*, 70). God reveals himself as the revealing God; this action *is* love. This action is not done for any *reason* that humankind can deduce. It is not accountable to the question "why?" It is therefore "'intelligible' only insofar as it is *not* understood" (*LA*, 71). If it cannot be reduced to a concept, then it cannot be co-opted into an "analogous" or "sociological consideration" applied to political structures and ideas.[21] If one nonetheless tries to conceptualize this theology of love into a concept, one can do so only in awareness that what is being transferred is a false reduction of what Balthasar wants to communicate about what he believes is true.

The nonconceptuality of love might not by itself seem to present a firm barrier to a political theology. There are those who would advance the idea that a more integrated political theology is possible. Jacob Taubes, for example, raises the possibility of a political theology that avoids the "overly this-worldly" extremism of Marx and the "overly other-worldly" extreme of Kierkegaard by combining the sacred and secular, which he claims they both separate.[22] Taubes's theology, in contrast as well to Schmitt's, is mystical, relational, universal, and not based on power.[23] It also approaches the divine as something other than "an object of our consciousness"

and thus as something nonconceptual, something that "could thus never be named."[24] And yet, unlike Balthasar, Taubes is able to imagine a politics in which people are "brethren 'on earth,'" but only if they can "overcome the principle of domination" both spiritually and politically.[25] The principle of domination was what he opposed in Schmitt's political theory; clearly, Balthasar also finds this principle theologically unacceptable.

But beyond the issue of conceptualization, Balthasar seems to specifically rule out political theology as a viable option in this and other works. This is not to say that his theology never touches the political. For example, in the first volume of his *Theo-Drama*, Balthasar acknowledges that theology, especially in its "dramatic" sense that he uses in this second part of his theological trilogy, must have "a political side."[26] Christianity understands itself in terms of a "kingdom" of God or of heaven: an explicitly political image. A kingdom must have a king—and in the case of Christianity, the central claim is that the king does not remain transcendent and abstract but appeared in history and in a political context, with real political consequences. "A king who is not of this world but acts in utter seriousness on the public world stage is bound to be involved in the political drama. The only question is, in what sense?" (*Theo-Drama*, 37). Balthasar comes to the conclusion that Christianity, as he understands it, inhabits a middle way—the way of "dramatic tension"—between the two obvious poles of religious attitudes toward politics: the apolitical and the theonomic. But he insists that this tension "is only inadequately expressed by the word 'political'" (*Theo-Drama*, 37).

Furthermore, any human attempt to enact the Kingdom of God on earth will fail to live up to the dramatic meaning of revelation as Balthasar understands it. This he thinks is true whether the attempt is a baldly theonomic one—an "attempt to erect a static copy of the Kingdom of God using the building materials of the old world, as the Constantinian and medieval, imperial theology tried to do"—or a more progressive, utopian effort (*Theo-Drama*, 38). This latter case might seem to be the logical outworking of a theology of love, in which one tries to politicize "what he knows of the

Kingdom's basic elements—'love', 'righteousness', 'peace'," and so forth (*Theo-Drama*, 38). But Balthasar rejects this as an option, too, for it also distorts the meaning of the drama: "it is revealing that the life of Jesus . . . was devoid of any political claim to power, nor did it prematurely institutionalize features belonging to the *eschaton*" (*Theo-Drama*, 39). In fact, the central event in this theological drama is characterized not by power but by "impotence"—and this impotence "can never be manipulated to 'amorize' mankind" (*Theo-Drama*, 39–40).

Thus, as far as Balthasar is concerned, the alternative to a power-centric political theology like Schmitt's is not a competing political theology of love but an insistence that theology, as he understands it, simply cannot be domesticated and politicized. Human "love for man can be part of what motivates certain human activities"—among them he lists "management of the state and war"—"but it cannot form these activities from top to bottom and domesticate them. The other forces of existence retain power and dominion over and against love" (*LA*, 64). Balthasar expands on the role of these "other forces of existence" in *Theo-Drama* (both passages appeal to Nietzsche as the reality check on an idealistic politicization of love):

> [F]or Nietzsche, and anyone else who is not entirely naïve, philanthropy is only one role, one way of acting on the world stage. There are many other, opposed ways, and they are unfortunately indispensable: the struggle for survival in which the strongest or the greatest talent prevails; self-defense—both social and individual—against unjust attack now or in the future; the administration of justice with its sanctions, and so forth. Much of this can be said to be for the common good, that is, again, it is philanthropy, yet in quite a different sense from that indicated by God's primal act. (*Theo-Drama*, 33)

Thus, for Balthasar, the "sphere of ordinary existence, the place where people interact"—in other words, the political—cannot be

understood purely by reference to the theological or ordered on theological concepts or principles. It is "at best a middle position in which love and self-interest, love and nonlove, temper one another" (*LA*, 64). The full implications of this position with regard to the limits and credibility of political theology are explored in greater detail in the next section.

The Limits of Political Theology

This section takes three concepts from Carl Schmitt's well-known political theology as examples of how Balthasar's work speaks to issues of political theology: the friend–enemy distinction, the essence of sovereignty, and the totality of the political. And it might be objected at this point that the theological concepts that form the basis of political theology are not quite the bloodless abstractions Balthasar is protesting in his theology. For example, regarding the first two, the clear implication of the friend–enemy distinction and the image of the sovereign as "he who decides" is that they are personal and relational dynamics rather than abstract intellectual notions.[27] Heinrich Meier explains that a theory that relies on a God "who actively intervenes in world events and who as a person makes demands on men"—the analogue of the deciding sovereign—is a theory in which "everything [must] be related to a *person*, to his *will*, and to the *adversary* born of that will. For there can be politics only between persons, in the force field of their volition, their action, their insight, never between ideas, laws, or random series. No one knew that better than Schmitt."[28]

However, the theological basis of the friend–enemy distinction is supposed to rest on belief or unbelief: "Friend and enemy part ways over the truth of revelation. Whoever denies that truth is a liar. Whoever places it in question obeys the adversary."[29] But in this case it must be asked: belief in what? If Meier is correct, it seems the only answer is belief in revelation understood as what Balthasar would call a communication, a teaching, or a *conceptual* proposition.[30] It is a demand for a fideistic "blind faith," in Balthasar's words (*LA*, 51). Even if this is not quite the case,

Schmitt is certainly thinking of something other than Balthasar's theology of love, and this for two reasons.

First, for Schmitt, the antithesis of a genuine sovereignty that acknowledges and enforces a clear friend–enemy distinction is the self-deluded, hidden, shame-faced sovereignty of liberalism, which pretends to a benign universalism it cannot seriously maintain.[31] Schmitt attacks liberalism for being anti-political in its worship of the individual and ethical over the sovereign and the political. The turn that Balthasar describes under the "anthropological principle" ends, as far as Schmitt is concerned, in the negation of the truly political, just as it ends, for Balthasar, in the loss of all credibility for faith. For Schmitt, a recovery of the true idea of sovereignty, with a clear understanding of who belongs to the designations friend and enemy, or believer and unbeliever, is absolutely crucial.

Balthasar, however, sees both of these impulses—the nationalist and the universalist—as symptoms of the same problem: the finitude and failure of human love. This finitude produces "islands of reciprocal sympathy"—either concretely in the forms of "the island of eros, of friendship, of love of country" or abstractly in "the island of a certain universal love based on the single human nature that all people share" (*LA*, 68). Balthasar points out that "all philosophical and mystical world religions strive existentially to live out" the universality of this last "island," on which "it even becomes possible . . . to love one's enemies" (*LA*, 68).

It is no doubt correct to locate political liberalism, with its foundation in universal human rights, on this island of universal love. And Balthasar might agree with Schmitt on the ultimate futility of expecting this sort of universal love to order political affairs. But Schmitt's opposition to liberalism stems from his assumption that the island of universal love is fundamentally different *in kind* than the smaller islands on which a friend–enemy distinction might be maintained. For Balthasar, the objection arises from the fact that universal love is ultimately *not* different in kind from the more restricted expressions of human love. They are all islands; they are all examples of the *finitude* of human love. The universality of this "certain universal love" is only apparent. In reality, Balthasar

argues, it is an attempt to "overcome the limitations of finitude through an abstraction that aims at identity, that is, through a fundamentally rational process" (*LA*, 68). Such attempts are "essentially gnostic doctrines" based on such a "detachment" from lived reality that "being" and "nothing" become ultimately indistinguishable (*LA*, 68–69). As such, they are corrosive to "real, finite love," which might be lived out as attachment between flesh-and-bone human beings. Universal love, in other words, is a falsification of love and thus an example of human failure to love fully, just as the other islands are (*LA*, 69).

But if even this island of universal love cannot lay claim to embodying the revelation of love that is the basis of Balthasar's theology, then clearly the other islands fall short as well. Where Schmitt insists the first sort of finitude—the one that maintains a friend–enemy distinction—is the proper "theological" form of politics, as opposed to the abstract universalism of liberalism, Balthasar demonstrates how both of them fail to live up to a theology of love. Ultimately, all humans fail to live up to the revelation of divine love, no matter where their allegiances or formal beliefs lie. "Friendship" with God is not something to be gained through belief, allegiance, obedience, or group identity but is a gratuitous, incomprehensible gift that cannot be limited to any designated membership.

Second, Balthasar's understanding of divine sovereignty offers a challenge to political theologies like Schmitt's insofar as they assume sovereignty is capable of legitimizing power or grounding politics. For Balthasar, "the sovereignly free love of God" is the ruling principle of the universe, but it is not the kind of sovereignty or rule that can transfer neatly to a political context (*LA*, 11). Sovereignty is tied up with the problem of legitimacy, and for Schmitt the loss of legitimacy is downstream from the loss of credibility: "conceptions of transcendence will no longer be credible to most educated people, who will settle for either a more or less clear immanence-pantheism or a positivist indifference toward any metaphysics."[32] This is a genuine political problem, but it is not one that Balthasar is willing to allow theology to be co-opted to solve.

It is perhaps worth quoting at length here from Balthasar's foreword to his *Theological Anthropology*, which states the case as bluntly as possible:

> Whoever tries today, in obedience to God's word, to say something about God and man has to negotiate the narrow path between two forms of titanism. The old one, dating from Constantine, which forced political power into the service of the kingdom of Christ, is today discarded, now that the Church has finally lost his power. The new one, which identifies technical progress with the growth of God's kingdom, is all the more welcomed. Both are, however, as we shall see, simply varieties of the same integralism: the one reactionary, the other progressive; the one clerical, the other secular. Both seek to provide the kingdom of Christ with an earthly power, for both see this world as merging with the realm of God. The earlier age saw the visible world as symbolic of the invisible; the present age regards the invisible as the visible's dynamic source of energy. The earlier age dragged time by its hair before the throne of the eternity it claimed to administer; the present age marches with time in order to achieve salvation through it.
>
> But the Lamb of God walked the narrow way and, by telling us to follow him along it, gave us the hope of avoiding all forms of human titanism.[33]

Again, we can see that the two options Schmitt places in opposition to each other—the political-theological sovereign state and the modern liberal constitutional polity—Balthasar equally rejects as valid manifestations of a genuine theology.

Furthermore, Balthasar consistently emphasizes the paradoxical nature of this theology of love with regard to sovereign power. This is especially important to an understanding of the incarnation and crucifixion, as already discussed, but paradox also characterizes Balthasar's understanding of God's sovereignty. In this regard,

God's power is demonstrated "precisely in its ultimate impotence" (*LA*, 85). Likewise, Balthasar claims that the Church, "which continues to ferment in society and presses for worldly power to be used in the service of justice and peace, is powerless in itself" (*Theo-Drama*, 39). The position is stated quite clearly in *A Theological Anthropology*: "Christ's kingdom 'is not of this world'; it is at once impotent and omnipotent in its relation to the world."[34] Attempts to use power to "strive in an earthly way to get rid of the impotence of the cross or else incorporate it in itself and utilize it . . . will attain the throne of omnipotence only beyond the impotence of death and the underworld."[35] Human power, like human love, finds its source in God, according to Balthasar, and can be open to that source. But to harness either God's power or love in service to a political agenda, even one of "assisting the will of God to realize itself," is to engage in the titanism Balthasar decries.[36]

A third issue merits attention. Schmitt perhaps comes closest to Balthasar's formulations in his assertion, in the 1934 preface to the second edition of *Political Theology*, that "the political is the total."[37] He asserts this in order to contrast his political theology to that of modern liberalism. Here, he puts the blame for liberalism on the shoulders of "Protestant theology," which "presents a different, supposedly unpolitical doctrine, conceiving of God as the 'wholly other,' just as in political liberalism the state and politics are conceived as the 'wholly other.'" Schmitt leaves no way out: "any decision about whether something is *unpolitical* is always a *political* decision," and this also applies to "the question whether a particular theology is a political or unpolitical theology."[38] This raises a challenge to a theology that like Balthasar's seeks to understand itself—if not as strictly *un*political—at least as *beyond* the political and not reducible to it. Meier doubles down on the claim, with reference to a later revision of *The Concept of the Political*: "man is 'grasped wholly and existentially in political participation.'"[39] This entails an "assumption of complete identification or an irresistible authority," for "how else than by virtue of his love or his obedience could he be *grasped wholly*?"[40]

The parallel to Balthasar's theology of a love that is revealed to man in such a way that he "'possesses' love only insofar as love possesses him" seems obvious (*LA*, 134). The challenge seems obvious, too: these two theologies cannot equally be descriptive of the total, for they are clearly not referring to the same thing. Either the political is the total or divine love is—or they are both wrong in their own ways—but if one is true, the other must be false. One clue that Balthasar may have already gone beyond Schmitt in this debate has to do with Schmitt's objection to the "wholly other." Schmitt, a Catholic, associates this objection with "Protestant theology." Balthasar, also Catholic, was well known for his long friendship and dialogue with the Protestant theologian Karl Barth, whose insistence that God be understood as "wholly other" in contrast to the scholastic *analogia entis* was one of his most famous accomplishments. Balthasar spent much of his life and work responding to Barth's claim in a way that understood it and accepted it but also went beyond it; Balthasar himself frequently used the term "wholly other" as a way to emphasize the paradoxical incomprehensibility of the revealed God.[41]

For example, it is the wholly otherness of God that allows human love, including the political relations it animates, to be "real" and "concrete" (*LA*, 69) and perhaps even "point the way" toward divine love without ever being able to "accomplish the journey" (*LA*, 62). On the contrary, divine love *is* divine *because* it "cannot in any essential way be derived from or anticipated a priori on the basis of created nature, because it arises from the Other *as* Other in unfathomable freedom toward his other; no preliminary bridge of understanding can be built on similarity or, for that matter, on identity" (*LA*, 70). Although the "pre-understanding" of human love may prepare the human being to "be grasped" (to use Schmitt's term) by divine love, ultimately that experience will "reveal his own inchoate, creaturely love quite concretely for the nonlove that it is" in comparison (*LA*, 73). Balthasar's understanding of love thus ends in a paradox that goes beyond the idea of love as "complete identification" with the divine in its nuance, leaving a legitimate place for human relations and interactions on their own

terms. The Wholly-Other "is at the same time the *Non-Other*. . . . Only because he is *over* the world is he *in* it" (*LA*, 150). By providing both the context and the impetus, God awakens "a love that allows the world to take initiative" (*LA*, 146). This power is thus revealed in its weakness. But it would be impossible, from this view, to mistake the inchoate middle position of human political relationships as "the total" except by denying their source and ignoring their limitations.

In each of these three examples, Balthasar's theology is able to anticipate, absorb, and transcend the binary antitheses of Schmitt's theological-political concepts. This comparison does not prove that Balthasar is right or Schmitt wrong, but it does suggest that these concepts have limits that can be exceeded by a different approach to theology.[42] Furthermore, it demonstrates the possibility of a love-centric theology that is not reducible to the type of liberal universalism Schmitt and others find politically problematic.

Conclusion

Because there is no separating faith, broadly understood, from politics, a credible theological account cannot be an apolitical one. A "methodological 'bracketing out' of existence" is out of the question (*LA*, 12). Religious and metaphysical beliefs—even outmoded ones—still inform a society's self-understanding, and individuals and churches cannot help but navigate their political and social obligations in light of their religious beliefs. Political theology offers welcome insight into "our understanding of ourselves in our relationship to the meaning of the political" and helps us "trace the relationships—genealogical and analogical—among our patterns of belief," as Paul Kahn writes in his critical analysis of Schmitt's theory.[43] Kahn understands political theology descriptively, stripped of any agenda—it is an acknowledgment of a latent "civil religion," a simple observation that "the state is not the secular arrangement that it purports to be."[44]

Balthasar's theological approach to politics is substantially similar to this assessment—except that it comes from the perspective of the theologian, not the political scientist. Insofar as all human

relationships can be, even unwittingly, ordered by a divine love they do not possess, Balthasar would agree that the state is never a purely secular affair. Divine love is formative, for Balthasar, and thus teleologically "informs the Church's mission . . . the [individual] Christian's mission and ultimately . . . the entire structure of creation" (*LA*, 126). But he insists it is not the role of the Church, or the theologian, to take on the project of the formation of the world as an end. For them, the only orienting end is love: "while the Church offers her support to everything in the political, social, and ethical projects of the post-Christian world that can be ordered toward this love, she nevertheless herself clings obstinately to the point of perfection" (*LA*, 130).

Again, here, Balthasar presents his theology as a "third way" between "the integralists' approach" and the more liberal forms of Christian social activism (*LA*, 59, 130). It is a mistake "to absolutize the struggle for social justice, and thus to identify with it, the way Christian socialists do, with the intention afterward to lend it a Christian coloring" (*LA*, 130). Ultimately, the only political action that Balthasar can recommend is that which comes as a byproduct, so to speak, of that "clinging to the point of perfection." The form of love is not finally revealed yet; the clinging is only a *waiting* that comes to experience love as "an a priori Yes to whatever may come" (*LA*, 125). The "absolutizing" of socialist political ends is one example of how politicizing theology falls short by substituting the certainty of a political agenda for the incomprehensible "apparent formlessness" of divine love as experienced in the waiting (*LA*, 125). But Balthasar points out that "integralism" makes the same mistake: it does not actually try to "integrate the multiplicity of dogmas in a specifically intellectual or spiritual manner" but rather seeks to silence the opposition. "The substitution of violent means for intelligence or spirit suggests that a genuine solution on an intellectual and spiritual level lay at that time out of reach" (*LA*, 59–60). Perhaps it is still out of reach, but Balthasar seems to regard that possibility as part and parcel of the experience of waiting, rather than a crisis to be solved through force.

To the extent that these two approaches are appealing as political agendas or theories, they fail as credible theologies, in Balthasar's view. Conversely, the credibility of Balthasar's theology is inseparable from its resistance to straightforward political application. On the one hand, the treatment of politics in his theological works could be seen as sparse, vague, and disappointing. On the other hand, these limitations of Balthasar's theology are what make possible an approach to politics that accepts both its potential (without naive idealism) and its inevitable failures (without resignation). The approach is not quite open-ended, in that it insists all human affairs do have their end in divine love, but it is nonprescriptive. It is animated by respect for human judgment in freedom and trust in the slow unfolding of divine love in history.[45] If this theology is a credible one, it is so only because it is also a limited one.

Notes

1. See Mark Lilla, *The Stillborn God: Religion, Politics and the Modern West* (New York: Vintage, 2007); Oliver O'Donovan, *Desire of Nations: Rediscovering the Roots of Political Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 14–15; David Newheiser "Normative Political Theology as Intensified Critique," *Political Theology* 19, no. 8 (2018): 669–74; and Marius Timmann Mjaaland, "Sovereignty and Submission: Luther's Political Theology and the Violence of Christian Metaphysics," *Studies in Christian Ethics* 31, no. 4 (2018): 436–51. But for a purely descriptive approach, see Paul W. Kahn, *Political Theory: Four New Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 17–23.
2. This is similar, but not identical, to the argument Heinrich Meier makes in *The Lesson of Carl Schmitt: Four Chapters on the Distinction between Political Theology and Political Philosophy*, trans. Marcus Brainard (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998): "Political theology stands and falls with faith in revelation. For it presupposes the truth of revelation, which is a truth of faith. Thus it cannot avoid seeing in unfaith its enemy from the very beginning" (66). *Credibility* is not the same thing as *faith* or *belief*; things can be believed for any number of reasons, which frequently have nothing at all to do with the credibility of the thing believed to any nonbeliever.

3. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Love Alone Is Credible*, trans. D. C. Schindler (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), originally published as *Glaubhaft is nur Liebe* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1963); hereafter cited as *LA*. Balthasar is better known for his great theological trilogy—*The Glory of the Lord*, *Theo-Drama*, and *Theo-Logic*—each book of which contains multiple volumes. However, he describes this small book as "an elaboration of what I endeavored in my larger work *The Glory of the Lord*" but limited to articulating only a "central methodological point" without explicating the results in voluminous detail (11, 12). Thus, it seems particularly apt for comparison to rival methodologies such as political theology. Balthasar also wrote a theological anthropology and a theology of history. See *A Theological Anthropology* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2010), originally published as *Das Ganze im Fragment: Aspekte der Geschichtstheologie* (Einsiedeln: Benziger, 1963); and *A Theology of History* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994), originally published as *Theologie der Geschichte* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1959).
4. Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, trans. George Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 49–50. See also Schmitt, "The Age of Neutralizations and Depoliticizations," trans. Matthias Konzett and John P. McCormick, in *The Concept of the Political*, trans. George Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 80ff.
5. Robert Yelle, *Sovereignty and the Sacred: Secularism and the Political Economy of Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018), 9.
6. Schmitt, *Political Theology*, 36.
7. To clarify, Balthasar does not think the theology he articulates is either new or unique to him; rather, it "seeks in particular to stay true to the thought of the great saints of the theological tradition," especially those who meditated on love (*LA* 12).
8. These are the names he gives to the first two chapters of the book.
9. If, as noted above, "the evidence for the existence of sovereignty parallels the traditional mode of evidencing the existence of the deity," then Balthasar's history demonstrates that the parallel actually extends deeper into the past than the modern question of sovereignty. Whether sovereignty truly parallels the most "traditional" theological mode of demonstrating faith in God and whether the question at hand is the "existence" of either God or sovereignty rather than their *essence* are questions the rest of this paper hopes to provoke. Quote from Yelle, 9.
10. Thomas Aquinas, *De Regno*, Book I, chap. 13.

11. Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Part II, chap. 17.
12. See Cyrus P. Olsen, "Act and Event in Rahner and von Balthasar: A Case Study in Catholic Systematics," *New Blackfriars* 89, no. 1019 (2008): 3–21, for a thorough exposition of this subjective-objective balance in the thought of Balthasar, Karl Rahner, and Pope Benedict XVI. For example, in seeking to overcome the obvious limitations of a purely propositional understanding, Olsen explains that "Balthasar rather saw how a doctrine of revelation ought to reflect the finite subject's creative historical participation in an encounter with Infinite freedom. Yet the objective nature of revelation could not be jeopardized lest the distinction between finite and Infinite be lost; within a doctrine of revelation, the balance of the subjective and objective poles must be maintained" (8). Balthasar's method in this regard is substantively equivalent to Eric Voegelin's understanding of the philosophical *metaxy* as a balance or tension between opposing poles as expressed in, e.g., *Autobiographical Reflections*, ed. Ellis Sandoz, vol. 34 of *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2006), 98–100; "Equivalences of Experience and Symbolization in History," in *Published Essays, 1966–1985*, ed. Ellis Sandoz, vol. 12 of *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990), 119; and *Order and History, Volume IV: The Ecumenic Age*, ed. Michael Franz, vol. 17 of *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2000), 306. Balthasar's understanding of a nonpropositional, nonconceptual, self-interpreting revelation is also identical, as far as I can tell, to Voegelin's pithy axiom that "the fact of revelation is its content" in, e.g., *Order and History, Volume V: In Search of Order*, ed. Ellis Sandoz, vol. 18 of *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2000), 87. For more on Voegelin's understanding of political theology, especially in relation to Carl Schmitt, see Thierry Gontier, "From 'Political Theology' to 'Political Religion': Eric Voegelin and Carl Schmitt," *Review of Politics* 75, no. 1 (2013): 25–43.
13. Steffen Lösel, "Love Divine, All Loves Excelling: Balthasar's Negative Theology of Revelation," *Journal of Religion* 82, no. 4 (2002): 589.
14. See Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics, Volume I: Seeing the Form*, ed. Joseph Fessio, SJ, and John Riches, trans. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1982), esp. Section III: The Objective Evidence, Part C: Christ the Centre of the Form of Revelation, pp. 451–511.

15. Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord*, 1:451.
16. Jason Paul Bourgeois, *The Aesthetic Hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer and Hans Urs von Balthasar* (New York: Peter Lang, 2007), 40; and Breandán Leahy, "Theological Aesthetics," in *The Beauty of Christ* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1994), 33.
17. *Kenosis* means "self-emptying" and refers to Christ's loss of self in both the incarnation and the crucifixion; the term is derived from Phil. 2:5–11.
18. See Lösel, 603–4; see also Balthasar's footnote rejecting the principle of *sola scriptura* (*LA*, 58n3), and by extension the principle of double predestination, for treating faith as "an abstraction" oriented toward the Word/Logos and as thus "distinct from love." For this reason, the Bible understood as an abstracted whole or independent principle "cannot possess the formal authority that the Reformers attribute to it."
19. Balthasar notes in a footnote on ecclesial authority (56n2) that "characteristically, Greek has no word that corresponds to the Latin '*auctoritas*' (which incidentally indicates in the first place "authentication," a beneficial guarantee, a helping influence, weighty recommendation, advice, exhortation, and so forth, and only secondarily authentically expresses opinion, command, authority)."
20. Schmitt, *Political Theology*, 36.
21. Schmitt, *Political Theology*, 36.
22. Martin Kavka, "A Mystic Conception of History: Negative Political Theology in Jacob Taubes," *Modern Theology* 36, no. 1 (2020): 17.
23. Kavka, 18.
24. Kavka, 19.
25. Jacob Taubes, "On the Symbolic Order of Democracy," *Confluence: An International Forum* 4 (1955); quoted in Kavka, 18.
26. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory, Volume I: Prolegomena*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), 37, originally published as *Theodramatik: Erster Band: Prolegomena Liebe* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1973); hereafter cited as *Theo-Drama*.
27. Schmitt, *Concept of the Political*, chap. 2; and Schmitt, *Political Theology*, 5.
28. Meier, 74.
29. Meier, 66; the chapter is titled "Revelation, or He That Is Not with Me Is against Me."
30. In *Political Theology* Schmitt defines "scripture" as "a book with positive revelations and directives," which accords with Meier's thesis even if it is less extreme (38).

31. Meier, 75–76; see also Schmitt, *Concept of the Political*, chap. 8, and *Political Theology*, 1–2.
32. Schmitt, *Political Theology*, 50–51.
33. Balthasar, *A Theological Anthropology*, vii–viii.
34. Balthasar, *A Theological Anthropology*, 216.
35. Balthasar, *A Theological Anthropology*, 216–17.
36. Balthasar, *A Theological Anthropology*, 216. This work verges on the quiescent at times. It treats Romans 13 and 1 Peter 2 at face value and concludes that "in [Christ] the secular order is so transcended that any immanent questioning of power relationships is unnecessary" (196–97), though not completely ruled out (198).
37. Schmitt, *Political Theology*, 2.
38. Schmitt, *Political Theology*, 2.
39. Meier, 76.
40. Meier, 76.
41. See Balthasar, *The Theology of Karl Barth: Exposition and Interpretation*, trans. Edward T. Oakes, SJ (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992); and John Webster, "Balthasar and Karl Barth," in *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs Von Balthasar*, ed. Edward T. Oakes, SJ, and David Moss (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 241–55.
42. Balthasar is not the only theologian to object to the validity of political theology on theological grounds. The primary figure in this regard is Schmitt's own friend and colleague, the theologian Erik Peterson. For more see Mjaaland; György Geréby, "Political Theology versus Theological Politics: Erik Peterson and Carl Schmitt," *New German Critique* 105 (2008): 7–33; Roberto Esposito, "Preface to 'Categories of the Impolitical,'" trans. Connal Parsley, *Diacritics* 39, no. 2 (2009), esp. part 3; and Eduardo Schmidt-Passos, "The Blood of the Martyrs: Erik Peterson's Theology of Martyrdom and Carl Schmitt's Political Theology of Sovereignty," *Review of Politics* 80 (2018): 487–510.
43. Kahn, 122.
44. Kahn, 18.
45. "There are three things we cannot do: we cannot carry on with natural metaphysics, natural ethics, natural jurisprudence, natural study of history, acting as though Christ were not, in the concrete, the norm of everything. Nor can we lay down an unrelated 'double truth,' with the secular scholar and scientist on the one hand and the theologian on the other studying the same object without any encounter or intersection between their two methods. Nor, finally, can we allow the secular

disciplines to be absorbed by theology as though it alone were competent in all cases because Christ alone is the norm. Precisely because Christ is the absolute he remains incommensurate with the norms of this world; and no final accord between theology and the other disciplines is possible within the limits of this world. The refusal of any such agreed demarcation on the part of theology, though it may look like and be called arrogance, is really no more than respect for the methodological demands of its subject" (*A Theology of History*, 13–14).