

“GOD’S LOVE FOR HIS ENEMIES”

JACOB TAUBES’ CONVERSATION WITH CARL SCHMITT ON PAUL¹

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Rule of thumb: normally, Taubes is right if it concerns matters of philosophy of history, except that his valuation has to be reversed.²

We sense that the world is not redeemed.³

For some, Paul represents a point of no return. In his letters, dating from a period preceding the creation of the gospels, he is said to have written down the outlines of a universal *ekklèsia* encompassing ‘Jews and Greeks’. He is proclaimed to be the founding father of Christianity; his words constituting it. The foundation of this community is laid by faith, i.e. the belief that Christ (the Messiah) has finally come and is to be identified with the crucified and resurrected Jesus of Nazareth. There seems to be no reason then to return to this point and reconsider its meaning. What need is there to uncover its historical context? The twentieth century confronted us with one fatal consequence of this turning point in history. The mythical constitution of Christianity includes the premise that the Jews became in some sense illegitimate by refusing to accept Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah. This people, seeing

¹ I would like to thank Theo de Wit and Grietje Dresen for their comments.

² Odo Marquard, ‘Aufgeklärter Polytheismus – auch eine politische Theologie?’, in J. Taubes (ed.), *Religionstheorie und Politische Theologie. I. Der Fürst dieser Welt. Carl Schmitt und die Folgen*, Wilhelm Fink Verlag, Munich 1983, 78, ‘Faustregel: in geschichtsphilosophiebetreffende Dingen hat in der Regel Taubes recht, mit einer Ausnahme: sein Bewertungsakzent ist umzudrehen.’

³ Martin Buber, ‘Kirche, Staat, Volk und Judentum. Aus dem Zwiegespräch mit Karl Ludwig Schmidt’, in Robert Raphael Geis and Hans-Joachim Kraus (eds.), *Versuche des Verstehens. Dokumente jüdisch-christliche Begegnung aus den Jahren 1918–1933 (Theologische Bücherei. Neudrucke und Berichte aus dem 20. Jahrhundert, Band 33)*, Chr. Kaiser Verlag, Munich 1966, 158. The complete passage reads: ‘Wir wissen aber auch, wie wir wissen, daß Luft ist, die wir in unsere Lungen einatmen, daß Raum ist, in dem wir uns bewegen, tiefer, echter wissen wir, daß die Weltgeschichte nicht bis auf ihren Grund aufgebrochen, daß die Welt noch nicht erlöst ist. Wir spüren die Unerlöstheit der Welt.’

themselves as gathered together and chosen by God in the holy nation of Israel, became the symbol of a stubborn infidelity in the Christian tradition. Therefore, they became ‘enemies of God’. These are the words used by Paul (Romans 11: 28). This phrase – among many others, especially from the gospel of John – haunts the fate of the Jews in Christian Europe. It may explain why for them Europe has never been a safe place. Furthermore, according to Jacob Taubes, it is hard to deny that there is a connection between the symbolic annihilation of the people of the old covenant and the physical extermination that became the programme of the Nazis.⁴

In the age of secular messianisms,⁵ that is, social and political movements pretending to realize some form of redemption in this world, the rejection of the idea that the Messiah is yet to come seems to be the ultimate heresy. Against the horrible background of genocide, an encounter between an ‘arch-Jew’ such as Jacob Taubes⁶ and the ‘Kronjurist des Dritten Reiches’,⁷ Carl Schmitt, seems impossible, or at least perverse. Nevertheless, after long

⁴ Of course, there is no unilateral causal connection between the two. The association is triggered by Adolf von Harnack’s *Marcion. Das Evangelium vom fremden Gott* (1923), reprint, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, Darmstadt 1996, especially 196ff., dealing with the alternative of a dialectical (Paulinian) versus an antithetical (Marcionite) opposition between Old and New Testament – with its politico-religious consequences. Breaking the bond with the Old Testament, seeing it as obsolete, makes it less likely to defend the Jews in times of threat, ‘This is the secret of German liberal Protestantism, which then in 1933 could not pass the test’, Jacob Taubes, *Die Politische Theologie des Paulus. Vorträge, gehalten an den Forschungsstätte der evangelischen Studiengemeinschaft in Heidelberg, 23.–27. Februar 1987*, Wilhelm Fink Verlag, Munich 1993, 84; English translation, *The Political Theology of Paul*, tr. Dana Hollander, Stanford University Press, Stanford 2004, 61. In fact, Taubes follows Buber who he quotes in ‘Das stählerne Gehäuse und der Exodus daraus oder der Streit um Marcion, einst und heute’, in *Vom Kult zur Kultur. Bausteine zu einer Kritik der historischen Vernunft* (Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religions- und Geistesgeschichte, herausgegeben von Aleida und Jan Assmann, Wolf-Daniel Hartwich und Winfried Menninghaus), Wilhelm Fink Verlag, Munich 1996, 177, ‘Harnack starb 1930, drei Jahre danach war sein Gedanke, der Gedanke Marcions, in Handlung umgesetzt.’ See also *ibid.*, 45.

⁵ See Jacob Taubes, ‘Martin Buber und die Geschichtsphilosophie’, in *Vom Kult zur Kultur*, 56.

⁶ Jacob Taubes, *Ad Carl Schmitt. Gegenstrebige Fügung*, Merve Verlag, Berlin 1987, 39, ‘Erzjude’; tr. *The Political Theology of Paul*, 110. Taubes (1923–1987) was born into a rabbi family, himself became a rabbi and studied in Switzerland during the war, escaping from the Holocaust; in 1947 he emigrated to the US where he found a job as a researcher; in the 1960s he returned to Germany to teach at the Freie Universität in Berlin.

⁷ The expression is from Waldemar Gurian, and is used in the title of Andreas Koenen’s biography *Der Fall Carl Schmitt: sein Aufstieg zum ‘Kronjuristen des Dritten Reiches’*, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, Darmstadt 1995. Schmitt was born a Catholic and became a lawyer, specializing in constitutional law; in the 1920s he wrote influential essays on key political problems, some in connection with religious concepts; in 1933 he joined the National Socialist Party and was actively involved in the expulsion of Jewish lawyers; later on he fell into disgrace and turned his attention to international law. After the war, he was discharged of his public functions and settled near Plettenberg, which became a renowned centre of intellectual activity.

hesitation by Taubes, who admired Carl Schmitt's work after reading 'Politische Theologie' as early as 1942 (without then knowing the political facts about the author),⁸ they actually met in the late 1970s. After hearing of Jacob Taubes' curiosity concerning his writings, Carl Schmitt had no hesitation and sent him his books and articles. For thirty years, Taubes did not respond, until finally, when Schmitt was an old and sick man, Taubes gave in and met him at his home near Plettenberg. The subject of their discussion, apart from anecdotes about their public life, was Paul, in particular the letter to the Romans.⁹ At the heart of the conversation was anti-Semitism,¹⁰ with Schmitt having to admit that he was mistaken about Paul's attitude towards the Jews.

And this is the point I challenged Schmitt on, that he doesn't see this dialectic that moves Paul and that the Christian church after 70 has forgotten, that he adopted not a text but a tradition, that is, the folk traditions of church antisemitism ...¹¹

In the case of Schmitt, the concept of the enemy is at stake. For him, the opposition between Jews and Christians is, or at least could be, a *political* one, an opposition of peoples.¹² The logic of being part of a particular people entails that in cases of threat, that is, the tension of the state of war, one must choose sides: for or against, associated or dissociated, in an existential and hence polemical way. This logic leaves no room for neutrality or liberality. Loyalty is what matters. In point of fact, Carl Schmitt was involved in the 'ethnic cleansing' of the German legal system in the early years of the Nazi regime.¹³ Like many others, he actually thought that the Jewish mind set was a threat to the cultural and political identity of Germany. Theological differences were not irrelevant to politics, he contended. On the contrary, the legitimacy of the

⁸ Taubes tells his version of his relationship with Carl Schmitt in an Appendix to *Die Politische Theologie des Paulus*; also in *Ad Carl Schmitt*.

⁹ *Die Politische Theologie des Paulus*, 137-138; tr. 101-102.

¹⁰ *Ad Carl Schmitt*, 60; the letter Taubes wrote to Schmitt in 1979 makes clear the intention behind his willingness to talk to Schmitt (ibid, 39ff.; also in *The Political Theology of Paul*, 110ff.).

¹¹ 'Und das hab' ich Schmitt vorgehalten, daß er diese Dialektik nicht sieht, die den Paulus bewegt und die die christliche Kirche nach 70 vergessen hat, daß er nicht einen Text, sondern eine Tradition übernahm, nämlich die Volkstraditionen des kirchlichen Antisemitismus...', *Die Politische Theologie des Paulus*, 72; tr. 51; see also, 162; tr. 129.

¹² Carl Schmitt, *Der Begriff des Politischen* (Text von 1932 mit einem Vorwort und drei Corollarien), Duncker & Humblot, Berlin 1963, 27, 'Die Unterscheidung von Freund und Feind hat den Sinn, den äußersten Intensitätsgrad einer Verbindung oder Trennung, einer Assoziation oder Dissoziation zu bezeichnen'; the enemy can be discerned as a political formation which 'in einem besonders intensiven Sinne existentiell etwas anderes und Fremdes ist'.

¹³ Bernd Rüthers, *Entartetes Recht. Rechtslehren und Kronjuristen im Dritten Reich*, C.H. Beck, Munich 1989², 99-171.

political order was due to the theological or metaphysical convictions of the people living under it.¹⁴ In politics, theological matters could not be neglected. Taubes totally agrees with this position, although from a different angle: engaging in theological matters has a political impact.¹⁵ However, his intellectual project seems to be guided by the idea of a deconstruction of mythical or politico-theological oppositions by means of historical research. He finds that it is not tradition, but the text and its historical context that should be the focus of our attention.

Thus, reading Romans 11, Taubes finds that while it is the case that Paul writes that the Jews have become God’s enemies, he also denies that God has washed his hands of them.¹⁶ On the contrary, it is God’s secret plan to save the Jews. For Taubes, God’s grace did not leave the people of the old Covenant. In fact, Paul tries to neutralize the political notion of the people, or ethnicity, although he does not conceal the differences between those who are for or against Christ. What is inherited through birth is transcended by faith, that is, by interiorizing one’s membership of the community of those who believe that Jesus is the Messiah. Paul explicitly states that the coming of the Messiah does not do away with God’s grace towards the Jews and the covenant He made with their forefathers. God’s secret plan, however, is detached from secular history.

Matters seem to be much more complicated. The opposition between Jacob Taubes and Carl Schmitt is not only part of the bitter confrontation between two groups of people, between two ‘religions’ or ‘theologies’, but also part of a debate concerning the holy books of the Bible. Are they to be read as founding texts of a theological orthodoxy, or can they be read using the ‘historical method’? Taubes wrote on both aspects of the question: the historical context of sacred texts and the *theological* question concerning the status of these texts. Theology in the twentieth century has accepted step by step that God’s

¹⁴ Carl Schmitt, *Politische Theologie. Vier Kapitel zur Lehre von der Souveränität* (1922), Duncker & Humblot, Berlin 1985, 59; tr. *Political Theology. Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, translation by George Schwab, MIT Press, Cambridge (Mass.) and London 1985, 46, ‘The metaphysical image that a definite epoch forges of the World has the same structure as what the world immediately understands to be appropriate as a form of its political organization.’

¹⁵ See the introductory paragraphs of ‘Die Streitfrage zwischen Judentum und Christentum’, in *Vom Kult zur Kultur*, 85, and in the same book the article ‘Theologie und politische Theorie’ (1955). In another early text, Taubes uses the ‘method’ of political theology to construct an opposition between a hierarchical and a democratic political order, ‘On the Symbolic Order of Modern Democracy’, in *Confluence*, 4(1955)1, 58-71.

¹⁶ The complete verse (11: 28) reads: ‘As regards the gospel they are enemies of God for your sake; but as regards election they are beloved, for the sake of their ancestors’ (New Revised Standard Version).

Word is definitely transcendent, that is, beyond reach.¹⁷ All talk about God and God's Word has to be accepted as merely *human* talk. It was exactly this kind of neutralizing discourse which was the object of Carl Schmitt's polemical essays against 'liberalism'.

It is my aim in this paper to explore some aspects of the conversation between these two authors on the texts and the mythical character of Paul. I am aware that both take extreme positions in the debate, but this may be precisely why we can learn something about the challenge of Paul's texts today. After briefly introducing the philosopher who is my main subject, Jacob Taubes, the first issue to be dealt with is Taubes' deconstruction of Paul as the founding father of Christianity in Section 2. Taubes shows that his texts display all the symptoms of a crisis, rather than a clear constitution. In Section 3, the second theme is the status of the mind, or to be more specific, the differentiation between God, world and human mind. Finally, in Section 4, I will explain the different approaches to political theology adopted by each author.

1. From European eschatology to the political theology of Paul

Jacob Taubes' core interest is the history of that aspect of religious thought which deliberately tends to transcend the existing order, that is, nature, a political regime or an established religion. Transcending here means opening up time to its fulfilment, instituting history and the end of history.¹⁸ The basic idea that history will come to an end, and with it all human suffering, emerged within ancient Jewish thought, more or less as a heresy, and through Christianity left its mark on Western culture.¹⁹ This revolutionary aspect can be found in eschatological movements such as messianism, apocalypticism, Gnosticism, millennialism or chiliasm. These religious movements, opposed to 'the world as it is', are the expression of a human yearning for a better world, for justice, for a new community, connected to the conviction that to achieve this 'the world as it is' has to end. This implies a radical evaluation – that the world as it is now is not good or just, and that humanity have been driven out of paradise into an alien world, one in which they are strangers longing for their true home. Eschatology says that this human desire or the specific desire of one people (for example, the Jews in exile) will be fulfilled by the coming of the

¹⁷ See Taubes' writings on Overbeck and Barth in *Vom Kult zur Kultur*.

¹⁸ *Ad Carl Schmitt*, 21-22, 'jene Erfahrung von Zeit und Geschichte als Frist, als Galgenfrist'.

¹⁹ This development is described in the only book published by Taubes, his dissertation *Abend-ländische Eschatologie* (Beiträge zur Soziologie und Sozialphilosophie, Band 3), Bern 1947.

Messiah sometime in the future. The time may be near, it may be far away – but He will come and establish a new kingdom, a new realm and a new world.²⁰

One logical consequence of the messianic scheme is that the Messiah can actually appear on earth.²¹ At the very least, people may believe that the Messiah has appeared in this world, and this is what matters – whether other people believe this or not. This signifies that justice is at hand; that the old world will be conquered, will disappear, will be destroyed. Taubes stresses the importance of this aspect of eschatology – the possibility of its fulfilment. He also observes that there are people (priests, statesmen) with a strong interest in this world who are averse to this kind of eschatology and try to accommodate Messianism to their own interests. The point is that the idea of the Messiah is complex enough to enable many variations, all of which are compatible with its logical structure. As a result, it is not possible to say that only one variety, the orthodox one, is specifically Jewish, and the others not.

Paul is a major figure in the history of eschatological thought. For Taubes, Paul represents a promising intellectual position, avoiding both the dangerous implications of messianism²² (the violence or self-destruction of a people following a charismatic person) and the irresponsible flight from this world to purely inner, personal salvation (the Gnostic position). Although Taubes assents to the Gnostic move, he does not follow it completely, and considers that this is also Paul’s position. The spiritual protest against ‘the world as it is’ adopts a *political* form without taking part in the usual political practices. Already in Taubes’ earliest work, Paul is the spiritual leader who operates in the transition from apocalypticism to Gnosticism.²³ Facing the failure of *parousia* (the coming of the Messiah as promised, and the fulfilment of the Law), as well as the violent Jewish insurrection, Paul feels the need for an interiorization of the messianic expectation. At the same time, this spiritual movement

²⁰ Ibid, especially 21-39.

²¹ From his point of view, as a Jew, Taubes stresses that the belief in the arrival of the Messiah occurred *twice*: with Jesus of Nazareth and with Sabbatai Zwi in the seventeenth century. Of course, the second appearance has no meaning for Christians. See Taubes’ comment on Scholem’s masterpiece on Sabbatai Zwi: *Vom Kult zur Kultur*, 44-45. The clue for Taubes is that the belief that Jesus is Christ need not be ‘Christian’, but is a possibility within Jewish (heretical) thought.

²² See the collection of articles and letters on Messianism in Elettra Stimilli (ed.), *Jacob Taubes. Der Preis des Messianismus. Briefe von Jacob Taubes an Gershom Scholem und andere Materialien*, Königshausen & Neumann, Würzburg 2006, and the afterword by the editor (‘Der Messianismus als politisches Problem’).

²³ *Abendländische Eschatologie*, 57ff. On the opposition between apocalypticism and Gnosticism see Joshua Robert Gold, ‘Jacob Taubes: ‘Apocalypse From below’’, in *Telos*, (2006)134, 140–156.

has to found a new empire in this world, being the revolutionary substitute for the Roman Empire. That is why Paul's reflections on the message of Christ can be called a *political* theology. In his 'testament',²⁴ Taubes presents a troubled Paul, balancing his Jewish background and bonds with his attempt to establish a new people inspired by Christ. In the description of his position, he personifies Moses, who is confronted with his stubborn people who are threatened by the wrath of Yahweh.²⁵ The loving response to the fact that the Jews may have become 'enemies of God' is a political response to Schmitt's criterion of the political.²⁶ In a sense, Taubes repeated this gesture by having a conversation with a man who was an accessory to a regime that killed millions of his people, while withholding his judgment.

At first sight, Taubes seems to be depoliticizing or spiritualizing the differences at stake. For Schmitt, a theological opposition can always be intensified into a political clash. The opposition then has a sharp dividing line, separating Jews and Christians as friends and enemies of God or, rather, different Gods (Jahweh and the Father of Christ – a distinction Gnostic writers actually made). Political theology, as this is, need not be taken solely in this way. Theocracy, in a sense, provides a political theology as well, but this time by separating spiritual from secular oppositions. The event Paul is trying to universalize attempted to escape the fatal laws applicable to this world. In this case 'political' means a deliberate refusal to defend the established order. This theological-political move needs to be repeated and rephrased throughout history. Paul's spiritual struggle still carries great weight today, as is shown in the works of nineteenth and twentieth-century writers.²⁷

Before giving an outline of Taubes' picture of Paul, I will briefly depict what characterizes his way of thinking. Firstly, as already mentioned, Taubes adheres to a historical criticism of religious and philosophical texts. His approach can be called 'political hermeneutics', because of his understanding of texts in the light of their political impact. While most interpretations tend to be apologetic,

²⁴ *Die Politische Theologie des Paulus* was published posthumously and was based on tapes of the lectures he delivered in Heidelberg shortly before his death in 1987.

²⁵ The scene is about the plea for forgiveness: people may err, God is asked for remission. This is part of Jewish ritual (Yom Kippur). Paul refers to this while addressing the 'Greek Christians' in Rome, urging them not to be resentful against the Jews. *Die Politische Theologie des Paulus*, 43ff.; tr. 28ff.

²⁶ In a letter to Armin Mohler, dated 1952, this is the key to Taubes's attitude towards Schmitt, *Ad Carl Schmitt*, 33-34.

²⁷ Whereas the first part of *Die Politische Theologie des Paulus* is about Paul's connection to Jewish tradition, the second part tries to detect the traces of Paul's thought in the texts of Harnack, Barth, Schmitt, Benjamin, Adorno, Nietzsche and Freud.

rationalizing foundational myths, Taubes reads the texts against the grain, often using hitherto forgotten texts in order to undermine conformist tendencies. Secondly, at the core of Taubes’ writing is the development of the free spirit, the freeing of the mind from its dependence on ‘the world as it is’. History is the development of the human mind towards spiritual freedom.²⁸ Its driving force is *negativity*, a force that is present in eschatological movements, which are always a nuisance to the powers that be.

Therefore, thirdly, for Taubes, spiritual matters are always and in essence *political*, precisely due to their power of negativity. Political theology not only refers to the divine sanctification of political power, but also has the reverse meaning: theologically de-legitimizing political power.²⁹ Fourthly, these three features of Taubes’ work not only serve the interests of the armchair scholar or historian, but enhance our understanding of our own time. The twentieth century, at least for a greater part (1914-1989), was an apocalyptic age. In the face of mass destruction and ideological mass manipulation, the critical question was whether the idea of the enlightened, liberal and progressive West could still be sustained.

These four characteristics return in Taubes’ treatment of Paul. Firstly, the letters of Paul are contextualized: to whom does he speak, and why, and with what purpose? How does he speak? Which words does he use, and what do they mean in their specific environment? Secondly, the focus is on Paul’s handling of the problem of messianism: was it really the Messiah that descended to earth, and why? Also, having left, will he return? What should be done if he does or does not return? Thirdly, Taubes stresses that Paul established a new people: that is, a new spiritual and political fact. This event went against, but also followed Moses, as it went against, but also imitated the Roman Empire. Finally, Paul is found to be present in the twentieth century. To give one example that has already been mentioned: the Gnostic tendency of Christian, especially protestant, theology was anti-Judaist, at least by implication, and foreshadowed the outbreak of the disaster of political anti-Semitism.³⁰

²⁸ Taubes, of course, is indebted in this respect to Hegel, but is better understood as a successor of the Young Hegelians, who did not accept Hegel’s alleged final conclusion that history ended in the Prussian state. See *Die Politische Theologie des Paulus*, 59ff.; tr. 41ff.; see also ‘Martin Buber und die Geschichtsphilosophie’, and ‘Nachman Krochmal und der moderne Historismus’, in *Vom Kult zu Kultur*.

²⁹ I subscribe to the proposal to distinguish between ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ political theology. See Marin Terpstra and Theo de Wit, ‘No spiritual investment in the world as it is. On the negative political theology of Jacob Taubes’, in I.N. Bulhof, L. ten Kate (eds.), *Flight of the Gods. Philosophical Perspectives on Negative Theology*, Fordham University Press, New York 2000, 320–353.

³⁰ See note 4.

On all four points, Carl Schmitt can be seen – and was seen by Taubes – as the ideal antagonist. Although Schmitt was not a theologian, and probably not a very orthodox Catholic, he saw the Roman Catholic Church as the legitimate heir to Christ,³¹ and as an excellent example of representational power.³² Apart from Romans 13,³³ his most important reference to Paul is to the idea of the *katechon*, the defensive power to ward off the antichrist.³⁴ For Schmitt, the *katechon* is a ‘bridge’ between the paralysing effect of eschatology and political power.³⁵ Thus, Schmitt adheres to a traditional and established reading of the Bible, accommodating it to the historical situation. Secondly, and in line with the idea of the *katechon*, Schmitt favours all power that restrains lawlessness and anarchy, in short, which prevents civil war. He is on the side of State and Church and spiritually invested in the authorities instituted by God. Thirdly, Schmitt coined the term ‘political theology’ in its modern sense, that is, political categories, which are always polemical concepts, cannot be grasped other than as secularized theological concepts. Finally, Schmitt knew very well the political impact of the history of religious ideas even in the modern age. Clearly, there were enough overlapping themes to facilitate a conversation between the two men, despite their venomous enmity.³⁶

2. Paul: the historical context and its philosophical significance

In his articles on the religious texts of Late Antiquity, in all of which Paul is a major player, Taubes belongs clearly to a new paradigm in Paul research which began with Krister Stendhal and others in the 1960s.³⁷ Scholars belonging

³¹ ‘Die Sichtbarkeit der Kirche. Eine scholastische Erwägung’, in *Summa. Eine Vierteljahrschrift*, (1917)2, 71–80.

³² *Römischer Katholizismus und politische Form*, Jakob Hegner, Hellerau 1923.

³³ ‘Let every person be subject to the governing authorities; for there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God.’ (New Revised Standard Version).

³⁴ 2 Thessalonians, 2: 6-7, ‘And you know what is restraining him now so that he may be revealed in his time. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work. Only he who now restrains it will do so until he is out of the way.’ (New Revised Standard Version).

³⁵ *Der Nomos der Erde im Völkerrecht des Jus Publicum Europaeum* (1950), Duncker & Humblot, Berlin 1988³, 29, ‘Der Glaube, daß ein Aufhalter das Ende der Welt zurückhält, schlägt die einzige Brücke, die von der eschatologische Lähmung alles menschlichen Geschehens zu einer so großartigen Geschichts-mächtigkeit wie der des christlichen Kaisertums der germanischen Könige führt.’

³⁶ For an elaboration of these similarities see Reinhard Mehring, ‘Karl Löwith, Carl Schmitt, Jacob Taubes und das ‘Ende der Geschichte’’, in *Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte*, 48(1996)3, 231–248.

³⁷ Taubes was acquainted with him, according to an anecdote in *Die Politische Theologie des Paulus*, 59; tr. 41. See also the afterword to this book, 149; tr.120.

to this new school in the history of the first century, focusing on Paul, avoided talking about Christianity, and rather preferred to speak of the ‘Jesus movement’. Those participating in this movement ‘belong totally within the context of first-century Judaism in Roman Palestine and not to the history of later Christianity. To use the term Christian is anachronistic and misleading’.³⁸ Following the same line of thought, Taubes points to the fact that Paul does not use the word ‘Christian’ or any similar words in his letters.³⁹ Among the converts, there are only ‘Jews’ and ‘Greeks’ – Jews who accepted Jesus as the Messiah and non-Jews who were attracted to the Jewish religion, visited synagogues, and were also drawn to the Jesus movement. Paul had to deal with all these groups, especially the latter. He was the ‘self-appointed’ apostle to the heathens (Greeks), although a Jew himself. However, it is not my aim to go into details concerning the ‘true history of Paul’ here, what is of interest are the philosophical as well as political questions that inspire Paul’s texts. The main question, I think, is the problematic of loyalty – orthodoxy and heterodoxy.

People who are loyal and faithful to a specific tradition, ethnic group, nation or church value the history that revolves around the foundational moment. It is part of the story of their existence or identity. History is divided into ‘before’ and ‘after’ the event (for example the Christian era, or the Declaration of Independence). The event, being a historical construction that is only a ‘fact’ for those who believe in it, marks the distinction between those who belong to and those who are excluded from the community. This distinction can even receive mythical and polemical forms, such as the distinction between ‘friend and enemy’, or between Christ and antichrist. The historical truth is proclaimed by authority and present in daily life to a great extent, while the founding documents are treated as sacrosanct and as containing a divine message to be read devoutly. When this outlook gains prevalence, it may, as it did in the case of Christianity, become a world-view determining the ‘reading’ of the ‘book of reality’. Conversely, such a world-view can fade away in the course of time.⁴⁰ One theory holds that secularization refers to the process in which most outward appearances of this orthodoxy disappear, with fewer people caring about upholding this tradition. Nevertheless, Taubes is right when he points to

³⁸ John G. Gager, *Reinventing Paul*, Oxford University Press, New York 2000, p. viii. Taubes is not mentioned in this book, whose content nevertheless is very close to his interpretation of Paul.

³⁹ *Die Politische Theologie des Paulus*, 33-34, 56-57; tr. 21, 39; *Vom Kult zur Kultur*, 44.

⁴⁰ This is a recurrent theme in Taubes’ articles on theology (for example, ‘Nachman Krochmal ...’), the rise of the natural sciences, presupposing the emancipation of nature from God, changes everything in the modern world. On this point, Taubes argues in line with Schmitt’s essay ‘Politische Theologie’.

the persistence of Christian historical orthodoxy.⁴¹ Especially as a Jew, Taubes is fully aware of the powerful presence of the Christian tradition even where it seems absent due to secularization, unbelief and so on. The same can be said of the continuation of anti-Semitism as an interpretation of the difference between Judaism and Christianity.⁴² Taubes also criticizes prominent Jewish writers for accepting the *Christian* criterion in relation to this question (outward and inward religion, cult and belief) that has become commonplace.⁴³ Hence, reading the founding texts of Christianity from a historical perspective in a more critical way not only turns ‘facts’ against ‘myths’, or empirical research against prejudice, as is commonly done in the enlightened approach to science, but is a *political hermeneutics*. Taubes is not only fully aware of the political impact of historical criticism, furthermore, this political aspect is the very principle of his work. The ‘deconstruction’ of the established hermeneutic authorities is the ‘leitmotiv’ of his work – and especially his approach to Paul – in a twofold way. Taubes’ work not only digs up the historical Paul, removing the layers of traditional and orthodox interpretation in order to contradict the claims of established powers, but also shows that Paul himself delivered a ‘deconstructive’ type of thinking. For Taubes, the very principles of writing history or telling stories are also historical and literary.⁴⁴ The paradox of Taubes’ historicism leads us to the central theme of his interpretation of Paul’s acting within the ‘Jesus movement’. Historicism disrupts the connection between the thoughts or outlooks people have and the truth. Even people’s ideas about the truth and the way to achieve it belong to the historical contingency of opinions. However, again, even people’s attitudes towards this contingency and the plurality of opinions and beliefs is historical. At this point Taubes and Schmitt draw the same distinction, but they do so for opposite reasons. The plurality of thoughts and beliefs may lead to social disparity, which has to be overcome in order to communicate and live together; however, people’s inclinations towards creating unity and order in this contingent plurality differ. Hegemonic tendencies may result in the reduction of

⁴¹ An example is given in *Vom Kult zur Kultur*, 97, both the French and Russian revolutionaries, as well as the Italian fascists, were unsuccessful in their attempt to do away with the Christian calendar.

⁴² *Ad Carl Schmitt*, 51; *Vom Kult zur Kultur*, 110; *Die Politische Theologie des Paulus*, 72; tr. 51.

⁴³ *Vom Kult zur Kultur*, 44 (‘Der Messianismus und sein Preis’ – Scholem), 60ff. (‘Martin Buber und die Geschichtsphilosophie’), 85ff. (‘Die Streitfrage zwischen Judentum und Christentum’ – Rosenzweig).

⁴⁴ He goes even further in *Vom Kult zur Kultur*, 91, ‘... der Brief des Paulus an die Römer ... stelle nicht die christliche Lehre dar, sondern sei vielmehr die subjektive Meinung des Paulus.’

plurality (or complexity), by establishing orthodoxy, which makes all other thoughts and beliefs heterodox. Schmitt seems to presuppose that all the thoughts or beliefs people embrace are intrinsically hegemonic. Hence, a plurality of thoughts and beliefs inevitably will end in civil war. Political power tries to terminate civil war by taking a decision concerning the issues of the conflict. In this sense, order always fights against the self-generating disorder coming from below by establishing some form of *spiritual power*.

Taubes, on the other hand, favours the opposite position, holding that political power should be radically distinguished from spiritual matters.⁴⁵ Although he is realistic enough to recognize the irrepressible inclination of people to fuse political and spiritual power, he steps aside from ‘the world as it is’. It was exactly the enforcement of such a spiritual movement against all established power that Taubes observes in the letters of Paul. The Law of Moses (Jerusalem) and the Law of the Emperor (Rome) should not be resisted by creating another law, be it that of a revolutionary or a reactionary power, but by overcoming the law – through love. It becomes impossible, then, to proceed to a new law, a new distinction between friend and enemy. Paul is convinced that the Jews will finally be saved because of God’s grace and love for His people, even when they actually refuse to accept the new conditions created by the appearance of Jesus Christ. By sending his Son to save humanity, God has not produced a justification for discriminating against the Jews, but merely extended his grace to all.

3. Transcendence and *res mixtae*

In the 1950s and 1960s, Taubes worked simultaneously on two topics. One was the problem of messianism in texts dating from Late Antiquity, while the other was the impact of modernity and secularization on theology. Taubes’ work on modern theology is not widely known.⁴⁶ Nevertheless, his penetrating essays make very clear that within theology all attempts to connect the divine to the world in which we live have failed. The divine has to be separated from the secular realm. The interesting thing is that the re-emergence of ‘heterodox’ thought from the Middle Ages onwards and the changes we encompass with

⁴⁵ *Ad Carl Schmitt*, 28–29, 42 (in a letter to Schmitt written in 1979), ‘... der Apostel Paulus ... an den ich mich wende in den Wenden der Zeiten, hat innen und außen, auch für “das Politische”, unterscheiden. Ohne diese Unterscheidung sind wir ausgeliefert an die Throne und Gewalten die in einem “monistischen” Kosmos kein Jenseits mehr kennen.’

⁴⁶ Some of his articles on modern theology are collected in *Vom Kult zur Kultur*.

the terms modernity and secularization are parallel processes.⁴⁷ Against Blumenberg's view⁴⁸ (and, in the same sense, Marquard's – see quote at the beginning of this article), Taubes seems to hold that Gnosis and modernity have more in common than established Christianity and modernity. The demand for the freedom of spiritual life, which was the main target of heterodox movements and of the radical forms of the Reformation, went hand in hand with the disintegration of the hierarchical world-view of established Christianity. The Copernican revolution signified the end of the localization of the divine in heaven. Religion had no other option than to interiorize salvation. The historical work of Taubes shows that this turn to interiorization was already part of ancient Jewish and Christian thought. As previously mentioned, Taubes denies that the difference between Judaism and Christianity lies in the distinction between outer and inner religion. Interiorization is part of the logic of messianism – the 'Jesus movement' in which Paul plays a major part has to be denoted as a Jewish movement.⁴⁹

Karl Barth's theology is an important reference in Taubes' texts. It is based on a sharp separation of God and man, and God and the world. According to Taubes, this differentiation can be traced back to early Jewish thought on the relationship between God and man. What is divine? What is human? These questions haunt reflection within Jewish traditions.⁵⁰ God has always been a remote, hidden, non-representable and even absent, mysterious God, with humanity's communication with the divine being cultic. In essence, theology is the result of a crisis and entails a critique of religion.⁵¹ This is the beginning of humanity's reflection on its own share in the imaginary of the divine. In this differentiation there already lies the obvious project of writing the history of human thought about the divine, which can be undertaken without violating the basic belief in the existence of God. In fact, Flavius Josephus rewrote the Bible as a history of the ancient Jews in the first century AD. Seen from this angle, *political theology* becomes less strange or alien to the worship of the gods or the one God. If openness or susceptibility to the divine, and hence the

⁴⁷ *Vom Kult zur Kultur*, 43ff. (from ancient Jewish prophets to modern revolutionary movements), 56 (the apocalyptic mood in the inter-war years), 222 (*Romans* as the Magna Charta of Marcion, Luther and Barth). See especially the debate between Taubes and Blumenberg on the comparison of Gnosis and surrealism, *ibid.*, 152-159.

⁴⁸ *Die Legitimität der Neuzeit. Erneuerte Ausgabe*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt a/M 1988; original in 1966.

⁴⁹ *Vom Kult zur Kultur*, 48.

⁵⁰ 'Der dogmatische Mythos der Gnosis', in *Vom Kult zur Kultur*, 104f.

⁵¹ 'Theology and the philosophic critique of religion', *Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte*, 8(1956)2, 129-138; the original dates from 1954.

mediation and representation of the divine, has to be taken as human in order to respect the transcendence of the gods or God, political implications are no longer alien to religion.

Political theology can then be seen as the question of the *res mixtae*: the human determination of what ‘things’ in this world count as divine or as connecting us to the divine. In other words, the politico-theological question concerns the status of spiritual power (*potestas spiritualis*) in this world, or more generally, *the specific forms in which the spiritual realm crystalizes in this world*. Taubes’ interest in Paul is principally concerned with the strategic question of the formation of a spiritual community based on the belief that Jesus, crucified and resurrected, is the Messiah. On what terms should this community be organized? How should the actual problems with which the constitution of this community struggles be tackled? These are political questions, apparently; however, in this case, the political questions cannot be separated from theological questions such as how to deal with the bond between God and the non-converted Jews; how to think about God’s plans for ‘the Jews’ and ‘the Greeks’; the status of his Son sent to humankind; and the attitude to be taken in this world in the face of the return of the Messiah and the coming of the Kingdom of God in the possible near future.

The presupposition in Taubes’ account of this politico-theological questioning is the differentiation of God, world, society and humanity. In the mythical world, this differentiation is blurred or even absent, but as soon as it appears in the crisis of theo-cosmic myth the connections between the differentiated spheres become contingent and are hence open to different interpretations. A specific connection may be completely broken, as Gnosis tends to disconnect God (the Saviour-God) from this world (which was created by a demonic and evil God). Interpretations may also tend to fuse the differences by taking connections to be sacrosanct bonds. In the Roman state cult, or the theo-cosmic world-view of the ancient Greeks and Romans, the connection between God and society, or God and world, is taken as a reciprocity or analogy. Opposed to these kinds of connections, another bond appears: between God and humanity or, more specifically, between God and the human soul. Whereas the one connection favours public religion (cults, rituals, social and political forms of worship), the other enhances a more spiritual religion, interior to the human mind.

It is clear that the Jewish and non-Jewish people who were attracted to the ‘Jesus movement’ preferred the second kind of bond, and here Paul’s letters become relevant. Taubes’ interpretation of these strategic texts can be summarized as follows. The kind of spiritual and cultic life tied up with outer

forms, with social and political order, is symbolized as Law (*nomos*). Paul's theology is antinomistic: against the Law of Moses (rabbinic Judaism) and against the Law of the Roman Empire – and consequently against the Law of Christian orthodoxy which was later to be constructed. The symbol of *love* in Paul's letters, contrasting with law and symbolizing the overcoming of the Law, refers to the new foundation of a spiritual community that applies to another spiritual form in this world.

All the details that Taubes discusses in his texts on Paul ultimately concern the importance of one distinction and one consequence of it. The distinction is that between *psyche* and *pneuma*.⁵² The consequence concerns the way *pneuma* is translated into a spiritual form in this world: is there a complete retreat from this world into inner life (Gnosis), or is a 'pneumatic' movement constituted in this world (early Christianity)? The 'psychic' side of the human mind is connected to 'the world as it is'. The more 'psychic' the human mind is, the more it conforms to nature and to social and political codes. In accommodating this world, the human mind loses its independence and hence its revolutionary impact. The development which changed the 'Jesus movement' into orthodox Christianity – into the Christian Church and finally into a spiritual power with connections to secular power, tends to lay increasing stress on the connections between God and world, and between God and society. Christianity increasingly integrates Greek and Roman elements into its theology and religious organization.

It is on this point that Taubes and Schmitt are opposed. Such topics were presumably discussed by them on the two occasions that they met.⁵³ For Schmitt, the analogy between a theological or metaphysical world-view and a social and political order implies the necessity of orthodoxy with regard to social and political stability. Decisionism means, for Schmitt, the inevitability of a distinction between friend and enemy on the political level, which has its parallel in the distinction between a 'familiar' and an 'alien' way of life. In his view, these distinctions should materialize in representational institutions. Political power represents the 'idea', that is, the condensed form of a people's spiritual and material life, by guaranteeing its continuation in times of crisis, threat and hostility. Schmitt wants to bridge the gap between the spiritual and the secular orders.

⁵² *Die Politische Theologie des Paulus*, 59ff.; tr. 41ff.; see also *Vom Kult zur Kultur*, 103, 119, 138-139, and *Ad Carl Schmitt*, 62.

⁵³ The content of their conversation is not known, except what Taubes has told us. Unfortunately, the correspondence between the two will be published after this article is completed. See Thorsten Palzhoff, Martin Treml (ed.), *Carl Schmitt – Jacob Taubes: Briefwechsel*, Wilhelm Fink, Munich 2008.

For Taubes, on the other hand, the distinction between the two orders, their *tension*, is what counts.⁵⁴ In his view, the pneumatic movement of early Christianity points in another direction to that of later orthodoxy. The *pneuma* is that side of the human mind which is connected to the divine. Hence, it urges the human mind to decide whether it will live a pneumatic or a worldly, psychic life. Paul’s letters not only reveal the eschatological commandment to live in this world as if one was not part of this world,⁵⁵ but also the subtle distinction between the anti-Judaist position of the Gnosis and the Judaism of the early ‘Christian’ alternative. Interiorization is inevitable, so it seems, but can take different forms in this world. Gnosis is complete interiorization, with the consequence being that God and world, God and society, are completely disconnected. This means a rejection of the God of the Jews, the Creator-God, and hence a denunciation of the Bible of the Jews.⁵⁶ In his interpretation of Paul, Taubes tries to save the pneumatic movement from annihilating the Jewish tradition, either by rejecting Yahweh and the Torah, or by integrating Yahweh and the Torah into Christian theology as a providential part of it. Paul is an ambivalent but reliable witness against anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism. Those who transformed the symbolic annulment of the Jews into a political programme of physical extinction betrayed Paul. This was the clear message Taubes delivered to Schmitt.

4. Political theology: order, insurrection and revolution

At the end of the second section, I noted that Taubes tries to avoid the material dialectic of established and insurrectionary power because both use force in the name of a law. In Paul’s letters he perceives a political theology directed towards an even more revolutionary alternative in the name of a kingdom that is not of this world, and which overcomes the bitter historical and secular struggle between oppressors and oppressed. In this, Taubes seems to join Karl

⁵⁴ *Vom Kult zur Kultur*, 45, ‘Es [das Gewissen – MT] ist innerlich, steht aber in ständiger Spannung zu der Welt und zwingt uns, Spitzfindigkeiten zu konstruieren, um die Kluft zwischen ihm und der Außenwelt zu überbrücken.’ Of course, for Schmitt the bridge of the *katechon* was not a matter of sophistication.

⁵⁵ Agamben’s comment on Paul continues Taubes’ reflections on this point, *Il tempo che resta. Un commento alla Lettera ai Romani*, Bollati Boringhieri, Turin 2000.

⁵⁶ Taubes opens the second part of *Die Politische Theologie des Paulus* with an exposition of Harnack, who reintroduced Marcion in the twentieth century. It was Marcion, in the second century AD, who adopted the letters of Paul during his stay in Rome. See for a reconstruction along the same lines, Carsten Colpe, ‘Marcion, das Christentum ohne Gesetz und die Gesetze der Völker’, in Gesine Palmer et al. (ed.), *Torah Nomos Ius. Abendländischer Antinomismus und der Traum vom herrschaftsfreien Raum*, Vorwerk 8, Berlin 1999, 18-51.

Barth's reading of Romans 13,⁵⁷ both seeing 'a third way' – a spiritual one. For Taubes, this even seems to be connected to the eschatological speculations of Joachim de Fiore, who foresaw a third age of the Holy Spirit.⁵⁸ This might be another reason for speaking of the political theology of Paul, but how is this to be understood? To answer this question, we must observe that in the second part of his lectures on Romans, Taubes puts Barth and Schmitt together in one section.⁵⁹ Firstly, I will examine an illuminating passage in Schmitt's *Politische Theologie II* (1970) and then use the section on Barth and Schmitt to shed some new light on the difference between Taubes' and Schmitt's interpretations of Paul.

In the 'Afterword', devoted to Blumenberg's *Legitimität der Neuzeit*, Schmitt tries to tackle the objection that modernity offers a new beginning, laying its own foundation. This makes secularization a doubtful concept. Secularization means in this respect that theological concepts (that is, the medieval world-view) are transferred to a secular realm (that is, the modern world-view)⁶⁰ – as was the case with Church property. The claim that modernity has done away completely and definitively with theological concepts (*silete theologi*) and has found its own concepts and metaphors, challenges the premises of political theology – and consequently of the political relevance of Paul today. Schmitt and Taubes, however, assert the continuation of the entanglement of the theological and the political.

Modernity, according to Blumenberg, offers the definitive solution to the Gnostic threat which exists in the absolute opposition of good and evil, of a demonic Creator-God (the Biblical God Jahweh) and a benevolent Saviour-God (Christ and His Father). Christianity is seen as the first attempt to overcome the Gnostic split between this world and salvation by bringing together the 'two Gods' in its concept of a divine trinity. This still did not solve the problem of evil; however, modernity

⁵⁷ As long as there are Christians the alleged divine support of political power, as stated in Romans 13: 1–7, will haunt the minds. Barth destroys this connection by integrating 12: 21 into chapter 13: evil should not be overcome by evil. The second, thoroughly revised, edition of *Der Römerbrief* was published in 1922, in the same year as Schmitt's 'Politische Theologie'. Taubes wrote on Barth in 'Theodizee und Theologie. Eine philosophische Analyse der dialektischen Theologie Karl Barths', in *Vom Kult zur Kultur*, 212–229.

⁵⁸ *Abendländische Eschatologie*, 90ff.

⁵⁹ *Die Politische Theologie des Paulus*, 86–97; tr. 62–70.

⁶⁰ *Politische Theologie II. Die Legende von der Erledigung jeder Politischen Theologie*, Duncker & Humblot, Berlin 1984, 109–126. In *Politische Theologie*, Schmitt began his essay of the same name with the famous words, 'Alle prägnante Begriffe der modernen Staatslehre sind säkularisierte theologische Begriffe'. Blumenberg's objections are to be found in the second edition of *Legitimität der Neuzeit*, 99–113.

succeeded, as it made salvation immanent to the world through such notions as the dynamic of progress and the continuing reformation of the world by humanity. Schmitt does not deny that the modern idea of ‘immanence’ has become the hegemonic world-view and that social and political order is shaped according to it. This was already his contention in the original essay on political theology. In the later work, he argues that Blumenberg does not see the continuation of the Gnostic scheme, and a rather aggressive one, within this very dynamic of the ‘process-progress’. The militancy of progress consists in the mechanism by which what is superseded by novelties that persistently arise is immediately devalued as being something from the past. The old, traditional, established order cannot have any legitimacy at all in a world which only awaits a future of new devices, and these novelties, furthermore, do not have to justify themselves. They are improvements as a matter of course – they are automatically of higher value than what is superseded. Schmitt calls this the ‘autism’ of modernity, its ‘auto-authorization’ (‘Selbstermächtigung’). Success is proof of a pseudo-divine election. This unjustified preference for the new over the old is aggressive just because the old is not taken seriously but merely wasted. It is this stance, applauded by Blumenberg, that reminds us of the Gnostic opposition between the old and the new God. It is, however, another characteristic of this scheme that attracts Schmitt’s attention. The old and the traditional is not recognized as *enemy*, as a reality that has to be honoured while fighting against it. However, Schmitt argues, the Gnostic scheme of the created or given as something to be abhorred, and the promise of salvation as something to be longed for, is still there – and hence the distinction between friend and enemy, that is, the essence of the political. The aggression of modernity and its refusal to acknowledge the superseded as an enemy can only be seen from the perspective of political theology. Schmitt not only detects the continuation of the Gnostic scheme in modernity, against the claim of Blumenberg, but also the hidden despotism of progress: liberty replaces reason (that is, representational reason), but then novelty replaces liberty.⁶¹ We have become slaves of a permanent revolution, driven by the progress of science and technology. However, the liberal ideology accompanying this revolution conceals its political character. Although Schmitt is somewhat cryptic,⁶² when describing his own position after his comments on Blumenberg and his diagnosis of modernity, he seems to hold

⁶¹ Quoted in Latin, as the last words of *Politische Theologie II*, 126, ‘stat pro ratione Libertas, et Novitas pro Libertate.’

⁶² See, for some clarification, Theo de Wit, *De onontkoombaarheid van de politiek. De soevereine vijand in de politieke filosofie van Carl Schmitt* (dissertation), Ubbergen 1992, 445-452, and

on to the *Christian* attempt to restrain the Gnostic threat – the ‘bridge’ between the spiritual-eschatological and the secular realms. Whereas Eric Peterson, the real addressee of *Politische Theologie II*, argued that the Christian idea of the divine trinity makes any political theology meaningless, Schmitt argues that the unity of the opposition of Father and Son,⁶³ of constituting power and insurrection (*stasis*), remains a model of political theology. The inner dynamic of divine power has its secularized, but neglected, version in the modern process of progress, as the *stasis* of the new over the old. As Schmitt’s concept of the political refers to a notion of the state as something which is also ‘outside the law’ – as God himself may act ‘outside the law’, – so Paul offers a notion of community which is ‘beyond the law’ to which Taubes adheres. Both Schmitt and Taubes think the theological-political problem as an issue of the borderline. So the political-theological idea of a God who is at the same time a rebel against God could in a ‘humanized’ world even serve as a guide to trace the political, being hidden by the dominant liberal thought.⁶⁴ What comes to the fore as a basic theme in the conversation between Taubes and Schmitt is their aversion to the neutralization of the political, as if there were no longer any differences to fight for. While, for Schmitt, the antichrist always remains hidden behind real political entities, so for Taubes there is always an established order waiting for destruction. There is no reason to think that history is over and that we live in a *post-apocalyptic* age. In the twentieth century, the horror of the First World War put an end to an age of optimism. Enlightenment, progress and liberalism proved to be illusions, shattered by an outburst of violent and hostile forces. This climate united two ‘zealots of the absolute and of decision’, Karl Barth and Carl Schmitt, among many others.⁶⁵ From an orthodox protestant theological point of view the synthesis of faith and liberalism collapsed. The belief that freedom can lead to a stable and peaceful society in harmony with faith – that both could exist

Heinrich Meier, *Die Lehre Carl Schmitts. Vier Kapitel zur Unterscheidung Politischer Theologie und Politischer Philosophie*, J.B. Metzler, Stuttgart Weimar 1994, 17ff.

⁶³ In a note (*Politische Theologie II*, 117–118.), Schmitt refers to a notion of the crucifixion of Jesus which is also very dominant in Paul’s writings and Taubes’ interpretation of them. Jesus is punished as an insurrectionist, with no status as a Jew or Roman citizen, but rather that of an *outlaw*. It should be noted that, from a Jewish perspective, the division of God in ‘Father’ and ‘Son’ is blasphemous, *Vom Kult zur Kultur*, 88.

⁶⁴ Schmitt (*Politische Theologie II*, 122f.) uses and interprets a phrase of Goethe, *nemo contra deum nisi deus ipse*. With respect to liberalism, Taubes agrees with the criticism by Schmitt, *Ad Carl Schmitt*, 52–53.

⁶⁵ According to the subtitle in *Die Politische Theologie des Paulus*, 86; tr. 62. See Norbert Bolz, *Auszug aus der entzauberten Welt. Philosophischer Extremismus zwischen den Weltkriegen*, Wilhelm Fink Verlag, Munich 1989.

together very well ('Kulturprotestantismus') – was turned into a new opposition between God and 'the world as it is'. In this context, Barth wrote his famous book on Paul's letter to the Romans with Carl Schmitt, as mentioned above, criticizing liberalism for spreading the illusion that 'the political' was overcome – that the distinction between friend and enemy, let alone Christ and Satan, was no longer pertinent. The violent events falsified this belief. On this point, Taubes takes a position in the debate between Schmitt and Blumenberg on the concept of secularization: 'What Schmitt regards as realities, Blumenberg regards as metaphors. [...] I ask after the political potentials in the theological metaphors, just as Schmitt asks after the theological potentials of legal concepts'.⁶⁶ For both Taubes and Schmitt, living *in* this world means living among the political forces of friends and enemies: 'We knew that we were opponents to the death ('Gegner auf Tod und Leben'), but we got along splendidly. We knew one thing: that we were speaking on the same plane'.⁶⁷ The difference between the two is related to the 'spiritual investment in the world as it is'.⁶⁸ While Schmitt was obsessed by saving the world, and especially the state and the political and legal orders from the terrible forces of an unfettered apocalypse, as established Christianity had done,⁶⁹ Taubes, in his adherence to Paul, refused to stand for an established order: 'That isn't my world-view, that isn't my experience. I can imagine, as an apocalyptic: let it go down.' However, he did not deny that this was a *political* position. It is no coincidence that Schmitt, in his treatment of *stasis*, was in fact only referring to a divine duality, not a trinity: Father and Son, the dialectic of established, traditional power and insurrection. For Taubes, Joachim of Fiore's third age of the Holy Spirit,⁷⁰ was what was really at stake: 'You see now what I want from Schmitt – I want to show him that the separation of powers between worldly and spiritual is *absolutely necessary*. If this boundary is not drawn we will lose our Occidental breath. This is what I wanted to impress upon him, against his totalitarian concept.'⁷¹

5. Conclusion: an apocalyptic age

Among so many others, Carl Schmitt and Jacob Taubes replied to the immense violence and mass destruction of the apocalyptic age, running from the outburst

⁶⁶ *Die Politische Theologie des Paulus*, 95-96; tr. 69.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ *Die Politische Theologie des Paulus*, 139; tr. 103.

⁶⁹ *Die Politische Theologie des Paulus*, 96-97, 139; tr. 69, 103.

⁷⁰ *Abendländische Eschatologie*, 90ff.

⁷¹ *Die Politische Theologie des Paulus*, 139; tr. 103.

of mechanized and large-scale warfare (1914), passing through revolutionary messianic movements and the mass murders of the Gulag, Auschwitz, and the Second World War, to the threat of total annihilation of humanity during the Cold War. Schmitt called for new forms of political power, a new world order (*Nomos der Erde*), to counter the dangers of modern military technology in a world in which the system of European states that ruled for centuries had crumbled. In the face of the modern ‘antichrist’, he searched for the power that could restrain this diabolical force. Taubes on the other hand, who was impressed by Schmitt’s analysis, tended towards the opposite response. He would rather say: ‘Let this world fall, because it already is a fallen world’, considering that was the only way to achieve another world. Why be devoted to a world that should be ended anyway? He searched for ‘messianic sparks’, spiritual movements pointing to and beyond this end of the world. Both answers remain within the scope of the apocalyptic age; they both play with apocalyptic concepts. In an apocalyptic age, the question is always *Entweder-Oder*, it always calls for an *Entscheidung*.⁷² Carl Schmitt and Jacob Taubes could have this conversation because they were convinced that the West was still bound to some eschatological scheme.

Carl Schmitt did not *read* Paul, as Taubes wrote, he took over a tradition partially based on the texts of Paul and gave it his own twist. His reference to Paul served his sometimes desperate attempt to find a connection between God’s Providence and political events and forces in the modern age of ‘immanence’. Considering the constant threat of ‘the end’, he sought refuge in powers that could postpone the apocalypse. According to Taubes, Paul’s letters had a massive impact on the intellectual and political history of the West, but they were read and disseminated by those who wanted to detach Paul from the tradition he arose from, or who wanted to attach him to a *potestas spiritualis* intended to be related to this world. In both traditions, the Gnostic as well as the Christian, the ‘enemies of God’ remained the sign of imperfection. Against this ominous interpretation, Taubes presents another reading of Paul that does not allow any orthodoxy but shows us history in its heterogeneity. As a Jew, Taubes is inclined to move on with Paul, leaving Orthodox Judaism behind, while showing at the same time that Paul’s heresy is still loyal to the logic of Jewish messianism. Schmitt and Taubes are diagnostic writers, concerned with the history of religious and philosophical thought in the light of its political significance. Their

⁷² *Ad Carl Schmitt*, 62. See Mehring, ‘Karl Löwith ...’, 247, ‘Beide, Schmitt wie Taubes, entwarfen ein eschatologisches Geschichtsbild um der politischen Praktik willen: als Theologie der Entscheidungsschlacht.’

political preferences, because of their extremist tendencies, can hardly be called worthy of imitation. Schmitt failed to recognize in time that he had become part of a destructive regime rather than a catechontic power he had perhaps thought it to be. Taubes' political project remained negative, involving no physical involvement in political practice, and no complete withdrawal from this world. However, what would a spiritual community which is also a political force actually look like? As far as I know, he did not take any initiative to set up or join such a movement, although he sympathized with the students' revolt of the 1960s. His place was not in this world, but he could not prevent himself from spreading his provocative stance of non-involvement in this world, paradoxically intervening through his words – like Paul.

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