

# Introduction

Why add another text to the already vast corpus of literature on Carl Schmitt's political theology? It is exactly one hundred years ago that his influential work *Political Theology* (*Politische Theologie* [1922]) was published. Since then, it has served as a touchstone for subsequent inquiries into sovereignty and the secularization of theological into political concepts, producing no end of commentary. This has only grown in recent decades. Ever since the so-called “war on terror” and the unfolding state of emergency—the expansion of the security and surveillance state and the widespread deployment of extralegal measures to combat terrorism—Schmitt's theories of the sovereign state of exception and the crisis of liberal democracy have gained greater prominence, becoming the subject of numerous debates in political and legal theory, continental philosophy, and international relations (see for example Agamben, 2005a; Odysseos & Petito, 2007; Hooker, 2009; Galli, 2015; Vinx, 2015; Head, 2016; Meierhenrich & Simons, 2017; Scheuerman, 2020).

The ghost of Schmitt continues to loom large over contemporary political events. But why is this the case? What is it about this Weimar and Nazi era jurist and political theorist that seems to speak to us today? Why does this revenant appear every time the political order undergoes a crisis of legitimacy? What is there in Schmitt's political theology that makes it such a penetrating diagnostic tool for understanding moments of breakdown and rupture in the constitutional system, even if the political thrust of his analysis—that of revolutionary conservatism—ended up bringing about the destruction of the very system he purported to defend? Schmitt's eventual endorsement of National Socialism as a solution to a weakened and exhausted Weimar constitution, and his later participation in the Nazi regime, suggests that the desire for order and authority risks

destroying the thing it is intended to protect. For Schmitt, living as he did through the instability of the Weimar period, the only solution was a strong, authoritarian, and decisive sovereign, a figure that, moreover, takes on a theological significance. This was, according to Schmitt, the only way of restoring order and legitimacy in a modernity characterized by liberal individualism, nihilistic consumerism, technological domination, godless atheism, and revolutionary agitation. Yet, the famous first line from *Political Theology*—“Sovereign is he who decides on the exception”—foreshadowed and essentially paved the way for the Nazi (counter)revolution that culminated in the total destruction of the German state, not to mention the extermination of European Jewry.<sup>1</sup>

Our impetus for writing this book was the COVID-19 pandemic, which also poses significant challenges to the current constitutional order. This is not, of course, to say that our time is equivalent to the prewar Weimar period. Nevertheless, the past two years have seen unprecedented emergency measures imposed by liberal democratic states to deal with a public health crisis, measures such as lockdowns and restrictions on public gatherings and social interactions, vaccine mandates, and new forms of surveillance that would be unthinkable at any other time and that entail a severe infringement of civil liberties. Many commentators, including, most controversially, Giorgio Agamben, invoked Schmitt’s concept of the state of exception as a way of understanding these developments. Others (see Runciman, 2020, 2021) commented on the return of the strong Hobbesian state and on the way that crises such as pandemics reveal, as Schmitt himself maintained, absolute sovereignty as the hidden core of liberal democracies. However, the contemporary crisis of the liberal order is observed not only in the uncanny reappearance of the Schmittian sovereign state of exception but also in the broader tensions, fractures, and antagonisms, domestically and globally, that seem to have been accelerated by the pandemic. For instance, the social and economic inequalities revealed most sharply in: unequal access to vaccines and health care in different parts of the world; the return of the big state after a decade or more of neoliberal austerity; heightened geopolitical tensions and the fragmentation of the liberal international order into competing power blocs;<sup>2</sup> the rise of antiliberal populist forces in many parts of the world; new forms of authoritarian politics; the breakdown of trust in government and in the representative structures of democratic governance as seen in high levels of political disaffiliation and “post-truth” discourses; and the proliferation of wild conspiracy theories, anti-lockdown and anti-vaccine protests, as

well as new forms of protest and dissent over issues like racial justice and the environment. Indeed, one of the most serious aspects of this crisis is the looming ecological catastrophe, which poses an absolute limit to our current way of life, and indeed to human existence itself, and yet which we have no idea—or at least not the will—to effectively deal with. We discuss many of these examples in the book—but they can all be seen as symptoms of the legitimization crisis of liberal democracies.

And what of the question of political theology itself? For Schmitt, political theology referred to the translation of theological concepts, like God and the miracle, into secular political and juridical concepts, like sovereignty and the legal exception. Schmitt thereby sought to confine theology to a narrow set of political and legal categories, and to mobilize it in support of an authoritarian sovereign state. For Schmitt, in the time of secularism, characterized by the collapse of theological authority, the political sovereign must become the new God. This harnessing of theology for the revalorization of political authority and legal order is the constant imperative in Schmitt, and it forms a continuum in his thinking from his early work on political theology and the Roman Catholic Church in the 1920s, to his postwar essay *The Nomos of the Earth* and his writing on the Christian figure of the *katechon*, right through to his last major published work, *Political Theology II*, in which he responded to critics such as Hans Blumenberg and Erik Peterson, defending his initial, and what Peterson considered entirely illegitimate,<sup>3</sup> politicization of theology. In engaging with political theology, Schmitt was responding to the modern condition of secularism and to the decline of theological sources of moral and political authority.

However, in more recent times, and in the context of what has come to be termed the “post-secular” condition (see Habermas, 2008), the line between the religious and the secular, the sacred and the profane has become increasingly blurred in ways both interesting and dangerous. Religious expression has become more prominent in public political life, taking both conservative and progressive forms, translating into modes of political engagement that are both authoritarian and emancipatory. This has forced renewed reflection on political theology and its current, contemporary meaning. One of the aims of this book is to extricate political theology from the sovereign-centric Schmittian paradigm it has largely been confined to. We want to think about the intersection of theology and politics beyond the sacralization of the sovereign state and thus to explore its radical and emancipatory potential. In other words, we want to

think political theology *beyond* Schmitt. Certainly, we are not alone in this endeavor. Before, during, and after Schmitt's time, the relationship between the theological and the political had been configured in very different ways. Postwar theologians such as Karl Barth, J. B. Metz, Jürgen Moltmann, and many others recognized that "in the wake of Auschwitz" and the failures of the totalitarian state, Christian theology could no longer be legitimately recruited into the service of political sovereignty. Moreover, they sought to show how the church could accommodate itself to the conditions of secular liberal and democratic societies, and even play a role in supporting movements for social, racial, and environmental justice. We discuss a number of these alternative approaches to political theology. Our concern here is how political theology might be thought otherwise—not simply as a way of diagnosing the crisis of the current political order but also in thinking about alternatives informed by theological themes of justice and hope. Our point is that political theology has an important role to play in responding to some of the challenges we face today. For instance, coming to terms with the implications of the Anthropocene condition and the environmental crisis, or social injustice and the problem of state violence, or the legacy of slavery requires not only political investigation but also *theological reflection*. While we write as political and legal theorists rather than as theologians, we nonetheless believe that theology has something important to say about our current predicament.

As the title suggests, the three themes addressed in this book are *order*, *crisis*, and *redemption*. We develop a political theological framework to think about the nature of the current political order, how it falls into crisis, and how *we* (rather than the order itself) might be redeemed. So to be clear, the aim is not to find ways of preserving the liberal order in its current form, riven as it is with tensions and contradictions, such as that between the institutions of liberal democracy and the dynamics of the neoliberal capitalist economy. Rather, it is to show how the liberal order can be transformed in a more emancipatory way. We are fully aware of the seriousness of the situation and of the risks and dangers associated with the forces that are currently challenging this order. We find nothing redemptive or even vaguely appealing in communitarianism or in the return of strong national sovereignty as alternatives to globalization. Nor do we indulge in that easy radicalism and facile antiliberalism that welcomes the coming crisis as a path to salvation. As we argue in the book, Schmitt's antiliberalism and his authoritarian politics continue to have a strong affinity with the contemporary phenomenon of right-wing populism. His

political theology has nothing redemptive about it and, in today's context, only perpetuates the coming disorder. The adoption of a critical distance to Schmitt also extends to, and is in contrast with, the presupposition by many thinkers on the left of the pertinence of Schmitt either for the critique of liberal internationalism or, as exemplified by Chantal Mouffe, in facilitating a renewal of the left-wing democratic project. Schmitt offers only authoritarian solutions to the problems of liberal democracy. Yet at the same time, we want to understand the ways in which the liberal political order—which is now in a process of decomposition—has engendered many of the problems it now faces. So by *redemption* we evoke the possibility at least of a different kind of order, a different kind of world: for instance, one organized around principles of social and environmental justice; cosmopolitan right; global solidarity; new, decentralized forms of democracy; and, above all, by the ethical principle of *care*—care for and conservation of the natural world and for nonhuman species with whose fate we are inevitably entangled. This requires a radically different approach to politics, and to political theology, to that which Schmitt affords us.

So the central argument we make in this book is that while Schmitt's political theology furnishes us with important insights into the nature of the current crisis, our situation at the same time demands a reflection on the limits of his paradigm. In other words, there are certain internal limitations to Schmitt's sovereign-centric model of political theology that prevent adequate comprehension of our current crisis. To give perhaps an obvious example, there is no room whatsoever in Schmitt's thought for any consideration of the Anthropocene and the ecological crisis—not simply because those concerns were not present in Schmitt's time, but more so because his understanding of political theology is entirely anthropocentric, deriving as it does from his, rather heterodox, interpretations of the Roman Catholic tradition. The sovereignty of God over the universe, and thus of the sovereign over society, finds its corollary in the absolute sovereignty of man over nature. Nature, for Schmitt, is essentially *human* nature, as this, rather than the natural world, is the exemplary domain of the theologico-political. It is this domain that is Schmitt's exclusive concern, and that is asserted against all attempts to present a different derivation of the (theologico-)political. The Schmittian insistence upon human nature—the relationship between humans—is entirely oriented by the rethinking of the theory of the state, constitution, and international law, from which the natural world is effectively absent. This is why we believe an alternative conception of political theology based on ecological

awareness and entanglement, as we find, for instance, in thinkers like Catherine Keller and in process theologians like Alfred North Whitehead, to be necessary correctives to this lacuna in Schmitt's theory. So coming to terms with the parameters and implications of our current condition requires thinking both *with* and *beyond* Schmitt.

This book proceeds by an insistence upon the internal limitations and blind spots of Schmitt's political theology. The reflection upon these aspects of the Schmittian oeuvre ensures a more complex approach that resists the assumption of the direct, unproblematic applicability of Schmitt to contemporary phenomena. But why not simply bypass Schmitt altogether and turn to alternative approaches unencumbered by this Schmittian framework? Why summon up the ghost of Schmitt at all? There are a number of reasons why we consider Schmitt to still be important and to warrant renewed critical reflection. First, there are elements of his thinking that continue to be relevant today—such as his critique of technics and technological domination, which is perhaps even more pertinent in our technologically saturated age. We discuss this in chapter 5. Second, Schmitt's political theology shows how we might understand the recurring desire for sovereignty that haunts the political imagination. Sovereignty, in the era of a globalized economy, is more of a phantom than a coherent concept or institution, but the desire for it is no less real and intense for all that; indeed, perhaps it is more so. Recent political phenomena, such as the rise of populism, Brexit, the election of Trump and other far-right nationalist populist figures, can all be explained in terms of the projection of a fantasy image of sovereignty—expressed in terms of the restoration of national prestige (“Make America Great Again”), the repatriation of lawmaking powers and the control of borders (“Take Back Control”), and the idea of a strong executive state that can cut through the mire of bureaucratic complexity and act as a direct expression of the “will of the people” (“Get Brexit Done” or “Drain the Washington Swamp”). We address much of this in chapter 7. The renewed desire for sovereignty, which ensues from the democratic deficit—the sense of disempowerment and disaffiliation that many people feel today—is something that emerges whenever the political order experiences a crisis of legitimacy, when people feel that their elected governments no longer represent their interests, are unable to solve their problems, or cannot protect them from the buffeting winds of globalization. While the solution Schmitt offers to this democratic deficit is normatively deeply undesirable, and indeed unsustainable in the contemporary world, his politico-theological analysis nevertheless

points to a real problem in actually existing liberal democracies. Finally, Schmitt's political theology, through its distinctive form of analysis, introduces a radical questioning of the foundations of political legitimacy, legal authority, subjectivity, ethics, technology, democracy, and the relationship between religious and nonreligious spheres of life, that contains within it the possibility of its own radical transformation. In other words, whether we like it or not, Schmitt's political theology is the challenge we cannot avoid, the test we must confront, in order to determine, *beyond and after* Schmitt, responses to our current predicament.

### Methodology and Approach

This book focuses on Schmitt's political theology as *the* central thematic in his thought. The concern with the relationship between religious and political spheres of experience might be seen as the "red thread" that runs throughout Schmitt's intellectual career. Of course, Schmitt engages with this problematic in different ways and from multiple perspectives—whether through legal and sociological categories, the question of miracles, the "spirit" of technology, the mysterious figure of, or the historical significance and political role of, the Roman Catholic Church—but there can be little doubt that the relationship between theology and politics was his constant preoccupation. It is precisely because of the preeminence of this concept in Schmitt's oeuvre—not to mention the vast influence his thinking has had on subsequent debates in this area—that we have sought to consider his political theology anew with the aim of revealing its tensions, limitations, and aporias and to consider its relevance to the contemporary world. Doing so requires an engagement not only with his famous and seminal 1922 work but also with a series of lesser-known works from the same period (such as *Political Romanticism* [1919] and *Roman Catholicism and Political Form* [1923]), his prison writings after World War II (*Ex Captivitate Salus* [1945–1947]), and works from much later periods (such as *Political Theology II* [1970]). It also means unearthing subterranean dialogues with interlocutors like the philosopher Leo Strauss, the Dada artist Hugo Ball, revolutionary anarchists like Mikhail Bakunin, the rabbinical thinker Jacob Taubes, postwar German theologians like J. B. Metz and Jürgen Moltmann, and the legal scholar and justice of the Federal Constitutional Court, Ernst-Wolfgang Böckenförde. It is only by broadening out our investigations in this manner that we can form a

more complete, variegated picture of Schmitt's political theology and gain a clearer sense of its contours.

Schmitt's political theology is oriented entirely around the problem of order and its preservation. The principle of authority—whether embodied in the form of the Roman Empire, or the medieval Christian European order, or the modern nation-state—had to be preserved at all costs. The Apocalypse—whether expressed as the moment of biblical revelation or the messianic promise of revolutionary redemption—must be deferred. As Taubes once put it: “[Schmitt] prays for the preservation of the state, since if, God forbid, it doesn't remain, chaos breaks loose, or even worse, the Kingdom of God!” (2003, pp. 69–70). To do so, politics has to draw on theological ideas, recruit into its service religious institutions, and inspire sentiments of faith, devotion, and sacrifice. Central to Schmitt's political theology is the veneration of sovereignty and the fear of anarchy. However, as we endeavor to show in this book, Schmitt's “radical conservatism” also meant the preparedness to invoke exceptional measures that risked destroying, in autoimmune fashion, the very order they are intended to preserve. In this way, sovereignty—unhinged from its normal constitutional constraints—starts to resemble the anarchy it seeks to prevent. We explore this autoimmune tendency in Schmitt's political theology in greater detail throughout the book.

In investigating the development of Schmitt's thinking—in exploring its tensions, limitations, and moments of fracture—we intend to advance the debate on political theology and to take it beyond the sovereign paradigm in which it has largely remained trapped. Of course, as we have already indicated, political theology as a broad field of inquiry has, since Schmitt's time, become much more diversified, engaging with different concerns, from economics (see Agamben, 2011) to the natural environment (see Keller, 2018b). It has embraced “secular” and emancipatory causes, from ecology and social justice (see Moltmann, 1985; Metz, 1969; Gutiérrez, 1998) to decolonization and black liberation (see Heinrichs, 2019; Cone, 2019). Where Schmitt sought to reunite church and state—or at least to mobilize religious authority in support of political authority—other political theologians have been much more attuned to the dangers of this ideological alliance, proposing instead that the church play a public role yet one that was independent and critical of state authority (see Moltmann, 1971; Graham, 2013). However, from a political theory perspective, political theology is still largely beholden to Schmitt's sovereign-centric way of thinking (see Kahn, 2011; Yelle, 2019; Rasch, 2019). In addressing



Schmittian themes of political order and legitimacy, but from a radically different position, we aim to transform the terms of this discussion. We hope to show that political theology can be taken in more radical directions; that it can be reoriented toward the goals of justice and human (and nonhuman) emancipation.

In identifying the limitations of Schmitt's approach, we must also acknowledge some of our own. Our focus is mostly on Christian political theology. The reason for this is obviously that Christianity, and particularly Roman Catholicism, is the tradition in which Schmitt was immersed, even if his Catholicism was somewhat heterodox and, even, according to Peterson, "pagan." However, there are important non-Christian traditions of political theology, particularly in Judaism, for instance, in the thought of Hermann Cohen (see Rashkover & Kavka, 2013), and in the more mystical tendencies of Weimar-era thinkers like Franz Rosenzweig and Gershom Scholem (see Jacobson, 2003). Indeed, there are many fruitful dialogues and critical exchanges that could have been opened up between Schmittian political theology and forms of Jewish political theology that go in radically different, post-sovereign directions: from Cohen's neo-Kantian cosmopolitanism to the anarchistic theopolitics of Martin Buber (see Brody, 2018).<sup>4</sup> While the question of Jewish political theology as a possible response to Schmitt has by no means been neglected in this book—see the debates with key interlocutors such as Strauss (discussed in chapter 2), Benjamin (discussed in chapter 7), and Taubes (discussed in chapter 8)—there is much more to be said on this subject. Moreover, political theology has in recent times become more diversified, with an interest in non-European religious contexts such as Islam (see Campanini & Di Donato, 2021), Buddhism (see Singh, 2012), and Hinduism (see Basu, 2020). For reasons of space, and in order to retain the focus on Schmitt, we have not engaged with these other traditions. However, bringing these into dialogue with Schmitt may well prove productive avenues for future research.

### Structure of the Book

The theme of the crisis of the liberal democratic order is expanded upon in chapter 1. This chapter considers whether the state of emergency—which is central to Schmitt's political theology—is an adequate way of capturing the political *form* of contemporary society. Here we reflect on some

recent debates about the pertinence and validity of Schmitt's concept of the sovereign state of exception for thinking about the state's response to the pandemic. In contextualizing this question, we then turn in detail to Schmitt himself and to his politico-theological defense of strong sovereignty. We explore three early works written around the same time: *Political Theology I* (1922), *Roman Catholicism and Political Form* (1923), and *The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy* (1923). These key texts crystallize all the significant elements of Schmitt's conservative political theology: the sovereign state of exception as an extralegal dimension of state power; the translation of theological ideas into secular political and legal categories; the political role of the Catholic Church in representing and unifying society; and, lastly, Schmitt's rejection of liberal parliamentarianism as antithetical to authentic democratic identity. These ideas can be seen both as a response to the immediate and acute political crisis of the Weimar Republic in Germany, as well as to the deeper question of nihilism and the loss of firm moral and political coordinates that Schmitt detected in secular modernity. Our argument in this chapter is that, while certain parallels can be drawn with our situation today, Schmitt's antidote to secular modernity is normatively and politically untenable in the current crisis. Our critique extends here to certain contemporary thinkers who unproblematically adopt Schmitt's theories as a means of resisting (neo) liberal technocracy and as a way of renewing democracy today.

Our critical engagement with the limits of Schmitt's political theology is developed over subsequent chapters. In chapter 2, we ask the question, *Who is the subject of Schmitt's political theology?* In other words, what exactly is political theology engaged with, what is its field of operation, which political identities does it affirm, and who or what is it opposed to? The ambiguities of Schmitt's thinking are first revealed through the engagement of two central, early interlocutors: the founding member of Dada, and subsequent reaffirmed Catholic, Hugo Ball and the political philosopher Leo Strauss. The heterodox theological conservatism that orients Ball's essay on Schmitt's political theology seeks to proceed beyond the limits of the theological in Schmitt by according to the Roman Catholic Church the primary position in Schmitt's political theology, thereby absorbing the political into the theological. In contrast, Strauss approaches Schmitt with the presumption of the fundamental opposition of theology and political philosophy. Thus, Strauss considers the radical gesture of foundation—the friend/enemy opposition—in *The Concept of the Political* (1927) within the domain of political philosophy, emphasizing the limit of Schmitt's gesture

due to its dependence upon the conceptual framework of liberalism for its articulation. This limit is to be overcome for Strauss by a return to Hobbes, which Schmitt can only intimate. Ball and Strauss represent the preliminary attempts to identify the limits of the subject of Schmittian political theology and seek to think beyond them, through their respective emphases upon theology and political philosophy. Yet, it is the limits of these critiques—a project of Catholic renewal (Ball) and the renewal of political philosophy as the perpetual re-presentation of the opposition of theology and philosophy (Strauss)—that, in turn, lead to a discussion of the contemporary subject of political theology. Here, we commence from an era where liberalism has largely been displaced by neoliberalism. In this displacement, neoliberalism is antipolitical in a sense diametrically opposed to Schmitt: it is a depoliticization and neutralization of the question of *justice*. In response, the subject of political theology, informed by Roberto Esposito's deconstruction of the duality of person and thing, becomes a different understanding of subjectivity as situated within a world that is not merely coextensive with a legal framework based on property and rights and opens onto a broader understanding of ethical responsibility and justice.

The theme of personhood and subjectivity is further developed in chapter 3, in which we seek to understand, from a theological perspective, how identity—of persons and communities—can be transformed in an emancipatory way. Here we engage in a close reading of Paul's Letter to Philemon, which is an intercession on behalf of a slave, Onesimus, to his former master, Philemon, in which Paul urges Philemon to treat Onesimus no longer as a slave but as a brother and spiritual equal—thus suggesting the possibility of the transformation of existing social and political relationships. While the letter leaves this possible transformation ambiguous and unconfirmed, especially within the broader context of the slave economy of the Roman Empire, we explore the emancipatory potential of Paul's gesture. This involves the letter's interpretation in relation to contemporary considerations of decolonization and the legacy of slavery. Despite its limitations and ambiguities, the letter expresses a sensitivity to injustice and the ethical responsibility to transform a situation of domination into noninjurious social relations. In exploring the radical potential of this idea, and how it might be more broadly applied, we develop a politics and ethics of fraternity through a discussion of Étienne Balibar, Roberto Esposito, and Jean-Luc Nancy. We consider fraternity or brotherhood to be a less restrictive and more emancipatory foundation for political theology than Schmitt's friend/enemy opposition.

Chapter 4 focuses on the Anthropocene and the looming ecological catastrophe as a major factor in the current crisis of the liberal political and economic order. The time in which man becomes the main geological actor, with disastrous consequences for the natural environment, not only poses urgent questions about human survival and the capacity of our economic and political systems to manage this crisis, but it also raises profound questions about what it actually means to be human, and the extent to which our fate is deeply entangled with natural ecosystems and nonhuman species—a fact that has been brought home to us in dramatic fashion in the age of zoonotic viruses like COVID-19. In this chapter, we argue that Schmitt's political theology is entirely anthropocentric, based as it is on a conception of human sovereignty derived from the Judeo-Christian tradition, and thus lacks the critical capacity for adequately thinking the Anthropocene. Furthermore, the foundation for law or *nomos*, in Schmitt's theory, is one of land appropriation and the domination of territory, thus mirroring the violent and extractive relationship humanity has established with the natural world. Here we develop an alternative orientation for political theology, one that accommodates a different kind of relationship with nature and nonhuman entities. We engage first with thinkers like Agamben, Deleuze and Guattari, and Felice Ciamatti in order to deconstruct the anthropomorphic dualism between man and animal. We then turn to new currents in ecopolitical theology, and to thinkers like Catherine Keller and Bruno Latour, in order to construct a different relationship to the natural world and to our ethical responsibilities to the environment—one that stresses ecological interdependence and entanglement, as well as *repoliticization*.

Chapter 5 focuses on the theme of technology and political theology—or technology *as* political theology. Here we explore Schmitt's critique of technicity or technological domination, as outlined in his early essay "The Age of Neutralizations and Depoliticizations" (1929)—a critique that is continually reemphasized throughout his later texts, including his final published work *Political Theology II*. Schmitt's ongoing concern with the depoliticizing and totalizing effects of a technologically saturated modernity can therefore be understood as a central theme of his political theology. In this chapter, we consider the continued pertinence of Schmitt's critique to the contemporary and unprecedented domination of digital technology, rather than to the industrial and analogue technologies to which the Schmittian critique is addressed. We interrogate Schmitt's conception of the relationship between technology and political theology through the

comparative examination of the work of Peter Sloterdijk and Bernard Stiegler. Both Sloterdijk and Stiegler accord technology a central importance and respond to its further transformation into digital and biotechnological forms. This further transformation involves an acknowledgment of its profound alteration of the distinction between the human and the technological. We then proceed to examine the divergences between Sloterdijk and Stiegler. We show how Sloterdijk returns to Schmittian motifs of enmity and national homogeneity stripped of theological association. In contrast, in Stiegler, the theological is replaced with a notion of *spirit* that, as the insistence upon the primacy of conscience—the theoretical and practical basis of individual and collective consciousness—is the repository of a noninstrumental, ethical relationship between the human and the technological.

Chapter 6 examines the relationship between political theology and democratic constitutionalism. While most of the scholarship on Schmitt's constitutional theory focuses on his pre-war Weimar writings, we explore his complex relationship with the postwar German Federal Republic and with one of his key interlocutors, Ernst-Wolfgang Böckenförde. As someone deeply influenced by Schmitt, and part of his postwar intellectual circle, Böckenförde nevertheless elaborated an important critique of Schmitt—one that transforms the understanding and position of political theology in relation to constitutional social democracy. The transformation shifts political theology from the extrinsic Schmittian position to one *within* the framework of constitutional democracy. The internal critique, and the accompanying shift, are considered through Böckenförde's transformation of political theology—the Böckenförde-Diktum—into the historical process of an inherently problematic and fragile separation of state and religion, the explicit juridical integration and regulation of the state of exception within a democratic constitution, the deflation of the Schmittian opposition between democracy and liberalism (*Rechtstaat*), and the reduction of the Schmittian opposition between discussion and decision as the counterpart of the deintensification of the friend/enemy distinction. The difficulties of the Böckenfördian theory of constitutional social democracy, flowing from the internal critique of Schmitt, will then be revealed through the presence of continuing tensions underlying an apparently coherent, unified theory.

Chapter 7 continues this investigation of tensions inherent to democratic constitutionalism with a discussion of contemporary political mobilizations against the constitutional order in the form of right-wing populism as well as new protest movements for social, racial, and environ-

mental justice. Both forms of politics call into question, albeit in radically different ways and to entirely different ends, the legitimacy of the liberal democratic system, and both can be seen as symptomatic of the failure of its representative functions. We show, first, how the key elements of Schmitt's political theology—the critique of liberal parliamentarianism, the identitarian, exclusionary, and authoritarian model of democracy based on the unmediated “will of the people” (articulated through the figure of the leader), strong sovereignty, and the friend/enemy opposition—all come into play in contemporary right-wing populism. We contrast this with extraparliamentary movements of the left today, which challenge the liberal democratic order in a different way, in the name of emancipation and greater justice for minorities or for the natural environment. These may be seen as a form of “post-secular” politics. Comprehension of this demands a different kind of political theology, one that can call into question state power and violence as well as social injustice and environmental destruction. Here we reconstruct religious themes of messianic hope and the promise of justice and redemption through a consideration of post-war Christian theology in J. B. Metz and Jürgen Moltmann, the utopian Marxism of Ernst Bloch, and the mystical anarchism of Gustav Landauer.

The final chapter, chapter 8, explores the key theme of the *katechon* as central to political theology. This enigmatic and obscure figure from Pauline theology, which restrains the coming of the Antichrist and yet, in so doing, also delays the Second Coming of Christ and the final triumph of good over evil, we take to be of central importance for thinking about politics today, particularly in our apocalyptic times. The *katechon*, we show, was also fundamental to Schmitt's counterrevolutionary politicization of Christian theology. In this chapter, we take full account of the ambiguities of the *katechon*, showing how it can be given reactionary or revolutionary meanings, how it can be used to maintain the status quo or to carve out an autonomous space for resistant and transformative politics. However, here we offer a reading of the *katechon* that is different from Agamben, who invests little value in it, seeing it as something that obscures the state of lawlessness (the reign of the Antichrist whose presence must instead be revealed). Rather, we argue that in the “end-times” of ecological catastrophe and political and economic crisis, the *katechon* enables an alternative theorization of radical politics—one that is based on caring for the world that exists and bringing a halt to the blind, nihilistic, and destructive drives of neoliberal capitalism. Our claim is that it is precisely the concept of national sovereignty itself that, so far from being a bulwark

or restraint against the growing anomie of the world, actually hastens its arrival. Here we propose an alternative understanding of the *katechon* that we develop through the idea of planetary care and through a radical ethics and politics of cosmopolitanism. Thinking the *katechon* in this way allows an altogether different rendering of political theology.