

which is not fully explored. Nor does her claim consider the impact of the Protestant reform on later secularisation, which is odd given she has already described what was happening in Protestant regions. Secularist movements actually drew heavily on English, Prussian, and even Russian models of the relationship between the Church and State, and pursued a vision in which the State had much greater control over the Church. This vision would have been *anathema* to the council fathers. Why, therefore, would it be more likely that the Tridentine reform, rather than the Protestant reform which itself gave a much greater role to the state in regulating marriage, should bear the greater responsibility for paving the way for later secularisation? She may be right but her argument lacks depth.

On the whole it is an interesting work, and extremely useful to anybody looking for an introduction to the Council of Trent, but it remains one among several others. As noted, there are some contentious claims made throughout which are neither properly explored nor fully substantiated. They can seem out of place and almost kittenish. This is inevitably the result of trying to bring together a work which offers new perspectives while remaining an introductory text. The Cambridge Companion does not pretend to be anything else and at the end of each chapter there is a helpful bibliography for the benefit of any reader wanting to explore a particular area in more depth.

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Political Theology and Law

Geminello Preterossi

Routledge, Abingdon and New York, 2023, Law and Politics: Continental Perspectives, 202 pp (hardback £96), ISBN: 9781138549821

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This is not a book of Christian theology. Nor is it directly concerned with the workings of the law as such. Political Theology refers to a tradition of political analysis that began with the German jurist Carl Schmitt who has become, despite his culpable (although complex) association with Nazism, an influential figure for both the Right and the Left. His 'Political Theology' foregrounded the correspondence between an epoch's vision of what is ultimate and the structure of the worldly power of the age (e.g. between a voluntarist God and monarchical absolutism). There is thus a formal analogy between the theological-metaphysical and the political-legal. Schmitt was concerned with sovereignty, legitimacy and the restraining powers that held

back chaos, defining as sovereign the one(s) with the power to declare a state of exception to the law for the sake of the law. That is, sovereignty is evidenced by the decisionistic power to suspend the law in an emergency in order to preserve the law. Politics requires a monopoly of decision, which is a sort of 'excess' over and above the usual functioning of the law, which holds back anarchy – and this is a necessary 'theological' and sacral trace present in politics. As is, also, the need for devotional fervour in any politicisation process: flags, leaders and revolutions require obeisance and fidelity; communities require ethical and (pseudo-)religious bonds.

Preterossi's concern in this volume is to show that Political Theology reveals the matrix of modern politics. It is not an apologia for Schmitt nor does it recognise his analyses as valid for all time. Political Theology is a cipher for the irreducibly metaphysical nature of politics. Politics produces and requires an excess beyond itself in order to function well. When that is disavowed or repressed, the decisionistic excess will inevitably break out (e.g. normalised states of emergency, plebiscitarianism, violence, fundamentalisms, populisms). Secularisation is not, therefore, a Weberian disenchantment of the world but the persistence of this theological-religious excess in a new mode. Indeed, debates about the post-secular hover in the background of the book. Does this excess to the political – the need for decision, sovereignty, legitimacy and restraint of chaos – simply correspond to traditional theological concepts? Or do those theological concepts transmute into secular analogues, as if there is a constitutive structure to human living which requires 'transcendence' whether understood religiously (God, Pope, etc.) or not (hegemony, sovereignty)?

The case for this inextinguishability of the theological is first made by recourse to analyses of Hobbes and Hegel, and Schmitt's reading of them, and then by analyses of 'hegemony' in Gramsci and populism in Laclau. The book is clearly written for an audience of researchers in political theory. The reader requires a detailed understanding of: Hobbes; Hegelian dialectics and political theory; Gramsci's theory of hegemony; Laclau and Mouffe's discourse analysis and treatment of populism; Foucault's concepts of governance and genealogy; Agamben's archaeological method; and postsecularism. Preterossi's prose takes no prisoners. (A beginner with a theological eye would be better served by looking up Beth Phillips or William T. Cavanaugh who both give theological critiques of Political Theology.)

The second way that Preterossi approaches the insurmountability of the metaphysical excess to politics is by analysis of its disavowal in so-called Economic Theology, to which a major section of the book is devoted. Economic Theology here looks at the correspondence between (or transmutation of) the techniques and rationales of the Church's economy of salvation and modern bureaucratic procedures of life management now shorn of religiosity. It is something like the modern adulation of the neoliberal economy as the fulfilment of human life and wellbeing which, for Preterossi, leads to a denial of the importance of the polis, a loss of relational life, and the production of atomised consumers instead of citizens. This leads to a vacuum in which populisms have emerged which are really sophistic simulacra of true community bonds forged by political process. The sacred is

hived off into Legal Theology, a sort of moral ideology formed from the ‘religion’ of human rights, the moralisation of international relations and wars (Kosovo, Kuwait), and an exultation of humanitarianism that hides the dynamics of domination by military and technocratic bodies and by financial capitalism. It also concerns the hegemony of ‘woke’ political correctness with its demonisation of canonical works, the sanitisation of history, and the identity politics that divide rather than assemble political bodies. Economic Theology, allied with Legal Theology, and the various techniques of governance which deny and obscure the insights of Political Theology, herald the apparent arrival of a depoliticised and immanent society.

However, argues Preterossi, the political is resurgent. Look at the rise of emergencies requiring exceptional political actions: pandemic, migrant, climate, 2008’s financial crash. See the rise of populisms and ideological/religious fundamentalisms. Witness the theopolitics of the war in Ukraine. So there is a need for a deep analysis of the structure of modern politics which acknowledges the unavoidability of the theological-political. There needs to be political structures that can hold back chaos and anarchy but legitimated by collectivities that have ethical-political (not merely moralistic) bonds. We need too a confidence in political cultures that allow for conflict of ideas and interests in a complex, competitive, pluralist environment. And this is politics—the re-enchantment of political imagination and the search for mobilising worldviews (secular or not) that will allow for legitimate organisational forms rooted in collectivities of solidarity that will lead us out of both ‘politics as administration’ and reactive forms of pseudo-politics like populism. It is seizing the excessive energy that Political Theology evinces. Preterossi’s critical analyses and tools are credible and worthy of scrutiny, once one penetrates the prose, although theologically we will have different ideas about the ground of human sociality and what is really excessive to human political formations.

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The Visitation of Hereford Diocese in 1397

**Edited by Ian Forrest and Christopher Whittick
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£24.99), ISBN: 978-0-907239-87-1**

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In Hereford we are just beginning to consider how we might celebrate the 1350th anniversary of the Diocese approaching in 2026. It was therefore particularly