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SOVEREIGNS, CITIZENS, AND SAINTS:
POLITICAL THEOLOGY AND
RENAISSANCE LITERATURE

Graham Hammill and Julia Reinhard Lupton

The concept

Religion is not fully reducible to culture: this proposition, developed in the course of a series of collective conversations hosted by the two of us over the past five years, is at stake in each of the essays in this volume. By religion we mean above all the three monotheisms in both their distinctiveness and their entanglement, though we do not exclude *tout court* other forms and moments of religion from the discussion. Religion, we posit, is a reservoir of foundational stories, tropes, and exegetical habits that structure and give shape to political institutions and literary forms in ways that occur in culture—in specific spatio-temporal moments—while also manifesting a shaping power not fully reflective of the historical settings in which they are exercised. In recent years, religion has re-entered the stage of Renaissance literary studies as a subset of culture, taking its place alongside class, race, and gender as a form of social identifier. Yet religion, we argue, is not only an element in culture. Religion also instantiates discourses of value that aim to transcend culture, by creating trans-group alliances and affiliations around shared narratives, commandments, and principles. Unlike forms of national belonging, the singular traits of ascription and prescription around which religious communities form are conceived as coming from outside the groups that adhere to them—in the form of a sublime gift, book, or law

that pierces human temporality and sociality without being fully defined by them.

A cultural approach to religion, for example, can make little sense out of the Pauline tradition, which does not simply exemplify a religious identity (“Christianity”), but rather mobilizes a battery of geographical, historical, hermeneutic, juridical, and subjective positions and processes, as well as possible programs for their transformation and sublation. Like ghosts or viruses, religions leap across groups and epochs, practicing cultural accommodation in order to outlive rather than support the contexts that frame them. Religions survive when they manage to install elements of thought that stand out from the very rituals and practices designed to transmit but also to neutralize them. This is not to say that religion does not participate in culture, but rather that what distinguishes religion from culture is its absurd insistence and persistence beyond the local habitations of custom and habit, practice and power.

The renewed interest in religion and Renaissance literature has been amply documented in the review essay by Arthur Marotti and Ken Jackson, “The Religious Turn in Renaissance and Early Modern Studies,” published in *Criticism* in 2004, and in the special issue of *English Language Notes* on “The Religious Turn in Literary Studies,” edited by the medievalist Bruce Holsinger in 2006. The essay by Marotti and Jackson divides its attention between cultural and philosophical approaches to religion in the Renaissance; our volume throws its fortunes largely with the latter course, including a contribution from Jackson himself. Some of our authors, such as Alice Dailey and Aaron Kitch, stay close to the historical moments of their texts’ enunciations, yet demonstrate the productive operation of religious forms and genres across time and space. Others, such as Lowell Gallagher, Jacques Lezra, Ken Jackson, Philip Lorenz, Ineke Murakami, and Matthew Biberman, use founding scenes and tropes from the religious tradition in order to address early modern literature to contemporary philosophy and psychoanalysis. Others, such as Jennifer Rust and Catherine Winiarski, steer a middle course between history and theory in order to disclose the effectivity of exegetical forms within specific instances of literary expression and institutional change.

Religion is a problem that we have inherited from Latin. While the Greek term *threskeia*—“observances” or “rules of practice”—often passes as the equivalent of the more modern word religion, as Benveniste argues the Latin *religio* has no real equivalent. The specific problem with *religio* is its double origin. Cicero associates the word with *legere*, to collect, assemble, or read, defining religion as scruple, concern, meticulousness, piety, patience, respect, and modesty, while Tertullian associates the word with *ligare*, to bind or link,

defining religion as obligation or debt among members of a community (between the living and the dead, for example) or between those members and God. These two etymological origins combine to give a fairly rigorous definition of religion: religion repeatedly binds a group together by tying it as a group to some external, divine element which that group repeatedly recollects and retraces in particular practices that have to do with reading and discernment. As recently as Althusser's essay on "Ideology and the State," precisely this definition of religion exemplifies the relation between practice and ideology. The subject is interpellated into ideology through the divine call, the external divine element, which prepares the subject for participation in the modern state.

But the "re-" in *religio* suggests a relation to the external which is more complex and more promising. If a group is being repeatedly rebound to the divine, at some point that relation must have loosened up. And if that group is continually reconstituted around reading and discernment, there must have been some reading that went awry. As Régis DeBray argues, "there can be no organized system without closure and no system can be closed by elements internal to that system alone," and for this reason "the work of organization is by its very nature 'religious,' simultaneously producing an opening and a closure, saturating the 'below' with an absence on high" (170, 175). The reverse is also the case. The techniques and temporality of re-reading and recollection saturate the "on high" from below. Religion cannot help but mediate the incompleteness of collective life, both vertically in the unfolding of communities in history and horizontally in efforts to bind communities to and through a transcendental sovereign.

In convening a constellation of figures consisting of Sovereigns, Citizens, and Saints, we aim to address not religion as such, but rather religion in its constitutive dialogue with forms of political organization in the early modern West. This dialogue has come to carry the name of "political theology," a term closely associated with the writings of Carl Schmitt, especially his monograph, *Political Theology: Four Essays on the Concept of Sovereignty*. Among our assembled triumvirate of political-theological figures, the Sovereign belongs most clearly to Schmitt, the conservative jurist who helped developed emergency law and presidential powers at the end of the Weimar republic. Schmitt wrote from within a tradition of political Catholicism that extends back at least to Bodin, Suarez, and Ribadenyera (see the essay by Philip Lorenz on Suarez in this volume). Writing from within the tradition of political Catholicism, Schmitt argues that "the Catholic Church is the sole surviving contemporary example of the medieval capacity to create representative figures – the pope, the emperor, the monk, the knight, the person." For this reason, Catholicism offers a way to synthesize or at least

hold together “the most astounding *complexio oppositorum*” in the “juridical person” as “the absolute realization of authority” (*Roman Catholicism* 17).

Throughout the 1920’s and 1930’s, Schmitt’s explicit political objective was to transfer that judicial person from the Church to the State. In the process, he argues that the vanishing point of the sovereign is the exception, the extreme emergency unforeseen by the law which puts the entire legal system into crisis. (In this volume, see Ken Jackson’s essay on states of exception.) Following Bodin, Schmitt argues that while every legal system must assume some challenge that will throw it into crisis, no law or set of laws can predict that challenge and foreclose it. Such a situation, though radically contingent, is structurally necessary for every legal system. And for this reason, the sovereign is necessary as well. In the state of exception, the sovereign emerges as a representative person; the exception is Schmitt’s temporal representative for the external element to which the collective is bound. His main purpose is to ensure that the sovereign rules over it. But the exception is also a crypt of sorts for what Schmitt calls “real life.” “In the exception the power of real life breaks through the crust of a mechanism that has become torpid by repetition.” (*Political Theology* 15). While Schmitt’s formulation gets at the logical relation between sovereign and real life, it would be more accurate to say that the sovereign encrypts life by making it bear the burden of sovereign power. By combining the logic of inclusion by exclusion with an argument about the necessity of the sovereign for the formation of the state, Schmitt offers a cunningly insidious justification for internment of the stateless peoples produced by the modern state.

Sovereigns can also be saints, as disclosed by Walter Benjamin’s account of the tyrant-martyr at the center of the Baroque *Trauerspiel*. Yet the martyr, as Benjamin also demonstrates, can stand over against the sovereign, forcing him to expose the violence founding his rule by exercising his will on her body and on that of the body politic. We take up Schmitt’s analyses of the Sovereign, but we insist on supplementing the sublimity of his singular figure with that of the Citizen and the Saint. The Citizen’s membership in a horizontally-conceived body-politic and the Saint’s emancipatory and revisionist affiliation with the Prophet operate at odds with Schmitt’s desire to preserve order at almost any cost. Whereas the sovereign uses the exception to encrypt life, the saint-as-prophet probes the exception in order to rescript life. This is not to suggest that, like the sovereign, the prophet prevails over the exception. Rather, as Spinoza understood, the prophet is affected by the exception on the level of imagination or fantasy: “God’s revelations were received only with the aid of the imaginative faculty, to wit, with the aid of words or images. It was not a more perfect mind that was needed for the gift of prophecy, but a more lively imagination” (403). The

prophet does not have a superhuman understanding of God, but through an imaginative and passionate attachment to “the Law” or “the mind of God”—for Spinoza they are the same thing—the prophet produces new moral knowledge “beyond the limits of the intellect.” Prophetic imagination differs from day-dreaming in that prophecy is already caught up in a signifying system. As Spinoza emphasizes, prophesy needs signs for verification. The prophet, one might say, courts the law from the space of exception as a response to the sovereign. The prophet turns the space of the exception into the space of revelation and reinscribes the law accordingly. If in the tradition of *raison d’etat*, religion ensures the obedience of the people, the prophet introduces a third form of violence which dissolves the dialectic. By courting the divine from within the space of the exception—the end of days—the prophet shows violence to be the creative content of all law. Political theology makes things sacred through obedience, by making life into a sign of obedience to the sovereign’s absolute authority. Prophesy, on the other hand, turns sacred signs into weapons. Think of *Samson Agonistes*, when Samson pulls down the temple walls. Samson’s transformation from judge to prophet means that he cannot relate to sacred signs in the same way. As his hair, sign and seal of sacred authority, is cut, Samson is released into prophecy, turning the temple of Dagon into the space of exception in order to prove the intimate connection between divine law and divine violence.

The Saint and the Citizen would seem to exist at cross-purposes with each other, inhabiting distinct zones of public life as well as opposing historiographical moments. (In this volume, see Dailey’s essay on the conflict between treason law and saints’ lives in the struggle to define Catholic dissidence in Elizabethan England.) The Saint elects to join the City of God at the expense of the City of Men. Her acts of extremity cannot ground ordinary life, and she embraces the most confining restraints and restrictions in order to separate from society. On the other side of the chasm, the modern citizen is defined by a system of rights that, among other tasks of division and protection, separates church from state, relegating religion to the private world of individual conscience and purely civil (rather than civic) associations. Whether decked in the attributes of martyrdom or the vocation of prophesy, the Saint has become the nostalgic afterimage of a lost exceptionality forever eclipsed by the normative routines of citizenship. Yet the citizen, precisely in the ordinary character of her life, rezones the complex landscape of religious, ethnic, sexual, and economic differences. (See Gallagher’s essay on the stigmata suffered by a seventeenth-century working girl.) *Citizenship (like religion) is not culture*; indeed, its norms represent an alternative to culture, understood as either a national community or as

the form taken by particularized minority positions excluded or marginalized by that national vision. A social instance, a public sphere, is called forth in the literature of citizenship, a sphere irreducible to either the first nature of kinship or the second nature of culture.

The sovereign, the citizen, and the saint, in both their inherent oppositions and their elective affinities, invite us to approach questions of community, group membership, and difference from a vantage point *other than culture*, even and especially when “culture” itself emerges as a concept inhering within but not identical with the public spheres assembled in their names. To look at the nexus of theological and political definitions of group membership—as Catherine Winiarski does in her essay—is to derail any simple model of progressive secularization and liberalization by insisting on the ongoing impact of religious modes of social and political thought on modernity. By convening the citizen, the sovereign and the saint in a virtual covenant that links diverse discourses and historical moments, we aim to track the vicissitudes of key concepts, exegetical habits, and literary forms in the unfolding drama of the modern state.

The contents

In “*Phares*, or Divisible Sovereignty,” Jacques Lezra explores sovereignty as a logical problem whose paradoxes are manifest in culture at a moment of historical transition when a theological version of sovereignty is being re-imagined and re-invented through state administration. Following Derrida’s reading of Schmitt, Lezra notes that sovereignty must be both indivisible and divided, both essentially self-authorizing and derived. For Derrida these paradoxes raise the modern problem of shared or limited sovereignty, but as Lezra shows, in the late sixteenth century “the aporetic of divisible sovereignty” finds expression in a set of overdetermined cultural moments—in a particularly vexed set of lines in Shakespeare’s *Richard III*, in early modern interpretations of the Book of Daniel, and in writings by the Catholic exile, Robert Persons, as he tries to imagine Elizabeth caught between her Catholic and Protestant past.

Catherine Winiarski’s essay, “Idolatry, Adultery, and the Subject of Monotheism,” is an exegetical, literary, and philosophical analysis of the coupling of monotheism and monogamy, doubled and inverted in the coupling of idolatry and adultery. She works first with the Decalogue, which correlates the commandment against idols on the first, ritual tablet with the prohibition against adultery on the second, ethical tablet. She then moves to key rereadings of marriage, adultery, and divorce in the Gospels, St. Paul, and

Augustine, arguing that Christianity postulates something like a form of sacred adultery in its new attitude towards the stranger and intermarriage. Winiarski's larger aim is to establish a key set of forms and figures that regulate the divisions and passages within Christianity as well as between Christians and non-Christians, and between religion and literature.

In "Making Edmund Campion: Treason, Martyrdom, and the Structure of Transcendence," Alice Dailey shows how the prosecution of the Jesuit Edmund Campion under secular treason laws served to prevent Campion's recourse to Christian martyrology. Shifting the conflict between Catholics and Protestants from theological to secular grounds, the strategy first tested in the trial of Campion would culminate in the Oath of Allegiance instituted under James I in 1606, which required all Catholics to declare their allegiance to the king and to renounce any right to depose him on religious grounds. Substituting the jewels of martyrdom with the marks of treason effectively cast Catholic dissidents as conspiratorial criminals rather than either saints or citizens. Using legal history in concert with the formal features of saints' lives, Dailey meticulously charts a fundamental contest and transfer between theological and political authority that demonstrates their codependence in this period.

In his essay, "Is it God or the Sovereign Exception?": Giorgio Agamben's *Homo Sacer* and Shakespeare's *King John*," Ken Jackson establishes the relevance of Agamben's rereading of Schmitt for Renaissance studies. In the first half of the essay, he sets up Agamben's intervention in theories of emergency, arguing that the primal appropriation and exclusion of "bare life" logically and historically antedates the division of sovereignty into sacred and profane bodies. The juridical formation of sovereignty precedes medieval political theology, as its legal ground, rather than succeeds it as its secular transvaluation. Jackson then shows the relevance of pre-modern, early modern, and contemporary accounts of sovereignty to the crises of kingship suffered in *King John*, a play that begins to transfer sovereignty from the physical body of the monarch to the multitude of citizens identified with the nation through the fact of their *natio* or birth.

In "Christall Mirrors': Analogy and Onto-Theology in Shakespeare and Francisco Suárez," Philip Lorenz, like Jackson, links Shakespeare and political theology. Like Dailey and Rust, Lorenz invites us to think the Catholic question in a Counter-Reformation and Baroque rather than medieval/archaic frame, and to do so through a substantial and fascinating body of texts that penetrates into Reformation England via the problem of recusancy. Francisco Suarez's *Metaphysical Disputations* were published in 1597, the same year that *Richard II* was entered into the Stationer's Register. The two texts share sacred tropes of sovereignty, yet exist on two sides of

the Reformation divide. Through the case of Suarez, Lorenz looks for deep structures of analogy, metaphor, and resistance that link the English and Spanish Baroque, while also attending to the coercive character of religious conflict and affiliation in this period.

Ineke Murakami's essay, "The 'bond and privilege of nature' in *Coriolanus*" examines natural law as the political and theological link by which Shakespeare binds citizen and sovereign. As with Lezra and Jackson, Murakami's argument is influenced by Agamben's reading of Schmitt. Murakami begins by focusing on tropes of beastliness and nature in *Coriolanus*, arguing that the play discloses a level of creaturely existence that she associates with Agamben's analysis of "bare life." For Murakami, Coriolanus is an exemplary instance of "homo sacer," or the sacred man whose sacrifice brings citizenship into being. Murakami then turns to figures of domesticity and maternity in order to show how these deform and put into crisis what she calls the biopolitics of citizenship.

Jennifer Rust's essay, "Image of Idolatryes': Iconotropy and the Theopolitical Body in *The Faerie Queene*," addresses scenes of idolatry and iconoclasm in Una's odd sojourn among the satyrs, which she associates with both Irish-Catholic and Jewish forms of theological deviance in the Protestant imaginary. Like Dailey and Lorenz, Jennifer Rust pursues the afterlives of Catholicism in Reformation England. Like Winiarski, Rust is concerned with the politics of the image and the psychic legacies of iconoclasm. Rust demonstrates how forms of Catholic image-production reenter the Protestant public sphere during the period of Shakespeare, Spenser, and Sidney in order to re-sacralize, but from a distance, both the vertical spaces of majesty and the horizontal precincts of community and commonwealth. By insisting on what she calls the theo-political *body*, like Murakami, Rust brings forward questions of sexuality, gender, and lived corporeality that have not been central to political theology from Spinoza through Schmitt and Benjamin.

In "Golden Muse: Protestantism, Mercantilism, and the Uses of Ovid in Marlowe's *Hero and Leander*," Aaron Kitch visits the Elizabethan poetic scene examined by Rust. Whereas Rust emphasizes the iconotropic recycling of Catholic imagery within mainstream Protestant poetics, Kitch argues for more radical, "nonconformist" Protestant elements in the renovation of Ovidian poetry advanced by Sidney, Marlowe, Golding and others. The new mythopoesis, Kitch argues, manages to marry humanist aesthetics with the Protestant personalization of divinity, and it does so, moreover, through a nascent mercantilist discourse that takes money not simply as a sign of materialist idolatry, but rather as a system of abstract signification that resembles the literary itself.

Matthew Biberman's "Three Folds: Searching for Milton's *Paradise Lost* between Moses, Lacan, and Derrida" sets up *three folds* in Western thought. The term "fold," borrowed from Deleuze's work on the Baroque, maps the shared surfaces and reversible fabric of temporal periods as well as perceptual phenomena. The first fold in Biberman's account is Judaism, while the third fold is psychoanalysis and the forms of thought it has spawned; the middle fold, Biberman argues, is Christianity, as represented by the Baroque poetry and prophesy of Milton. In addition to *Paradise Lost*, the key text throughout Biberman's analysis is the Decalogue, itself divided or folded between two tablets whose ritual and ethical commandments establish a dynamic typology of subjective and historical possibilities for the West. As such, this essay reaches back to the exegetical architecture sketched by Winiarski, but deploys it on the very different plane of contemporary critical theory and its Miltonic yearnings.

In "Imagining Baroque Ethics: John Evelyn and the Case of the Stigmatic 'Working Wench,'" Lowell Gallagher, like Biberman, uses Deleuze's account of the Baroque fold in order to re-approach the varieties of religious experience at the end of the Renaissance. Gallagher's interests and procedures, however, are inductive rather than deductive, micro- rather than macroscopic. Gallagher recaptures a moment documented in John Evelyn's diary: the stigmata manifested on the skin of a servant girl in a neighboring home. Gallagher probes the phenomenological aptitudes of Evelyn's account, his "vagabond eye" indiscriminately attentive to both the quotidian and the strange. Gallagher associates Evelyn's forms of attention with the Baroque's interest in manifestation, in the making-appear of phenomena without reference to an underlying structure. Saintliness and citizenship converge in Gallagher's analysis of Evelyn's diary in so far as the experience of transcendence appears in and as the folds and wrinkles of everyday life.

The cover

The cover image of our volume is Dürer's drawing of the imperial crown worn by the Habsburgs. Beginning in 1424, the crown was housed one night a year in the Treasure Chamber of the Schopper House in Nuremberg, where it was brought out for public display on the Friday after Easter (Strauss 3:1216). The drawing of the crown served as a preparatory study for Dürer's oil portrait of Charlemagne for the Treasure Chamber, an idealized portrait that derives its iconographic energy from representations of God. The imperial crown is a classic icon of political theology: the

cross, proudly erected like a kind of steeple front and center, is flanked by small inscribed plates, one sporting an image of Christ and his saints with the insignia, "*Per me reges regnant* [through me kings reign, Prov 8:15]," a beloved maxim of political theology; and the other featuring King Solomon, figure of Old Testament wisdom and kingship. The design of the crown encloses a whole typology of epochs and jurisdictions, the emperor himself receiving the ornament from the Pope in order to assume command of an empire both "holy" and "Roman." Remarking on the Emperor's special relationship to papal authority in the medieval period, Carl Schmitt notes that the emperor's office involved "the elevation of a crown—not a vertical intensification—not a Kingdom over Kings, not a Crown of Crowns, not a prolongation of the monarch's power, not even, as was the case later, a bit of dynastic power—but a commission that stemmed from a completely different sphere than did the dignity of the monarchy" (*Nomos* 62). The Holy Roman Emperor, Schmitt argues, did not rule at the top of a hierarchical flow chart conceived as a series of nested jurisdictions; instead, his authority emanated from a source of authority completely different from that of Europe's princes. The synapses of mission and message that periodically connected Emperor and Pope in the medieval period—through crusade and coronation, for example—constitute a distinct reservoir of political theology in Schmitt's account.

Dürer's portrait of Charlemagne was commissioned not by the Emperor, but by Nuremberg's city council. Nuremberg, as a free imperial city, was the unofficial capital of the Holy Roman Empire; although it answered to the Emperor, he was rarely present, and the city council ruled largely without him. In Nuremberg we witness a self-regulating civic body, dislodged from any national allegiance by virtue of its juridical location beneath the penumbra of imperial authority. Whereas in the oil portrait, the crown sits securely on the head of Charlemagne, in the drawing, the crown rests alone, derealized from any markers of scale, its simple lines and water color washes lending it a sense of transparency and openness. When we first happened upon the drawing, we were struck by its architectural character: the gems are framed like little windows, the plates hang low like doors, and the whole thing is domed and bejeweled like an Emerald City gone multi-color. Although the cross marks the main entrance and axis of this space of sovereignty, the series of arched facets suggest multiple modes of accessing the guarded interior of the crown, evoking the civic, juridical, and confessional portals tested and contested during the political and religious struggles of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The essays in this volume venture into these openings, advancing a series of undertakings both conceptual-generic and phenomenological-historical into the clearing hedged about by theo-

logical, sovereign, legal, and public discourses in the early modern period. The volume as a whole aims to use the motifs of political theology—the iconographies and typologies of sovereignty, sanctity, and citizenship—in order to orient the study of religion and Renaissance literature historically, but without going the way of historicism.

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