Document généré le 23 avr. 2024 15:36

Laval théologique et philosophique

Political Theory and political Theology

James V. Schall

Volume 31, numéro 1, 1975

URI : https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1020453ar
DOI : https://doi.org/10.7202/1020453ar

Aller au sommaire du numéro

Éditeur(s)

Laval théologique et philosophique, Université Laval

ISSN

0023-9054 (imprimé)
1703-8804 (numérique)

Découvrir la revue

Citer cet article

Schall, J. V. (1975). Political Theory and political Theology. *Laval théologique et philosophique*, *31*(1), 25–48. https://doi.org/10.7202/1020453ar

Tous droits réservés © Laval théologique et philosophique, Université Laval, 1975

Ce document est protégé par la loi sur le droit d'auteur. L'utilisation des services d'Érudit (y compris la reproduction) est assujettie à sa politique d'utilisation que vous pouvez consulter en ligne.

https://apropos.erudit.org/fr/usagers/politique-dutilisation/

Cet article est diffusé et préservé par Érudit.

Érudit est un consortium interuniversitaire sans but lucratif composé de l'Université de Montréal, l'Université Laval et l'Université du Québec à Montréal. Il a pour mission la promotion et la valorisation de la recherche.

https://www.erudit.org/fr/

POLITICAL THEORY AND POLITICAL THEOLOGY

James V. SCHALL

I. THE STATEMENT OF CLASSICAL POLITICAL THEORY

IN a well-known essay, Professor Leo Strauss noted that the characteristic of classical political theory was that "it is free from all fanaticism because it knows that evil cannot be eradicated and therefore that one's expectations from politics must be moderate. The spirit which animates it may be described as serenity or sublime sobriety." [1] This appreciation of the abidingness of evil as a practical reality does not, however, obviate the task of political theory to inquire about the good and the kind of regime in which it can appear in its most positive form. Moderation in expectation, then, has theoretical justifications. This is doubly so because the best possible regime of perfect order and justice runs into conflict both with the human condition and with the curiously open nature of man's speculative powers. "The peculiar manner of being of the best regime — namely, its lacking actuality while being superior to all actual regimes — has its ultimate reason in the dual nature of man, in the fact that he is the in-between being existing between the life of brutes and that of the gods." [2] Built into classical political theory, then, is a suppressed conflict, as it were, a tension between the best men can do with their public order given the presence of an inevitable degree of evil among them and the desire for an order in which these tendencies towards corruption are eliminated. For this reason too, as Eric Voegelin has remarked, the problem of the divine and the contemplative stands at the heart of political thought.[3]

Thomas Aquinas, likewise, held that there were two communities to which men were ordered. The human law was directed to the mortal community while the divine law fashioned men into "a certain community or republic of men under God." [4] The

1. Leo STRAUSS, "What Is Political Philosophy?" *Journal of Politics*, # 3, 1957, Reprinted in *Contemporary Political Thought*, J. Gould, ed., New York, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969, pp. 58-59.

2. STRAUSS, p. 64.

3. Cf. E. VOEGELIN, "Was Ist Politische Realität?" *Anamnesis*, München, Piper, 1966, pp. 287-288.

4. "... Sicut praecepta legis humanae ordinant hominem ad quandam communitatem humanam, ita praecepta legis divinae ordinant hominem ad quandam communitatem seu rempublicam hominum sub Deo." *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, 100, 5.

human law had a radically different purpose from the divine law, even though they were connected teleologically. The end of the human law is the temporal tranquillity of the city, to which goal the law achieves its purpose sufficiently by prohibiting exterior acts insofar as such acts can disturb the peaceful status of the community. The purpose of the divine law, on the other hand, is to lead men to eternal happiness.[5] These two communities were not unrelated, of course, but they were certainly not the same thing. For Aquinas, the duality in man was the basis for an invitation to a community into which man could not properly enter of his own accord.[6] Thus the efforts to achieve the essential effects or conditions of the divine republic through the earthly peace were not only impossible of achievement but blasphemous. Politics, then, retained its moderation for an even more profound reason than man's ontological status between the gods and the beasts. The invitation to man to share the inner life of God — the essence of the Christian doctrine — transcended any political possibility.

Can this conclusion of classical political theory be overcome? That is, are these two "common goods" forever to remain separate both in theory and in practice? The "moderation" of classical theory was designed precisely to prevent man's ultimate metaphysical and religious desires from seeking a political expression. "Hubris," pride, was the belief that the two endeavors were not necessarily as separate as classical and Christian theory had implied — or, at least, this was the view of classical thought itself. The result of this is, then, as no less an authority than Lemuel Gulliver had written in the introductory letter to his justly famous travels, that we cannot expect to remove the evils of mankind without changing the very structure of man himself so that we must to some degree live with them.

> ... Yahoo, as I am, it is well-known through all Houyhnmland, that by the Instructions and Example of my illustrious Master, I was able in the Compass of two years (although I confess with the utmost difficulty) to remove that infernal Habit of Lying, Shuffling, Deceiving, and Equivocating, so deeply rooted in the soul of all my Species; especially the Europeans... I must freely confess, that since my last Return, some corruptions of my Yahoo Nature have revived in me by conversing with a few of your Species, and particularly those of mine own Family, by an unavoidable Necessity; else I should never have attempted so absurd a Project as that of reforming the Yahoo Race in this Kingdom; but, I have now done with all visionary Schemes forever.[7]

In other words, the scheme to change radically the nature of man is not only "visionary" but destroys the very wonder and freedom of the men who do exist — liars, shufflers, deceivers, and equivocators that they surely are. Any political theory which refuses to accept this is, by definition, an anti-classical theory. The theories of the good life, the best regime, and the good citizen of classical theory arose out of this context. This is why the instruments of positive improvement for classical theory were

5. "Legis enim humanae finis est temporalis tranquilitas civitatis, ad quem fines pervenit lex cohibendo exteriores actus, quantum ad illa mala quae possunt perturbare pacificum statum civitatis. Finis autem legis divinae est perducere hominem ad finem felicitatis aeternae; qui quidem finis impeditur per quodcumque peccatum, et non solum per actus exteriores, sed etiam per interiores." I-II, 98, 1.

6. I-II, 109, 2.

7. Jonathan SWIFT, *Gulliver's Travels*, R. Quintana, ed., New York, Modern Library, 1955, p. xxiv.

always virtue and persuasion, even though, for the same reason, the state necessarily had coercive powers.

II. THE HOLY AND THE POLITICAL

The fundamental unresolved question in the history of political thought, however, is that of the spiritual perfection of the public order in this world as such. Augustinian political thought, in one sense, deprived the political order of its aura of sanctity and goodness except insofar as it might be an instrument of providence.[8] But Augustinian theory did not for a minute forget the question of the City of God. That is, men were called to be holy and to be holy in community and in communion. Augustine was not loath, then, to call that blessed life about God a "city." What he explicitly denied was that the earthly political order ever could be the proper instrument of man's ultimate destiny. In this sense, Augustine is a classical political thinker.

If there is one thing clear about political history, however, it is that this question of a holy public order will not disappear. Metaphysics and religion have long recognized that man's ultimate happiness is an unavoidable problem. Consequently, one of the central themes of political thought has certainly been the effort to maintain a legitimacy for the political as such in relation to philosophy and religion without, at the same time, eliminating completely a noble and ethical vision of man as a public desideratum and consideration. Even in such extremes as Hobbes, the very structure of his politics is to grant such minimal peace as the brutish and short life of man would allow. The widespread appearance of "political theology" in ecclesiastical circles recently, together with an evident and radical dissatisfaction with the overly pragmatic and purely descriptive or value-free standards prevalent in most academic political theory, are signs that this problem of the spiritual of the public order requires fresh consideration.

We are not used to a phrase such as "a holy politics" or "a moral polity." Indeed, for anyone at all familiar with the evolution of political thought, they incite rather unpleasant memories of perhaps Byzantium or Bossuet, or even of the armies of Islam. "To understand Byzantine history," Steven Runciman noted,

---

8. "By the state, remember, St. Augustine does not mean any given city or kingdom. When he speaks of the *civitas terrena*, the city of the earth, which he also calls the *civitas diaboli*, the diabolical city, he means all who through all the centuries have striven for the sort of goods I have described. It began in Adam's time, with the first fratricide, Cain, and continues through the time of Remus and Romulus, the reconstituted fratricide, down to the present. All of these people who strive for self-satisfaction in this way, as they are grouped in different states, under different rulers, constitute the city of the devil. God in His mercy has given them... this utilitarian suggestion or insight : give up that boundless lust for wealth, come to terms ; take a little, let others have a little ; otherwise nobody will have anything — you will all be dead. And when men, following this utilitarian suggestion, agree to give up their absolute lust, to accept a share of the common good, and to punish those who exceed their shares, we call the result a state — an association dictated by utility for the purpose of enabling a group of people to enjoy, without destroying one another, whatever goods they like best. Some people will like one thing and some will like another. We will have, therefore, a hierarchy of states, some not as bad as others, yet all corrupt to some degree, for the original sin contaminates them all. Whatever it may be that they want, it is still self-seeking that moves them to form a political community, the self-seeking that Augustine calls *cupiditas*." Dino BIGONGIARI, "The Political Ideas of St. Augustine," *The Political Writings of St. Augustine*, H. Paolucci, ed., Chicago, Regnery-Gateway, 1962, Appendix, pp. 349-350.

> it is essential to remember the unimportance of this world to the Byzantine. Christianity triumphed in a disillusioned age because it promised a better world to come and provided a mystic escape from the world here and now. But the right eternal bliss, the right ecstasies, could only be won by treading the path of perfect orthodoxy.[9]

A more dynamic, worldly version of this drive has become historically ever more to the fore. For the early American Protestants, for example, ecstatic bliss was not enough. "Upon that expression in Sacred Scripture, *cast the unprofitable servant into Outer Darkness*," Cotton Mather wrote in *The Magnalia Christi Americana* (1703),

> it hath been imagined by some, that the *Regiones Externae* of America, are the *Tenebrae Exteriores*, which the unprofitable are there condemned to. No doubt, the authors of these *Ecclesiastical Impositioins and Severities*, which drove the English Christians into the Dark Regions of America, esteemed these Christians to be a very unprofitable sort of creature. But behold, ye European Churches, there are Golden Candlesticks in the midst of this *Outer Darkness*; unto the upright children of Abraham, here hath risen Light in Darkness.[10]

Already, even in the religious sphere, the Dark Night is being transformed into the Golden Candlestick. The Kingdom of God is beginning to take worldly shape.[11]

However paradoxical it may sound, then, during the last decades of the Twentieth Century, partly because of the poverty of the Third World, partly because of an inner dissatisfaction in more settled societies, there is again a widespread search for a political solution to our spiritual problems, an uneasy belief that a politics that does not also meet man's deeper aspirations must fail. Conversely, a theology which does not have tangible political effects is likewise sterile:

> The transcendence of the faith, especially if it lives under the mode of incarnation, does not only give to theology the possibility of criticizing all these things in political opinions and movements which are opposed to Truth and Charity, preventing, thereby, every absolutism; it also gives to it the possibility of finding a way to discover *the line through which the concrete call of the love of the brethren passes historically*. It gives it the power of advancing gradually, in fear and trembling, step by step, in assuming the risk of discernment and of corresponding engagement, which consists in placing oneself at the service of the brothers. In this manner... will it be historical and practical. For the *theos* of which the *logos* speaks (insofar as it is theology) is the God of history, and the word (*logos*) which it articulates is the word of God made flesh, who gives his life to free the brothers.[12]

What the Byzantines found in mystery and the early Puritans in the Wilderness has now become the concrete political enterprise of the spiritual in this world.

---

9. Steven RUNCIMAN, *Byzantine Civilization*, New York, Meridian, 1956, p. 87.

10. In *Colonial American Writing*, R. N. Pearce, ed., New York, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1962, pp. 138-139.

11. Cf. Carl L. BECKER, *The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth Century Philosophers*, Yale Paperback, 1957; J. B. BURY, *The Idea of Progress*, New York, Dover, 1955; Sydney E. AHLSTROM, "The American National Faith," *Religion and the Humanizing of Man*, J. Robinson, ed., Los Angeles, The Council on the Study of Religion, 1972, pp. 87–100; Will HERBERG, "America's Civil Religion," *The Modern Age*, Summer, 1973, pp. 226–233.

12. Juan-Carlos SCANNONE, "La théologie de la libération en Amérique Latine," *Christus*, Paris, juin, 1972, p. 346. (Author's translations unless indicated.)

The economic and cultural disorder in the world are ever more seen to be the result of theories and practices that refuse to account for man's spiritual aspirations.[13] And, it should be noted in this connection, many materialist political movements, beginning with marxism itself, are "spiritual" in the sense that they base themselves upon a hatred of public evil with a promise to establish complete justice for man by removing all evils.[14] What is now desired and believed to be possible is a *politics* that answers concretely man's most fundamental aspirations. Gone is the sense of moderation as well as the distinction between the two communities. We refuse to be Yahoos because we can find "the line through which the concrete call of the love of the brethren passes historically."

What is new in all of this is the transformation of politics into an aspect of eschatology.[15] The specifically "Christian" element in this approach becomes obvious because of the tradition of Caesar and God.[16] "My Kingdom is not of this world" has tended to separate the question of man's ultimate happiness from his political condition, which, to be sure, was seen also as a search for a kind of happiness.[17] Indeed, the two tendencies were seen largely to be in conflict. Yet, there has been an abiding effort to reunite these two strands into one. "History reveals two great movements, always interlocked yet essentially independent of one another," Sir Harold Mattingly wrote,

> the movements of states and of peoples, in which the individual plays a humble and subordinate part; and the development of the individual soul, which, strong in its own freedom, need care little for political rise and fall, for *res Romanas perituraque regna*, "the might of Rome and kingdoms doomed to die." Hitherto it is in the first of these movements that the strength of paganism has been seen,

---

13. "It becomes obvious why Christians and secular men who speak the language of political humanism find themselves so often side by side. They participate in a fundamental refusal to be absorbed by systems that require adaptation to given structures. They both deny the legitimacy of all structures — either structures that claim to be based in nature, or structures that claim to represent transcendent eternal values, or structures that claim to represent the truth of technological efficiency — as the determining and final context for man's action. With their common passion for, and vision of, human deliverance, they agree that integration in systems is a form of domestication that trades security for freedom, goods for a critical consciousness, a full stomach for man's vision of a new tomorrow. The problem of humanization cannot be thus equated with economy or economic development (the great temptation of the poor nations of the world !) Humanization is not the gift either of the gods of futility or of their resurrected form today, the gods of technology. Both agree that man does not live by bread alone. The fundamental issue at stake is whether man is free to create his own future, to break away from all the domesticating systems that strive to preserve the old and recurrent, in order to march toward a new tomorrow." Ruben A. ALVES, *A Theology of Human Hope*, Washington, Corpus Books, 1969, p. 83. Cf. J. MOLTMANN, *Theology of Hope*, J. Leitch, trans., New York, Harper, 1965.

14. Cf. MARX's, "Excerpt from Toward the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right," in *Marx & Engels, Basic Writings on Politics and Philosophy*, L. Feuer, ed., Doubleday Anchor, 1959, pp. 262–266.

15. Cf. J. METZ, "An Eschatological View of the Church and the World," *Theology of the World*, W. Glen-Doepel, trans., New York, Herder and Herder, pp. 81–100; Carl E. BRAATEN, "Toward a Theology of Hope," *New Theology*, # 5, M. Marty, ed., New York, Macmillan, 1968, pp. 90–110.

16. Cf. O. CULLMANN, *The State in the New Testament*, New York, Scribner's, 1956; *Jesus and the Revolutionaries*, New York, Harper's, 1970.

17. The contrast between the more recent forms of political theology and the pre-conciliar discussions on religious liberty and the necessity of religion to grant an autonomy to the state can nowhere become more graphic than by a rereading of John Courtney Murray's *We Hold These Truths*, Sheed and Ward, 1960.

> the strength of Christianity in the second. Whether the quickening of Christianity is ever to work in the life of groups and societies, as it has worked in the lives of individuals, may be doubted. Perhaps it is always to be a leaven, slowly leavening the lump of societies that, collectively regarded, are still pagan. Perhaps the attempt to evangelize the state in any deep sense must fail, but one is sometimes inclined to doubt whether the attempt has ever yet seriously been made.[18]

Precisely this suspicion that the attempt has not yet been seriously made is what is becoming the driving force behind political theology. Conversely, recognition that the individual's corporate life needs moral texture and spiritual depth sends all recent radical and socialist movements in search of quasi-religious justification.[19]

III. FROM CLASSICAL TO MODERN POLITICAL THEORY

The most famous book in all political theory proposed that the virtue of man as man is justice. Political thought is the search for justice. This same book, moreover, maintained that justice among mortals could not be found among men and their existing institutions. The task of politics was to allow the good man to discover and contemplate the good in itself. The irony of this vision, once achieved, is that it proved to be all-absorbing, all-consuming so that the effort to entice the good man back into the affairs of ordering the city was no simple one. None the less, only if this contemplating man did return to structure the city on the model of the transcendent good could every other man receive his due share of happiness and justice. The weak and the small were, thus, dependent on the perfect, while the perfect must first discover what is beyond them.

Political philosophy, then, began with the belief that the pursuit of justice, the essential task of politics, required the absolute good, which was not itself directly political. And without justice, no state could rest. The cycle of deterioration in the Eighth and Ninth Books of *The Republic* was witness to the political turmoil caused by the lack of the Good. In other words, politics is the reflection of contemplation. Without its overflow, as it were, no state could save itself.

If there is anything common to the political thought of the generations from Aristotle to the behaviorists, it is that politics and speculative metaphysics or religion are not the same things. *The Book of the Metaphysics* was not *The Book of the Politics*. As we have suggested, there was a tension and a dichotomy between what belonged to Caesar and what belonged to God. For the post-Aristotelian philosophers, to be sure, individual perfection and consolation could not be discovered in the city, as Aristotle had held, but rather through withdrawing from the city and politics. The locus of self-sufficiency shifted to the individual within a world reason and a world

---

18. Harold MATTINGLY, *Man in the Roman Street*, New York, Norton, 1966, pp. 155-156.
19. Dean M. Kelley argues, on the other hand, that the failure of the so-called traditional Protestant churches along with, more recently, the Roman Catholic Church to provide an abiding context of religious worship and meaning has caused them to decline, while the more conservative and sect type churches which retain a very strict code and belief are growing. Cf. *Why Conservative Churches Are Growing*, New York, Harper, 1972.

empire. Even the Stoics were enamored with a politics of the vaguest and most abstract kind. Their *humanitas*, reason, and law were anti-political in this sense.[20]

Augustine, at the Empire's end, managed to formulate the political enterprise so that man's contemplative drives were proper to the City of God. The politics of this world were provisional, intrinsically fleeting, the coming to terms with man's darker drives and ambitions in the most expedient and workable terms. But in no case did politics define man's true home or his highest activity. Indeed, the very attempt to establish a City of God on earth was the ultimate delusion, for it offered man something infinitely less than that to which he had been called.[21]

The freeing of politics from the immediate directive control of the contemplative or divine was, in any case, the greatest of achievements. Christianity was vital to the very structure of classical political thought because it was able to give a reason why politics, the proper science of man *as man* in Aristotle's schema, did not have to be concerned directly with man's highest destiny or virtue.[22] Resurrection and the Kingdom of God suggested both that man's deepest personal desires would be fulfilled — the sting of death was not absolutely defeating — and that politics could, consequently, pursue a temporal good in a human, finite fashion. When Aristotle said that politics was not concerned with making man to live, but *to live well*, he implied that political theory was limited by what man already was and that this "limitation" was a norm and a freedom. Otherwise, the task of politics would become directly metaphysical. That is, it would endeavor to bring forth man *qua* man upon the assumption that no historical or reflective experience of the human could yield any criterion about man's being.

Modern political theory began with Machiavelli. The essential premise of specifically "modern" theory was the speculative indifference to political means.[23] This indicated that the theoretical check on the scope of politics — the essentially metaphysical thesis that "the human" was already a given and thereby a limiting norm of what the state could do — was removed.[24] Modern theory, then, was a working out of the consequences of the denial of any higher judgment on politics other

---

20. Cf. Ernest CASSIRER, "Crisis of Man's Knowledge of Himself," *An Essay on Man*, Doubleday Anchor, 1946, pp. 15–40; C. N. R. MCCOY, *The Structure of Political Thought*, New York, McGraw-Hill, 1963, pp. 73–98; George SABINE, *A History of Political Theory*, New York, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1963, pp. 123–140.

21. Cf. C. DAWSON, two essays on Augustine in *St. Augustine*, M. D'Arcy, ed., New York, Meridian, 1957; Herbert A. DEANE, *The Political and Social Ideas of Saint Augustine*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1963, Chapters i and iv; R. NIEBUHR, "Augustine's Political Realism," *Perspectives on Political Philosophy*, J. Downton, ed., New York, Holt, 1971, pp. 243–257; J. EAST, "The Political Relevance of St. Augustine," *The Modern Age*, Spring, 1972, pp. 167–181.

22. Cf. MCCOY, p. 99 ff.

23. Cf. Warren WINIARSKI, "Niccolo Machiavelli," in *History of Political Philosophy*, L. Strauss, ed., Chicago, Rand McNally, 1963, pp. 247–276; MCCOY, pp. 147–186; J. R. HALE, "Machiavelli and the Self-Sufficient State," in *Political Ideas*, D. Thompson, ed., Baltimore, Penguin, 1966, pp. 22–33.

24. "Indeed the modern world has increasingly seen political activities as autonomous. Not only practically but also theoretically the acquiring, maintaining and exercise of power admitted every possible means. Politics was become a law unto itself. Injustice at the service of the political was committed not only without bad conscience, but even from a certain sense of 'duty.' Machiavelli was the first to express this independent 'morality' in the political realm..." R. GUARDINI, *The End of the Modern World*, J. Theman, trans., New York, Sheed and Ward, 1956, pp. 47-48.

than politics itself.[25] The absolute states of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were the empirical products of this belief, while the liberal and democratic states that succeed them from the French Revolution on had the common background of a rejection of contemplative norms. The "religious" and the "metaphysical" were thus deprived of their direct political function of providing the limits and the structures of the human conceived as something given by the order of nature and nature's God. Descartes' *Cogito* and Grotius' dictum — the natural law would be the natural law even on the supposition that God did not exist — set up the framework of modern theory according to which politics became the architectonic science whose task was to create man as a totally independent being under whose will and choice all things exist.[26]

But while this autonomous evolution in a Hobbes, Rousseau, or Hegel was itself a kind of inverted theology which purported to explain all reality by its own independent premises — Aristotle remarked that politics would be the highest science if man had nothing higher than himself — still the whole effort of modern speculative political thought, be it liberalism, much of conservatism, or socialism, was to account for all reality, or at least all that mattered, without the need of God or the spiritual understood in the classical or Christian sense. Politics was its own thing. The spiritual mattered only insofar as it became some kind of worldly power demanding public attention because of its unavoidable strength. Otherwise, it was wholly private. Consequently, the spiritual was either an aspect of the material as Marx would explain or else it belonged to a separate sphere autonomous to politics with no real influence on it. The significance of Marsilius of Padua at the origin of modern theory was undoubtedly his success in removing religion theoretically from the public order as a factor to be reckoned with. By completely depriving religion of "exterior acts" over which the public order had some control, as Aquinas had held, Marsilius removed religion from the catalogue of humanly meaningful things with some empirical effect in the world.[27]

IV. THE CONTEMPORARY REAPPEARANCE OF THE HOLY IN POLITICS

What is striking today is the reappearance in political form of the suppressed spiritual in a highly peculiar fashion, at least in regard to the history of political theory. Indeed, we are witnessing the end of "modern" political theory. We are coming to a new turning point in the history of political theory every bit as sharp as the ones inaugurated by Aristotle, the post-Aristotelians, Christianity, or Machiavel-

25. Cf. Leo STRAUSS, "Marsilius of Padua," *History of Political Philosophy*, pp. 227–246; Sabine, p. 287 ff.

26. Cf. the author's "Cartesianism and Political Theory," *The Review of Politics*, April, 1962.

27. "It is now that Aristotle's non-ecclesiastical or pre-ecclesiastical thought begins to show its full implications in the justification of a purely civil commonwealth, perhaps Roman but not Papal, and to show them by the pen of Marsiglio, citizen of the city-state of Padua, exponent of mixed imperial and city-state philosophy, almost Greek. The process now begins — while eviscerating the State of that ethical content with which Aristotle had endowed the Polis — of making for it all the ethical claims on the individual which the great Greeks presumed for their own intimate and cultural community." George CATLIN, *The Story of the Political Philosophers*, New York, Tudor, 1939, p. 181.

li.[28] To suggest that the essential content of this new turning point is that theology has suddenly become politics would be something of a rhetorical exaggeration if taken too literally. The fact is, however, more and more scholars, particularly those from the Third World, many Europeans, Protestants and Catholics alike, and not excluding several notable marxists such as Ernest Bloch and Roger Garaudy, are coming to accept that the one is the other, that theology is politics and politics theology.[29] For anyone familiar with the history of Christianity or of politics, this will surely seem a most perplexing turn of events, as we have earlier indicated. In any case, it has spelled the doom of so-called "modern" political theory. For this reason, it is no accident that the study of ancient heresis is, in a way, the best preparation for understanding the intellectual content of the political movements of recent times.[30]

"Theology as a reflection of faith," Dorothy Sölle recently told a famous gathering of theologians,

> has to comprehend the social situation of these who are injured and expose the social cause of their injuries. Theology has to become political theology, theology cannot afford to say out of hand to a man: "God loves you." Since every fact of reality is substantial, established by social process, such a sentence has to be actualized politically.[31]

That this also portends something of a revolution in theology goes without saying, for the medieval relation of theology to politics was always that theology was the queen of the sciences, the ultimate judge of the truly human, such that it provided a check on the aberrations of politics. Theology is now looking upon itself in a rather opposite fashion. It is a partisan advocate for political well-being. Theology tests its validity by

---

28. Cf. SABINE, p. 141 ff.

29. Cf. Wolfhart PANNENBERG, "The Church and the Eschatological Kingdom," in *Spirit, Faith, and Church*, Philadelphia, Westminster, 1970, p. 118 ff.

    "In the chaos in which we try to think out ways and means of hoisting ourselves on to the level of that phenomenal change that is taking place in this 20th century, I offer a few reflections on what non-Christians expect the Church to do in the field of public morality, and these reflections cane reduced basically to three precise demands:

    1) Recognition of the autonomy of human values in the fields of knowledge and action;
    2) The embracing of man's Promethean ambition for a continuous creation of the world and of man by man;
    3) A clear decision to enfranchise the word and reality of *socialism* as the condition for the unbounded development of all men and the whole of man.

    We are anxiously and hopefully waiting for this step to be taken because our common future depends on it. We do not ask any Christian to be less Christian but rather to be more fully Christian — that is, to contribute a Christian response to the problems of our time and in the spirit of our time. We are profoundly convinced of the fact that communism cannot fully succeed without integrating the best of the Christian contribution to the image of man." Roger GARAUDY, "What Does a Non-Christian Expect of the Church?" *Concilium*, # 35, New York, Paulist, 1968, pp. 44-45.

30. Cf. B. MONDIN, *L'Eresia del Nostro Secolo*, Torino, Borla, 1971; Paul GOODMAN, *The New Reformation*, New York, Random House, 1970; E. VOEGELIN, *The New Science of Politics*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1952, pp. 107–132; also the author's "From Politics to Enthusiasm, Some Reflections on Atheism, Heresy, and Sanity in the Waning Years of the Twentieth Century," *Homiletic and Pastoral Review*, October and November, 1971.

31. "The Role of Political Theology in Relation to the Liberation of Man," *Religion and the Humanizing of Man*, p. 132.

the criterion of political performance or, even more fundamentally, theology is claiming to be the vision which establishes the Kingdom politically.[32]

If theology, in its own methodology, has begun to turn to politics as a matrix discipline — for Aristotle, politics was architectonic over the practical but not over the speculative orders — recent political thought, for its part, has reached its own impass.[33] Current revolts against academic political theories in the name of social activism and concern are symptomatic of this deeper crisis affecting all scientific dsciplines.[34] Classical liberalism, socialism, personalism, and behaviorism have all failed in their own orders as intellectual constructs because of their human narrowness and failures to account for the spiritual hopes of man.[35] And this has not been any accidental failure but one lying at the heart of these theories. For they have all, in one way or another, failed to account for the public nature of the spiritual in the modern world.[36] What has happened, in other words, is that theology has suddenly rediscovered Plato's notion that the just man must return to the city, while political theory has been forced to recognize that it cannot escape from the good in its deepest dimensions as a criterion of its own viability.

---

32. Cf. *The Revolutionary Writings of Father Camilo Torres*, M. Zeitlin, ed., Harper Colophon, 1969; François FRANCOU, "Le Chili, le Socialisme et l'Église." *Cahiers de l'actualité religieuse et sociale*, 15 mars 1972, pp. 181–185; José RAMOS, *Quaderni di azione sociale*, Gennaio, 1971, pp. 31–46; A. ZENTENO, "Justicia: Denuncia-Annuncio-Compromiso en Medellin," *Christus*, Mexico, Julio, 1971, p. 39 ff.; Jose-María GONZALESp08-RUIZ, "The Public Character of the Christian Message and of Contemporary Society," *Concilium*, # 36, pp. 54–62; "Options politiques de l'église," *Lumière et Vie*, # 105, novembre-décembre, 1971; *What the Religious Revolutionaries Are Saying*, E. Smith, ed., Philadelphia, Fortress, 1971.

33. Cf. Edward McNALL BURNS, *Ideas in Conflict*, New York, Norton, 1960, pp. 543–565; James PETRAS, "Ideology and United States Political Scientists," *Apolitical Politics*, C. McCoy, ed., New York, Crowell, 1967, pp. 76–98; Lee Cameron McDONALD, *Western Political Theory*, New York, Harcourt, 1968, pp. 606–611.

34. Cf. Sanford LEVINSON, "On 'Teaching' Political 'Science'," *Power and Community*, P. Green, ed., New York, Vintage, 1970, pp. 59–84; Eugene RABINOWITCH, "The Student Rebellion: The Aimless Revolution," *The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, September, 1968.

35. Cf. Gilles MARTINET, "La Jeunesse Révolutionnaire et les Partis Communistes," *Le Monde Diplomatique*, avril, 1972, p. 13; Laszek KOLAKOWSKI, "The Concept of the Left," *The New Left Reader*, D. Oglesby, ed., New York, Grove, 1969, pp. 144–160.

"From the perspective of intellectual history, it is striking that the issue of development in its economic, social, and political guises arose to challenge the social scientists just at the time when we thought we had buried the presumably old-fashioned and innocent concept of progress. Although earlier social theorists had certainly given support to the notion of human progress and social evolution, modern social scientists have generally been somewhat embarassed by this popular Western and peculiarly American article of faith. With the rise of the dictators and the holocaust of World War II, the mood of social science was at best agnostic and skeptical to any suggestion about either the inevitability or even the desirability of progress. With this as a background, the social sciences were hardly ready to embrace enthusiastically the concept of 'development' as applied to the non-Western world." Lucian W. PYE, *Aspects of Political Development*, Boston, Little, Brown, 1966, p. 51.

36. Cf. Willi OELMÜLLER, "Ethics and Politics Today: Philosophical Foundations," *Concilium*, # 36, pp. 40–53.

Of essential importance in understanding the relation the issues of political theory, its terms and evolution, with the kinds of enthusiasm and values embraced in political theology is the discussion of Charles N. B. R. McCOY, "On the Revival of Classical Political Philosophy," *The Review of Politics*, April, 1973, pp. 161–179. It is also important to recognize that much of the current expansion of theology into politics has little awareness of the thoroughness with which this sort of a question has been treated in classical political theory.

What sparked this whole crisis both in theology and in political theory has been, it appears, the plight of the Third World together with the lot of the underprivileged in all societies along with the suppression of elementary human and civil dignities in the marxist-socialist systems.[37] This means, then, that the predominant political systems of the modern age have floundered by running into a radical impasse that can only be described as spiritual.[38] Even the most recent arrival on the horizon of political discussion — the ecological-conservative thesis — is itself suffused with a theoretical bias not only about the value and dignity of man but about any conception of the spiritual conceived in any terms but contented earthly life.[39] Whatever be its background, however, the "revolutionary" nature of recent times is motored by the insistence that a full, human, earthly, abundant life is both possible and available. Evil, political and moral evil, is now defined socially, not individually. That is, what prevents this full development or liberation, as it is now more often called, from happening immediately is the true evil and proper object of political and moral hatred whether it be individually conscious or not.[40] Guilt and innocence are more and more not personal things as in classical ethics but class or functional categories which depersonalize the individual.[41]

Theology has likewise read, in its turn, the statistics of the worldly lot of most humans today.[42] On this basis, and even in spite of a real growth of some degree everywhere in the world, what many have decided is that theology will be judged by its results in effecting worldly progress. The very structure of the ecclesiastical is to be that of protest, of hunting down evils and bravely, as it were, yelling about them.[43]

---

37. Cf. Michael HARRINGTON, *The Accidental Century*, Penguin, 1967, pp. 275–306; Richard SHAULL, "The New Challenge Before the Younger Churches," *Christianity and World Revolution*, E. Rian, ed., New York, Harper, 1963, pp. 190–208.

38. Cf. Herman KAHN, "Interview," *Intellectual Digest*, September, 1972, pp. 16–19.

39. Cf. the author's *Human Dignity and Human Numbers*, Alba House, 1971, Chapter I.

40. Cf. RAMOS, p. 35.

41. Cf. R. LAURENTIN, *Liberation, Development and Salvation*, C. Quinn, trans., Orbis, 1972; GONZALES-RUIZ, p. 56; Olov HARTMAN, "Development and Liberation," *Lutheran World*, # 2, 1973, pp. 133–140.

42. "The Church's mission is to be a sacrament, that is, an effective sign of salvation. If the construction of the just society is part of salvation history, the Church has her proper role to play in building this new order. This role can be described as a double function:
    1) Hermeneutic function: to interpret the signs of the times and orientate the purpose of human action so that it conforms with the plan of salvation.
    2) Critical function: to denounce absolutism and any deviation from the plan of salvation; the criterion will be her eschatological consciousness; to draw attention to the temporary nature of every historical situation... The Church is critical because she predicts the plan of salvation, as well as man's place and role in this plan." Jesus GARCIA GONZALEZ, "Development and/or Liberation," *Lumen Vitae*, Louvain, # 1, 1972, p. 26.

    "The socio-critical attitude of the Church cannot consist in the proclamation of one definite social order as the norm for our pluralistic society. It can only consist in that the Church operates its critical and liberating function in society and applies it to this society. The task of the Church is not a systematic social doctrine, but a social criticism." Johannes B. METZ, "The Church and 'Political Theology'," *Concilium*, # 36, p. 17.

43. An example of the overall flavor of much of this kind of thinking can be seen in the following "Manifesto" of a Mexican group called "Priests for the People":
    "As believers in Christ and heralds of the gospel, we radically oppose capitalism because:
    It protects the strategic power of the dominant class through an economy organized for profit, for individual gain, for excessive concentration of wealth.
    It looks on work as merchandise; it is an enslaving subordination of the worker, who is obliged by

Worldly progress, or revolution if necessary, is, however, dominated by hope and eschatology, by the belief that the Kingdom of God is quickly coming to all this world so that all injustices and disorders, those due to man and to nature, are overturned and revolutionized by its coming.[44] In this sense, theology believes it can offer both a better spiritual depth and a deeper moral zeal than any of the classic ideologies. Plato had asked, "*what* is justice?" He found his answer in the vision of an already perfect good. Today's question is rather, "*when* is justice?" Any answer in terms of after life, patience, or the abidingness of political evils and imperfections — such as both the classical and Christian traditions had assumed — is rejected as anti-human.

In this sense, then, the significance of the current direction of practically all political theology which holds as an essential dogma that sin is social sin or, better, structural sin becomes apparent. Original sin, indeed, is removed from its ancient context to become the complexus of worldly disorders that result in the lot of the poor — a word which begins to take on psychological as well as economic overtones. The poor you must *not* always have with you is the new law. Politics becomes the salvific instrument for removing this fundamental blight which is seen as the origin of all others. Socialism becomes a kind of dogma, not necessarily because it actually relieves the poor more effectively — it does not — but because it proposes in the abstract a more absolute, "holy" state. The separation of economics and politics, church and state — once considered the signs at least of political maturity — becomes social heresy. Thus utopia, the heavenly kingdom, the classless society — those historical substitutes for heaven where all wrongs will be righted and all desires fulfilled — are also redemptive in this world. That is, all human and natural disorders can be removed to leave, paraphrasing Lenin's famous dictum, precisely nothing "left to be done."

---

the system to sell his labor. The private ownership of the means of production that it defends inevitably divides society into oppressors and oppressed, and leads to the horrible system of domination of man by man.

Most of the population lives in grinding poverty, because there is no chance for a fair distribution of income. Prices are based not on production costs, but on what the market will bear.

Internationally, it brings about a dependence on imperialism that hamstrings the underdeveloped countries, which are more and more invaded by 'international' corporations.

With *Populorum Progressio*, we repudiate as opposed to the gospel the ideology that capitalism spawns, which is based on individualism, class greed, unqualified ownership of the resources that produce wealth — and which uses slogans like the defence of democracy, freedom, order, and legality.

By people we mean here the classes that are exploited and excluded from the enjoyment of ordinary consumer goods... We also include those individuals from various social positions who, though not belonging strictly to the people, nonetheless side with them in their struggle. Those who do not belong to the people are: the exploiters...

... As we see the socio-political reality, a new type of production is coming, one without exploitation or excessive wealth, and it will be the basis for a new society..." *IDOC*, North America, March, 1973, pp. 24-25.

44. Cf. Brian WICKER, *First the Political Kingdom*, University of Notre Dame Press.

"If action is the midwife of the future, then human activity can add the new to the world. It can indeed be an act of creation. God's grace, instead of making human creativity superfluous or impossible, is therefore the politics that make it possible and human. This is so because in the context of the politics of human liberation man encounters a God who remains open, who has not yet arrived, who is determined and helped by human activity. God needs man for the creation of his future." ALVES, p. 136.

V. THE STATEMENT OF POLITICAL THEOLOGY

The objection of political theology to political theory, then, is that a completely happy state of man *can* be accomplished soon so that the fulfillment of legitimate human aspirations can be put off neither to the great beyond after death nor to the great withering away of the state. Political theology claims, by right, to judge the economic performance of capitalism and the civil rights performance of marxism.[45] In short, no more generations can be sacrificed to bring about the millennium. *Politics is now conceived to be the art of the impossible.* This is why hope and eschatology are the form not of theology but of politics. Even the last things are subject to conquest.[46]

Everything, therefore, is being made anew. The "not yet" of Scripture is accomplished when the worldly political task is completed. Political theology does not formally deny the basic Christian thesis that "the times and the moments" for the coming are in God's hands.[47] What it does suggest, however, is that it is scepticism to maintain that they are not being fulfilled "now" in the restructuralization of the absolutely secularized order. The death of God is merely the reverse side of the Kingdom of God.[48] The traditional primacy of contemplation meant that God is supreme over every *now* and every nation. In fact, it meant that all historical beings are equally near to God whatever their earthly lot. Paul wrote to Timothy,

> First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all men, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life, godly and respectful in every way. This is good, and it is acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.[49]

The beggar and the tycoon, Dives and Lazarus, were, strictly speaking, equal in their chances before the divinity. Indeed, the beggar had somewhat the advantage. Furthermore, while there was a "history" of God's intervention in this world, the

---

45. "Reactionary governments in the Western World may once have considered Christianity their subservient ally against revolution. But today, when unpredictable change is a sort of predictable constant, there are some theologians who keep urging Christianity to abandon its role as the docile supporter and sanctifier of the status quo. They urge, instead, that it join forces with leftwing radicalism in the fight for a remade society. Thus a new movement, a theology of revolution, is moving within the orbit of Christendom. While not yet a homogeneous school, it holds that the chief function of Christianity is to spearhead radical change for the sake of freedom and justice." Vernon G. GROUNDS, *Revolution and the Christian Faith*, Philadelphia, Lippincott, 1971, p. 13. Cf. also Giuseppe VACCARI, *Teologia della Rivoluzinoe*, Milano, Feltrinelli, 1969; Hans-Jürgen PRIEN, "Liberation and Development in Latin America," *Lutheran World*, # 2, 1973, pp. 114–132.

46. Cf. Johannes METZ, "Creative Hope," *New Theology*, pp. 130–141.

47. *Acts*, I, 7.

48. Cf. Joseph COMBLIN, "Secularization: Myths and Real Issues, *Concilium*, # 47, pp. 121–133.
"From one point of view, the Christian now lives in the curse and judgment of existence in a Godless world. However, from another perspective, the very profane *Existenz* which our destiny has unveiled may yet prove to be a path to a universal form of faith. The very fact that our present is so detached from its past, from Christendom, with its corollary that an acceptance of the present demands a negation of Christendom, of the Christian God, can mean that the horizon of our present will open into a future epiphany of faith that will draw all things into itself." Thomas J. J. Altizer, "America and the Future of Theology," *Radical Theology and the Death of God*, T. Altizer, ed., Indianapolis, Bobbs-Merrill, 1966, p. 20.

49. 1 *Timothy*, 2, 1–4.

circumstances of the chronological time or era of one human life did not place it at a disadvantage over another life in the fundamental sense of acceptability before God. Neither the ancient Persians, the Han Chinese, the Teutonic Knights, the Franciscan friars, the Calvinists of Geneva, the armies of Napoleon, nor the companions of Lenin had an "unfair" advantage over one another.

For political theology, however, the nearness of the eschaton is rather a function of the accomplishment of the political task.[50] This is why there is so little patience or willingness to accept that the poor of the world and those subject to injustices are near to God whatever be their lot. The urgency for change and revolution on this score is the result of theological analysis.[51] Politics is thus a providence as well as a worldly enterprise.[52] Sin is social structure, not how we are to one another no matter what be our earthly lot.[53] Damnation is living in unjust societies. In this view, it would appear, what has disappeared from the world is precisely the finite, mortal, sinful man, the initial being around whom Aristotle had originally constructed a politics separate from but dependent upon metaphysics, about whom Christians believed was carried the substantial burden of reality — God loved sinners, God loved his creation.

Political theology, it seems, has gained the parousia but lost the wayfarers who are expected to inhabit it.[54] From a political point of view, the man who is the vibrant "stuff" of politics is again lost. This is doubly significant, for the fundamental importance of Christianity in political theory was precisely in freeing politics from the necessity of fulfilling by political means man's ultimate destiny and desires.[55] That political theology proposes to accomplish exactly this is the measure of its meaning in the history of political thought. We are at another turning point as significant as that of Machiavelli, who inaugurated "modern" political reflection by separating politics

---

50. "At the same time, as God gave man, through the interplay of cosmic evolution, intelligence, freedom, love, in one word, a soul, God also completely and fully gave an extension of his temporal destiny in a divine dimension. He called mankind to an age capable of gathering together in him, in a simultaneity of fulness, the totality of his fleeting existence. In short, he calls man and mankind to an everlasting fulfillment." LAURENTIN, p. 213. Cf. also J. B. METZ, *Concilium*, # 26, pp. 2–18.

51. "Insoluto è però rimasto il problema della violenza, che si è continuato a definire sostanzialmente non evangelica, ma senza affatto chiarire l'equivoco contenuto nel termine e che da tempo si vorrebbe chiarito, cioè se violenza delle istituzioni, contra la quale sarebbe quindi legittima e perfino doverosa una reazione di difesa, anche, al limite, di carattere violento." Gianpaolo SALVINI, "Il Sinodo e la Giustizia nel Mondo," *Aggiornamenti Sociali*, Milano, Febbraio, 1972, p. 95.

52. In the older notion, providence was a divine attribute which meant that it could not be simply political. The combination of providence with politics or the reading of politics through providence makes the divinity more controllable.

53. This is the real danger of identifying "sin" with social sin. For it means that the guilty are not any longer individual human beings who have done something wrong, but members of a class or group. This is the reappearance of a kind of corporate sin. Cf. again the reading of Footnote # 43 for an example of the way this mentality appears in popular literature. Cf. E. FEIL, "The Theology of Revolution: A Critique," *Theology Digest*, Autumn, 1971, pp. 220–224.

54. "Political theology preaches, celebrates, meditates, dialogues, demonstrates, protests, worships, confronts, listens, and looks. Its content is revolutionary, its methodology is multi-dimensional, its voice is the voice of protest... In short, the work of political theology is social change, and in the long run, radical social change." Joseph M. PETULLA, *Christian Political Theology: A Marxian Guide*, Orbis, 1972, pp. 30-31.

55. Cf. the author's "The Significance of Post-Aristotelian Thought in Political Theory," *Cithara*, November, 1963.

from the regulation by the speculative order of man's given being.[56] The subsequent history of modern political thought as a practical and theoretical working out of the consequences of this separation has come to the point where "the spiritual" reenters the secular as the all-consuming care of man.

As Jacques Ellul has recently noted,

> Moreover, instead of the consoling presence — that experience so much desired by religious people — man now experiences faith and religious conversion thanks to his participation in politics. What was lost by the church has been found by the parties, at least those worthy of the name. Faith in attainable ends, in the improvement of the social order, in the establishment of a just and peaceful system — by political means — is a most profound and undoubtedly new, characteristic of our society. Among the many basic definitions of man, two are joined together at this point: *homo politicus* is by his very nature *homo religiosus*.[57]

Thus the sudden interest by theology in politics is, in a real sense, a belated response to an evolution that had already taken place of its own accord and by the logic of its own premises within politics. Politics, which set out to cut itself off from the spiritual in the modern world, again has become spiritual.[58] This is why today the religious questions are seen to be essentially practical ones and why, as indicated earlier, political theory has become the locus of controversies once seen under the aspect of heresy and orthodoxy.[59] Consequently, theology recognized the need to reenter politics because it became brutally aware that the political controversies and struggles of the late twentieth century were, in truth, the continuation and sophistication of ancient disagreements about the nature of man and God.[60] Political theory, meanwhile, found itself at an impasse because the whole world was suddenly rejecting an academic theory that limited itself purely to material or methodological questions.

VI. THE ALTERNATIVES TO POLITICAL THEORY

In the *History of the Peloponnesian War*, Thucydides suggested that human nature is inclined to evil for the most part, that while it can also produce many fine and

---

56. "Machiavelli overturned the tradition of classical political thought; he effected a revolution from the dominion of Plato and Aristotle, who had taught men what they ought to do. Machiavelli teaches what men do — herein lies his revolution, our debt, and his triumph." WINIARSKI, p. 247.

57. Jacques ELLUL, *The Political Illusion*, K. Kellen, trans., New York, Vintage, 1972, p. 21.

58. "With the decline of religious faith the problem which the Prophet defined in the Bible, 'Wherefore doth the way of the wicked suffer?' received a new interpretation. Before, the question could be considered on the transcendental plane: one had the assurance that the account would be settled in the hereafter, in another place. Once religious belief was undermined, however, the evils and injustices of this life could no longer be regarded as merely temporary or temporal; therefore, they ceased to be tolerable, and men began to put their faith in the achievement of perfect justice and the settling of accounts in this world, not the next." J. L. TALMON, "Utopianism and Politics," *Utopia*, G. Kateb, ed., New York, Atherton, 1971, p. 94.

59. Cf. Friedrich HEER, *The Intellectual History of Europe*, J. Steinberg, trans., London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1966, pp. 1–25. Cf. also the author's "The Urgency and the Waiting," *World Justice*, Louvain, # 4, 1969-1970, pp. 435–459.

60. Cf. METZ, *Concilium*, p. 12.

noble things, its basic tendencies are somehow against its own best interests.[61] The revolution at Corcyra, the brutal treatment of Melos and Mytilene, the plague at Athens were all sobering reflections about what can be expected in man again and again. Whether the cycle of man's tragic inclinations can be broken in this world is, as we have remarked, the very core of political theory. Certainly with the slaughters of a Biafra, a Burundi, a Sudan, or a Bengladesh, a Vietnam, or an Indonesia, not to mention World Wars I and II, it would be rash to conclude that it has been so broken.[62] The theoretical discussion over linear and cyclical history, moreover, does not definitely mean that the "raw material" of human nature which Thucydides described so painfully is somehow bypassed, especially as an essential aspect of politics which must be accounted for within theory itself.

If this cycle cannot be definitively broken, then, politics consists in acute analysis of human instincts and historical trends.[63] Obviously, Thucydides himself thought men could progress and improve their lot even brilliantly, as Pericles' Funeral Oration revealed. Yet, in the end, defeat was possible, even for the best of men or the best of cities. His judgment of Nicias comes close to being his ultimate judgment upon what even the most noble can expect in this life. "For these reasons, or reasons very like them, he (Nicias) was killed, a man who, of all the Hellenes in my time, least deserved to come to so miserable an end, since the whole of his life had been devoted to the study and practice of virtue." [64] It is for such a reason, it seems, that Hannah Arendt wisely maintained that the realm of politics is that of natality, whereas metaphysics arises at the point of death and mortality.[65] That is, politics, whatever its intrinsic glory and value, itself is subject to realities it cannot confront. This is why, then, for classical theory, politics cannot be religious or metaphysical in its very depth.

The problem of contemporary political theory, however, lies precisely in the death of Nicias. Is it possible to produce a transformation of man and his social structures such that the Nicias of today — conceived now not as a classical politician but as the poor and the downtrodden masses — will not be possible? The challenge of political theology to classical political theory is that an affirmative answer to this unsettling question is working itself out in hope. Revolution is bringing forth a new man freed from the bonds of the Thucydidean past. Now the "new man" — whether he be seen in the light of the eschatological hope of the Christian radicals, or of the revolutionary vision of the socialists, or the biologically good man of the genetic engineers — defines his newness through the elimination of the dire elements of the human condition.[66] For Plato, Aristotle, and Thucydides, "revolution" was almost

61. "Then, with the ordinary conventions of civilized life thrown into confusion, human nature, always ready to offend even where laws exist, showed itself proudly in its true colours, as something incapable of controlling passion, insubordinate to the idea of justice, the enemy of anything superior to itself..." THUCYDIDES, *The Peloponnesian War*, R. Warner, trans., Penguin, Bk. 3, p. 211.

62. Cf. Samuel P. HUNTINGTON, "Political Order and Political Decay," *Political Order in Changing Societies*, New Haven, Yale University Press, pp. 1-92.

63. This was in fact what the methodology of Hobbes proposed at the origins of modern theory. It is no accident Hobbes was a translator of Thucydides.

64. THUCYDIDES, Bk. 7, Ch. 7, p. 486.

65. Hannah ARENDT, *The Human Condition*, Doubleday Anchor, 1959, p. 156 ff.

66. Cf. for example Herbert MARCUSE, *One-Dimensional Man*, Boston, Beacon, 1967.

always and inevitably a passage from a good to a less good or evil condition. For political theology, it is coming to be considered in exactly the opposite manner, as the catharsis or trauma giving birth to a new being.[67]

Generally speaking, there are three general styles of program offered to accomplish this task — economic and political revolution, genetic engineering, and technological progress.[68] What is important to remember is that these proposals are brought forth directly to answer the classic question of the good man.[69] All recognize some radical break with the past such that historical example or tradition is, in theory, irrelevant. To put it another way, the familiar human nature to which we can still instinctively respond in Thucydides, Aristotle, Sophocles, or Tacitus is no longer a reality in this world, or at least, should not be. That is, nothing can be concluded from man's accumulated experience or philosophical reflection on it.[70] This means that the criterion of what man is or should be must find another source independent of any normative "natural" or human order. The three dominant alternatives for this are 1) theology, which claims a non-natural source, 2) utopia, which discovers a freedom unhindered by any past, and 3) ecology, which makes a closed natural "ecosystem" the criterion of "the human." That each of these proposes a "non-political" norm in terms of classical or even Christian political thought means that the kind of "politics" we are experiencing in recent times is dominated by the search for the spiritual as a substitute for the limited kind of good life for mortal, sinful, finite man once assumed to be the substantial presupposition to all political thought.

VII. THE END OF IDEOLOGY

The contemporary point of contact between the "spiritualization" of politics and political theology lies in the curious results of the "decline of ideology" theory of a decade or so ago. The discovery of the Third World as a problem of political theory has been the instrument through which post-Machiavellian politics has been again introduced into the holy while the so-called "separation" of church and state — which

---

67. Cf. METZ, *Concilium*, p. 14.

68. Cf. for example, R. BUCKMINSTER FULLER, *Utopia or Oblivion*, New York, Bantam, 1969; R. L. SINSHEIMER, "Genetic Engineering, the Modification of Man," *Impact of Science on Society*, October–December, 1970, pp. 279–291; "Genetic Science and Man," *Theological Studies*, September, 1972; John MCHALE, *World Facts and Trends*, New York, Macmillan, 1972; *The New Revolutionaries*, T. Ali, ed., New York, Morrow, 1969.

69. "This article will first recapitulate a widely held skepticism about the criteria for the 'good man' who is the aim of eugenic policy." Joshua LEDERBERG, "Experimental Genetics and Human Evolution," in *Beyond Left and Right*, R. Kostelanetz, ed., New York, Morrow, 1968, p. 180.

"I am convinced that all sovereign nations and all political theories and realized political systems, class warfaring, and charity are obsolete because they were all invented as ways for special groups of organized humans to survive a little bit better under the fundamental working assumption that there did not exist and never would exist enough metabolic sustenance to permit more than a minority of humanity to survive and live out its potential lifespan of years." FULLER, p. 210; cf. also p. 178.

From the standpoint of political theory, these passages and similar ones are of great significance as they claim a solution for the problem of the good life not in either politics or theology but in biology or technology.

70. Cf. A. TOFFLER. *Future Shock*. Bantam, 1970.

Professor Sabine once oddly held to be the main contribution of Christianity to political theory — comes to be gradually dropped.[71]

> The modern effort to transform the world chiefly or solely through politics (as contrasted with religious transformation of the self) has meant that all other institutional ways of mobilizing emotional energy would necessarily atrophy. In effect, sect and church become party and social movement...
>
> Whether the intellectual in the West can find passions outside of politics is moot. Unfortunately, social reform does not have any unifying appeal, nor does it give a younger generation the outlet for "self-expression" and "self-definition" that it wants. The trajectory of enthusiasm has turned East, where, in the new ecstasies for economic utopia, the "future" is all that counts.[72]

Thus Daniel Bell summed up the direction of political thought in the 1960's.

Some ten years later, political thought seemed less concerned with East and West and more with North and South. The Bishops of Peru wrote, in a typical document:

> ... "Oppositions" are arising in the Christian community in favor of the oppressed; they are assuming their problems, their struggles and their aspirations. Many Christians see their commitment enlightened by a theology which, grounded in their faith, interprets the present state of affairs as a sinful situation and a negation of God's plan. This theological vision is urging them to commit themselves to the cause of liberation, in response to the Lord who calls up to build history. The church is thus discovering the inevitable political implications of its presence in the world; it is realizing that it cannot proclaim the gospel, in a situation of oppression, without stirring consciences by the message of Christ the Liberator. In the example of evangelical poverty, it sees the expression of the solidarity with the oppressed and the denunciation of a sin of that depressing consumer society which creates artificial needs and superfluous expenditures... "Justice," understood as holiness, the gift of God, is the foundation of social justice; but the latter is the necessary and irreplaceable pledge of the former.[73]

In reflecting on the differing contexts of these two statements of Bell and the South American bishops, we can see that the problem of a spiritual order which is both economically viable and morally holy is being grappled with. What is of interest is that the religious discovers its function just where the "decline of ideology" failed as a theory, namely, at the plight of the Third World.

During the 1950's, the famous debate on the decline of ideology was ignited by Professor Edward Shils speech, "The End of Ideology?", which he delivered at the Congress of Cultural Freedom in Milan.[74] According to this thesis, the western world was experiencing a lessening of ideological divisions between socialists and capitalists, between marxists and democrats, between religion and secular humanism because all modern social systems were discovering similar economic and political needs, procedures, and norms. Western democracies were, in fact, welfare states; communist countries were recognizing the need for a certain amount of profit as well as for some

---

71. Cf. SABINE, p. 141.

72. Daniel BELL, "The Passing of Fanaticism," in *The Decline of Ideology*, M. Rejai, Chicago, Aldine-Athenaeum, 1971, pp. 40, 44.

73. The Bishops of Peru, "Justice in the World," *Lumen Vitae*, # 1, 1972, p. 36. Cf. also the series in *Lumière et Vie*, entitled, "Ambiguïtés du Progrès, » # 111, janvier–mars, 1973.

74. *Encounter*, November, 1955.

internal civil liberties. Christians and marxists were beginning to wonder what they had in common.[75]

Since this economic development evident in all ideological systems in practice did distribute a greater volume of wealth more evenly, the argument ran, the result was an obvious yielding of rigid political and economic dogmas which only interfered with true progress if adhered to with any absolute rigidity. There was, therefore, considerable hope that the world could look forward beyond the economic and political cold war to a time of increasing amity and prosperity. Out of this spirit was eventually to arise economic development theories such as W. W. Rostow's *Stages of Economic Growth* or J. K. Galbraith's *New Industrial State*, which found all systems tending to an empirical similarity and structure within a logical process.

Discussing this decline of ideology theory some five years after the Shils speech, Professor Seymour Martin Lipset was beginning to have some trouble with it. Is it really such a good idea that ideologies decline? Lipset's inquiry was occasioned by his own theory:

> A basic premise of this book is that democracy is not only or even primarily a means through which different groups can attain their ends or seek the good society; *it is the good society itself in operation.* Only a give-and-take of a free society's internal struggles offers some guarantee that the products of the society will not accumulate in the hands of a few power holders and that men may develop and bring up their children without fear of persecution. And... democracy requires institutions which support conflict and disagreement as well as those which question legitimacy and consensus.[76]

For Lipset, then, democracy is itself the good society in operation which depends upon intrinsic diversity. Any influence which would drastically reduce the causes of change and conflict would eventually destroy the good life itself. A fresh variety of ideology seemed the best guarantee for the health of democracy even though there will inevitably be some source of disagreement in any social order.

As a result of the decline of ideology, then, Lipset faced a problem not unlike that of Lenin when he was required to account for the failure of marxist systems to develop according to a predicted pattern.[77]

> But I believe that there is still a real need for political analysis, ideology, and controversy within the world community, if not within the western democracies. In a larger sense, the democratic controversies within the advanced democratic countries have become comparable to struggles within American party elections. Like all nomination contexts, they are fought to determine who will lead the party, in this case the democratic camp, in the larger political struggle in the world as a whole with its marginal constituencies, the underdeveloped states. The horizon of intellectual politics must turn... to this larger context.[78]

---

75. Cf. *The Christian-Marxist Dialogue*, P. Oestreicher, ed., London, Macmillan, 1969; PETULLA, *Christian Political Theology: A Marxian Guide*, Orbis, 1972.

76. Seymour Martin LIPSET, *Political Man*, Doubleday Anchor, 1963, p. 439. Italics added.

77. In his *Imperialism*, Lenin projected the internal failures of the marxist analysis onto the structure of colonialism.

78. LIPSET, pp. 453-454.

In the Third World, there is a dire need for "intense political controversy and ideology. The problems of industrialization, of the place of religion, of the character of political institutions is still unsettled..."[79] Left political leaders who did become empowered in the Third World, however, found that they were ever more outflanked by those more radical than themselves, while they were unexpectedly caught in the same problems of corruption, order, and efficiency that cropped up no matter what the revolutionary form of rule might have been tried. "The socialist in power in an underdeveloped country must continue, therefore, to lead a revolutionary struggle against capitalism, the western imperialists, and, increasingly, against Christianity as the dominant remaining foreign institution."[80] What this means is that ideology is ending only in the West, but it is needed elsewhere to develop "free political and economic institutions in the rest of the world."[80]

VII. THE REEMERGENCE OF VALUES IN POLITICAL CONTROVERSY

As the 1960's rolled on their turbulent way, with their Berkeley's and Paris May riots, it became obvious that ideology returned in an astonishing manner within the western democracies themselves where they supposedly had declined. The discovery of the poor and the underprivileged rekindled ideological flames.[81] Third World thinkers by the end of the decade could hardly see in any terms other than ideological ones. The very notion of scientific objectivity and discipline became suspect. The question suddenly was asked, how was it possible for western social science of which Shils and Lipset were such articulate spokesmen to have become so conservative in retrospect? Already there had been a considerable literature concerned with the ethically neutral strance of behaviorist political theory which had dominated especially American universities for almost two decades. The so-called "new left" politics of the late 1960's and early 1970's were, in fact, based in large part precisely on the notion that politics should and could have an ethical context.[82]. Conflict for conflict's sake, value-free investigations seemed to blind political thought against the very nature of political reality as it is in the life of men.

Christian Bay noted in 1965 that Lipset's "replacing political ideology with sociological analysis" was implicitly a kind of conservative acceptance of the status quo.[83] Further, Bay was concerned that comparative government studies which concentrated on the booming field of development often were beginning to conclude that democracy was not the best form of government if development be the goal of

79. LIPSET, p. 454.

80. LIPSET, pp. 454-455.

80a. LIPSET, p. 456.

81. Cf. *To Free a Generation*, D. Cooper, ed., New York, Collier, 1968.

82. Cf. Todd GITLIN, "The Future of an Effusion: How Young Activists Will Get to 1984," *1984 Revisited*, R. Wolff, ed., New York, Knopf, 1973, pp. 11-39; Tom HAYDEN, "The Politics of 'The Movement'," *The Radical Papers*, I. Howe, ed., Doubleday Anchor, 1966, pp. 362-377.

83. Christian BAY, "Politics and Pseudopolitics: A Critical Evaluation of Some Behavioral Literature," *Apolitical Politics*, p. 23. Cf. Lipset's own reaction to this in the Introduction of the Doubleday Anchor edition of *Political Man*.

politics. What concerned Professor Bay was the anti-political level of this kind of behaviorist thinking, though, it must be remembered, socialist theory had long ago arrived substantially at this view that the need of development can put in abeyance the problems of democracy.

> What was anti-political was the assumption, explicit or implicit, that politics, or at any rate American politics, is and must always remain primarily a system of rules for peaceful battles between conflicting private interests, and not an arena for struggle toward a more humane and more rationally organized society.[84]

Politics must, then, again rediscover a vision. "... The human goals of politics should be conceived in terms of maximalizing human freedom... Politics exists for the purpose of progressively removing the most stultifying obstacles to a free human development with a priority for the worst obstacles." [85] In retrospect, it seems curious and ironical that this is also the essential function political theology claims for itself.[86]

Out of a criticism of the very method of sociological and behavioral political theory, therefore, a moral and ethical reaction arose which sought to reintroduce the classical question of what ought to be the form and content of the public order within the dimension of the human social good. J. Peter Euben's perceptive remarks upon the limits of scientific and rational methodology underscored the degree to which descriptive political thought carried a bias against an ethical politics that would account for those who did not share justly in the public order.

> Believing that our propositions capture reality, we sometimes forget that any theory of politics and modes of political organization favors certain values, life styles, and people at the expense of others. Material abundance does not alter this situation. The promise of such abundance is not itself material. To be rich and yet desperate seems yet somehow absurd. That it is not absurd remains an unanswered and at least potentially a political challenge. The recognition that there are many poor and despairing, without dignity, commitments, or self-respect, is a prerequisite for escaping the intimidations of liberal politics and scholarship without ignoring their significance.[87]

By a kind of circular logic, then, the end of ideology has led to a resurgence of political considerations that seem near to ideology itself as the major program for contemporary political theory. Indeed, Professor Euben's proof for the inadequacy of liberal and behavioral theory is little more than a reaffirmation of the Gospels — concern for the poor, the downtrodden, and the weak — in a current context. Thus, the Christianity Professor Lipset saw being driven out of the Third World as the last vestige of colonialism makes its reappearance on the theoretical level as the consensus

---

84. BAY, p. 23.

85. BAY, pp. 37, 41.

86. In this regard, it is interesting that Alexander Solzhenitsyn's complaint against the religious leaders of the Russian Orthodox Church is precisely that they do not protest: "We are robbing our children when we deprive them of something which they can never experience again — the pure angelic perception of worship which as adults they can never recapture, nor even realize what they have missed. The right to continue the faith of their fathers is annulled, as is the right of parents to bring up their children in their own outlook on life — while you, hierarchs of the Church, have accommodated yourselves to this, even abetting it and finding in it a true sign of freedom of religion." "Letter to Pimen, Patriarch of All Russia," *The Tablet*, London, 15 April 1972, p. 360.

87. J. Peter EUBEN, "Political Science and Political Silence," *Power and Community*, pp. 45-46.

of radical politics. In this sense, the ease with many theologians are recently embracing radical political positions is not surprising or unexpected.

Professor Zbigniew Brzezinski, however, sees this so-called ethical and planetary consciousness of radical politics to be, at best, "a form of hedonism and narcissism." This self-proclaimed "high-minded rhetoric" is really deficient because it does not engage the intellectual and the scientific structures needed to bring it about.[88] Brzezinski sees the new "technetronic" age, as he calls it, which he sees potentially capable of meeting the admitted material requirements of mankind, creating by its very complexity a new age of confusion and chaos in comparison with which the cold war will be seen to have been a time of relative order. "The real danger of the 1970's and 80's is a world-wide disintegration of social and political order: in brief, a planetary fragmentation of peoples and states."[89] This will happen because the supposedly idealistic young have merely passion and enthusiasm to sustain their vision. They have little "long-term commitment," or conceptual tools to understand the requirements of a new ethical political order. In other words, the current rediscovery of an ethical or spiritual politics has a moral root in hedonism on the part of the rich and in envy on the part of the poor, both of which stand to ruin any possibility that man will use his intelligence in a sane technical and political fashion.[90]

Thus, the reappearance of ideology at the international level runs up against a despair and violence on the part of the poor and a skepticism in the developed nations against the potential of science and technology.[91] What is lacking is a theory or an intelligence that could ground the possibility of development or liberation for the poor in a concept of man that can accept science and technology without denying objective human values. It is into this theoretical breach that political theology sees its place in political theory.

VIII. FROM THE POLITICAL TO THE CONTEMPLATIVE: LEISURE AND SALVATION

The struggle going on within political theology today is about transforming its purpose so that it might become an active force and guide to fill the spiritual lacuna that has arisen in modern political theory. The danger of this way of posing the problem, especially in the Third World where much of this impetus for political theology lies, consists in its failure to account for the terms of classical theory as well as older Christianity which were both most reluctant to identify the religious task with the political. Indeed, this politicization of theology strikes the older theory as abandoning that higher level of reality and morality which preserves the dignity of man by insisting that politics is not his ultimate destiny.

Likewise, the question for contemporary political theory vis-a-vis the spiritual comes back to the issues posed in earlier history about the place of the spiritual in politics. It is clear that the spiritual has a place in the public order. It is not a purely

88. Zbigniew BRZEZINSKI, "The International and the Planetary," *Encounter*, August, 1972, p. 52.

89. BRZEZINSKI, p. 54.

90. BRZEZINSKI, p. 54.

91. Cf. Philip HANDLER, "Science in America," *U.S. News*, 18 January 1971, pp. 32-33.

private affair as much of modern theory has held. But politics has its proper autonomy that cannot and should not become a vehicle for man's metaphysical and religious drives. In one sense, the spiritual has always been more powerful than the temporal. There are many indications today that we are again proving this point.

What is required is a theoretical effort to regain the validity of man's scientific and technological and economic capacities within a world that is broader than politics. The first step in this process, it would appear, must be a recognition on the part of religion that its main and sole justification is not worldly success seen in terms of human alleviation. It is quite true that at the origins of modern health care, hospitality, care of the poor and orphans lies a spontaneous religious impulse to do something about the weak of this world. The Gospels clearly teach this to be a major sign of Christianity. The modern state has subsumed most of these voluntary functions into itself as a normal part of its competence. But all of this is not and cannot be what religion is "for." The other side of modern economic development and growth is abundance and leisure which seem, in the long-run, to be our real future.[92] But both leisure and the care of the poor are signs that man as a person transcends the political and cannot be wholly absorbed in it. What is curious about much of Christian political and revolutionary literature lately — something pointed out by the more perceptive of critics — is its failure to protect precisely the spiritual in man because it overly identifies religion with the worldly task.[93]

In conclusion, political theology is today claiming a place in the history of political theory. Political theory itself, moreover, has more and more come to recognize both theoretically and practically that its modern evolution from Machiavelli has been deficient and vulnerable because of its underestimating of man's spiritual desires and realities. At first sight, this appears like a happy coincidence for both. Yet, what seems more obvious, from a longer look at political theory beginning with the classical and Christian problems, is that political theology has not been so far able to preserve its own proper mission as theology. Christianity is not a pure spirituality, to be sure, as Marsilius tried to make it. But its major task is to distinguish the public life of the world with its admittedly spiritual depth from full identification with the Kingdom of God.[94]

Since Christian theologians tend to confuse the two, then, they are prone to undervalue and underestimate the properly political questions that legitimately belong

---

92. Cf. McHALE, FULLER, Theodore ROSZAK, *Where the Wasteland Ends: Politics and Transcendence in Postindustrial Society*, Doubleday.

93. Cf. E. L. MASCALL, *Theology and the Future*, New York, Morehouse-BArlow, 1968.
From the side of a development theorist, David Apter has also warned of the temptation to identify religion and politics into some kind of unified form. Cf. his "Political Religion in the New Nations," *Some Conceptual Approaches to the Study of Modernization*, Prentice-Hall, 1968, pp. 193–233.

94. Ivan Vallier has perceptively noted the danger of radical politics which attempt to theologize the public order: "The distinctive feature of this radicalism is that the office of the priest, including its symbolism and charisma, is injected into civic life as a type of political authority. This is a very old and traditional kind of action, with deep roots in the caesaropapist infrastructure of Latin America. Clerical radicalism is an appropriation of an old means in the service of new goals. It is an implicit refusal to acknowledge that civil and ecclesiastical spheres should be differentiated." "Radical Priests and Revolution," *Changing Latin America*, D. Chalmers, ed., New York, Columbia, 1972, p. 17. For a rather opposite view, see Yves Vaillancourt, "Les politisés chrétiens et la libération," Relations, Montréal, mai, 1972, pp. 141–145.

to the public order. Furthermore, in this effort to sanctify the existing political regimes, especially the socialist ones, or transform by revolution corrupt regimes into holy ones, they seem to have forgotten the political implications of evil which classical and especially Augustinian politics recognized. The result of this is both a failure to confront the theoretical problem of the transpolitical destiny of man (even in this world) and to ignore the kinds of specifically worldly threats that do arise in the political order. The danger and trend of political theology today, it seems, is the reerection of a new style "Byzantine" theory, this time with none of the subtlities of independence that even Byzantium preserved.

The lesson of all of this for contemporary political theory is a rethinking of the whole origin of modern political thought so that politics does not have to have — as it does for modern theory — a totalist tendency which absorbs into itself all that is of man, both here and hereafter. The rediscovery of moderation from classical theory is evidently the avenue along which the enormous practical future of worldly man lies. Conversely, what political theology has lost, much to the detriment of man's future, is its pragmatic sense. No more do we find enthusiasm and talent being poured into the pedestrian daily affairs of suffering man out of which alone progress can arise. What is now sought is a sudden political solution that will eliminate once and for all man's plight.

The validity of classical political theory, then, seems to be found here, in its reminder to both theology and contemporary politics that the way of man is still through the evils and hardships and turmoil of man's desires and finiteness. The other side of this theory is a sense of freedom and accomplishment that recognizes that man is precarious, yet capable of producing a nobility that is properly his. When Aristotle ended the *Politics* with a discussion of leisure, he reminded man that the end of politics is contemplation. This still remains the most radical single notion in all political thought. It is also the essential connection between political theory and political theology. This is why, in the end, spirituality will always be, in some basic sense, also a public question.