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The Scenario of Carl Schmitt's Political Theology as a Restoration Discourse of the Political

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Abstract: The present paper aims to understand the state in a political theology key, as formulated in Carl Schmitt's writings. In other words, through "political theology" it is not emphasised a certain political doctrine, but it rather asserts a way of thinking the political through theology. This scenario is brought to the theorist's attention because of the modernisation process intensively developed in the 20th century. Moreover, the author argues that the crisis of the state is a theological-political problem since the modern theory of the state is a legitimate successor of theology The German author's plan is to provide an alternative to the European secularised modernity, since he identifies that the political organisation of a society (always) reflects its religious beliefs. In this way, the study attempts to approach the tension between theology and politics, surpassing the historical-institutional experience, by proposing the understanding of some schmittian metaphysical subtleties that reveal the relationship between theology and politics as a mutual determination. Therefore, using the method of correspondence between theological and political concepts, the paper focuses on Schmitt's arguments when claiming that the state has lost its monopoly over the political, so that the reaffirmation of the political theology becomes the natural and legitimate scenario.

Keywords: *technology; technique; ethics; science; issue.*

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1. Introduction: Carl Schmitt and the Question of Secularisation

Carl Schmitt, an influential German lawyer, is the author who places the notion of *political theology* in the heart of the 20th century debates. His hostile reactions to the Treaty of Versailles or to the Weimer Republic lead Schmitt to elaborate a critical view of the liberal parliamentary systems. However, in his works, the author does not show that he opposes democracy, but rather theorises a regime that highlights authority. The starting point of the schmittian political theology is constituted by the question on how law is instituted (*Rechtsverwirklichung*), by publishing the works entitled *Guilt and Types of Guilt. A Terminological Examination* (1910) and *Law and Judgement. An Investigation into the Problem of Legal Practice* (1912), advancing furthermore to political philosophy with *The Value of the State and the Meaning of the Individual* (1914). The lawyer's new issue was the following: the source of the modern political order. Gradually, Schmitt's concept of political theology can be associated with three major milestones of his life: the first is the debut period when he publishes *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, (1922); followed by a controversial period of his career, associated with his involvement in the national-socialist government (1933-1936), while he published *The Concept of the Political* (1932); and the third period may be considered the last part of his life when he publishes *Political Theology II: The Myth of the Closure of any Political Theology* (1970). In this last volume, Schmitt condemns the reduction of political theology to a mere theory or to a conceptual history.

Carl Schmitt's political theology scenario is a way of adapting traditional theology to the intellectual climate produced by modern philosophy and science (Strauss, 1965: 317). Thereby, questioning the secularisation phenomenon, made it possible to (re)introduce theology to the core of the political theory debate. Following Max Weber's sociological point of view, Jean-Pierre Sirroneau states that secularisation is seen as a process of emancipation towards the Church, on the basis of rationalisation (Sirroneau, 1982: 5).

The revolution of ideas of the 20th century problematises two main issues: the thesis of secularisation and the constitution of the political. Schmitt's attempt was to provide an exhaustive understanding of the state, starting from secularisation. He argues that the phenomenon of secularisation is a historical movement understood as a "neutralisation and depoliticisation of the state" (Tofan 2011: 147). On this occasion, Schmitt continues by saying that "all significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularised theological concepts not only because of their

historical development – in which they were transferred from theology to the theory of the state, whereby, for example, the omnipotent God became the omnipotent lawgiver – but also because of their systematic structure, the recognition of which is necessary for a sociological consideration of these concepts" (Schmitt, 1996b: 56). This view of the author is a novel translation of secularisation, being rather understood as a hermeneutical grid, in which a political concept is viewed from the perspective of the dominant meanings of the era (Tofan, 2011: 146). Therefore, the meaning of secularisation encountered in Schmitt transcends the historical-institutional relationship of religious-political tension, acknowledging that the historical development and systematic structure of concepts reveals their theological character.

At the core, Schmitt's political theology functions as a *system* capable of producing *representations* of historical situations. In a general way, the author analyses the implications of transferring sovereignty from the sovereign to the people, questioning the leader's decision and his capability of representation. As Hugo Ball argues, the importance of political theology has a legal nature to Schmitt, since the legitimation of authority represents a matter that maintains the unity of the state (Ball, 1989: 303-343). The mystery of the schmittian political theology is synthesised in the following equation: "Every power is transcendent; the Transcendent is power; every attempt to escape power is a way to seize power; every movement, which is directed to the prevention or limitation of power, is a seizure of power. It makes no sense and is very dangerous to oppose a political myth" (Schmitt, 1991: 181).

The complexity of this issue is defining for Schmitt. The author witnesses a decline of the traditional authority, which, in his opinion, leads to the systematic division of the sovereign state. Not only does he see the crisis that the state is facing, but he proposes a restoration of it, by using its theological foundation. If there is a theological foundation, then the state must understand its purpose according to a mystical and sacred foundation. In other words, Schmitt's proposal does not have an ideological nature, since it does not propose an instrumentalisation of religion, but it has instead a hermeneutical nature, because through the theologico-political scenario it proposes a healing of the essence of the state.

2. Carl Schmitt and the Political

In *Political Theology* (Schmitt, 1996b) or *The Concept of the Political* (Schmitt, 2007), Carl Schmitt develops a political theology in the sense of a theory of the state. As it has been pointed out above, the formula proposed

by the author is related to the state, but what does he understand by the idea of the state? His work does not provide a concrete definition of the concept. His comprehension of the concept is (rather) metaphysical, underlining that: "the state is not a construction made by people but, on the contrary, it is the state that makes of every human being a construction […] because the sum of a hundred thousand individuals cannot elevate itself above the nature of what is summed" (Schmitt, 1914:93). In fact, Schmitt is not concerned with the ancient city-state, or the medieval feudal states, but he associates the concept with the emergence of absolutist monarchies and modernity. This vision follows the machiavellian/hobbesian concept of the state as a sovereign entity. That is why Schmitt implies that "(The state) is in the decisive case the ultimate authority" (Schmitt, 2007: 20). For the author, the concept of the state presupposes the concept of the political, and this presupposition is characterised as a mutual identification of them.

Schmitt offers this specific understanding because he refuses to embrace a historical approach to the state, seeking rather a *determination* (or appointment) of it. According to the author "the state realises the connection of this theoretical world with the world of real empirical phenomena, and represents the sole subject of the juridical ethos (*Rechtsethos*) […] the sense of the state consists solely of the task of realizing law in the world, so making it the center of the series: «law, state, individual»" (Schmitt, 1914: 2). In essence, Schmitt's analysis reveals his stake: to restore the state, not to idealise it. Thus, from a conceptual point of view, the author does not *define* the political, because such an acceptance would reduce the political to a field; rather, Schmitt's plan is to *appoint* the political by a criterion (the friend-enemy distinction). Defining the political, says the author, would be necessary and sufficient "as long as the state is truly a clear and unequivocal eminent entity confronting non-political groups and affairs" (Schmitt, 2007:20). In other words, as long as the state has a monopoly on the political. In this way, says Kervégan, the author attributes to political a non-derivative character (Kervégan, 2005: 75). At the same time, the political remains an independent domain but cannot be isolated from other areas; its independence consists of a variety of antitheses that lead to the ultimate friend-enemy distinction. In Schmitt's view, this final distinction "provides a definition in the sense of a criterion and not as an exhaustive definition (*Erschöpfende Definition*) or one indicative of substantial content (*Inhaltsangabe*)" (Schmitt, 2007: 26).

Finally, in a metaphorical language, the content of the schmittian works, represents a hypostasis of power inside the state. Schmitt says that the example of the Catholic Church is the most relevant to the development

of a *complexio oppositorum* with a dogmatic-political function, arguing that it excels in the way of political representation, transposed into the concept of authority (Schmitt, 1996a: 26). Therefore, Schmitt's theoretical efforts concern two of the most advanced and better-structured historical bodies of the Occidental world: the Catholic Church, along with all its legal rationality, and the Christian state *jus publicum europæum* (Kervégan, 2005: 168). For Schmitt, the specific character of the political is reformulated into the key of a hermeneutic circle with a dual character, of the following type: power-legitimacy, sovereignty-decision, exception-norm, *δύναμις-ἐνέργεια.* In his opinion, all these relationships, which constitute the substance of the concept of the political contain the friend-enemy dialectic.

3. The Source of Political Order: On Decision and Representation

The present article continues by discussing two concepts on which Schmitt advances his political theology. The first one is represented by the concept of *sovereign decision*, on which the author argues that "the sovereign is the one who decides on the state of exception" (Schmitt, 2007: 15). Practically, the author links sovereignty to the issue of the decision in an exceptional case. While making an analogy with the concept of divine power, Schmitt says that sovereign power is one that assures the unity of a state, and the decision on the state of exception is the criterion by which political unity is thus achieved. From Schmitt's discourse it is understood that there is no supreme, legally constituted power to suspend the order of the state apart from the exercise of political power; for the author, the exceptional situation in the state has the same meaning as the miracle has for theology (De Franceschi, 2007: 663). For this reason, the place of the norm is replaced or taken by the state's ability to be sovereign, or, in other words, to decide. Thus, in this case, sovereignty has a double connotation, simultaneously understood as a legislator and creator of order. The historical context in which the author writes can be translated as an exceptional situation. Consequently, in order to resolve this crisis, Schmitt resorts to the protection-obedience relationship encountered at Hobbes, admitting that the "cogito ergo sum of the state" principle is the same as "protego ergo obligo", adding that the realism of the human being "can frighten men in need of security" (Schmitt, 2007: 52). In other words, as J. Mc Cormick also remarks, *fear* is the true source of the political order (Mc Cormick, 2005: 253), as it can be instilled to citizens through the *protego ergo obligo* principle. Schmitt attempts to demonstrate that the rebirth of fear, as a feeling belonging to the human nature, would be able to achieve the indissolubility

of the political. Otherwise, if other groups, different from the state (counter-forces) have the power to decide on the beginning of a war, or try to prevent the state from doing so, in this case, "a unified political entity would no longer exist" (Schmitt, 2007: 39).

What Schmitt says is that the sovereign is the only one who has the power to decide on what is good and what is bad for the state, and his decision is the result of the distinction between friend and enemy. By identifying the enemy and deciding on the exception, the sovereign has the fundamental role of defining the political boundaries of a community: he decides who is part of the community and who is its foe. Regarding the relationship that the sovereign has with the community, the state needs to provide protection to its citizens, who in turn obey it. It results from this association that the sovereign holds the authority in the state. Therefore, Schmitt speaks of a robust form of sovereign authority, placed above the society, which has a dual purpose: to identify the enemy and to keep the politic undivided (Mc Cormick, 2005: 257). In essence, what Schmitt argues is that the sovereign authority disappears with the emergence of secularisation, so that the political acquires a derived character. Or, it is precisely this issue the author has, that the political cannot be altered because it is not a distinct domain, but it establishes a relationship, as mentioned above. At the same time, if the state – acting by decision – gets to be deprived of its sovereign right of decision, it will then lose its political unity and therefore de-politicisation ends up destroying the state as a state (Schmitt, 2008: 214).

To solve this political neutralisation, which has led to the abandonment of the sovereign decision, Schmitt adopts a personalised conception of representation, using as a model the image of the Pope in the Catholic Church. Consequently, the author advances in his work *Roman Catholicism and Political Form* (1923), a different meaning for the concept of representation. Catholicism is, in his view, a *complexio oppositorum* because it encompasses the totality of antitheses of the political theory: On the one hand, sin exists in the Church, but there is also salvation; then, the Church is simultaneously pagan and monotheist (having a communion of saints and the worship of one God); being both patriarchal and matriarchal (having bishops, but venerating Virgin Mary) (Schmitt, 1996a: 8). Moreover, the Church includes all political forms: it functions as a monarchy (in the person of the Pope), as an aristocracy (the institution of the College of Cardinals), and as a democracy (allowing everyone to join it) (Schmitt, 1996a: 7). Thus, in order to reunify the image of the sovereign, Schmitt finds the Pope's image as the unprecedented model of representation: "The Pope is the

Vatican's sovereign [...] One of its (the Catholic Church) sociological secrets is the ability to acquire a legal form. But it only has this capacity or any other capacity because of its representation ability. The latter represents the civitas humana. It represents in every moment the historical connection to the Incarnation and Crucifixion of Christ. It represents the Person of Christ Himself: God become man in historical reality. Therein lies its superiority over an age of economic thinking" (Schmitt, 1996a: 19).

This model of Catholicism is for Schmitt the centre of his theologico-political thinking because the author rediscovers the foundation of the political starting from the essence of the Church. For the author, the essence of the Church is constituted by the historical event of the Incarnation, which therefore has the force of representation. On the other hand, in his view, purely economic thinking is rather technical-economic, not theologico-political, because it denies the principle of transcendence, and is therefore incapable of representation. By "denying transcendence" the author understands the de-politicisation of the state and its historical uprooting. Although liberal parliamentarism claims to be the actual expression of the principle of representation, Schmitt argues that true representation should be established from bottom to top, and not from the top to bottom, as illustrated by the Catholic Church (Schmitt, 1996a:173-174). Because the liberal representation originates in the individual, the individual's decision-making capacity is non-existent, so, consequently, the mechanism of his representation is wrong. In other words, in order for representation to exist in the state, there must be a hierarchical order at the top of which there is a representative figure. In essence, the idea of representation is for Schmitt governed by personal authority, and the political form of the Catholic Church is, by excellence, the model *representing* the population in its essence, while not only reproducing its political will.

4. Concluding Remarks

The present work has explored the theologico-political scenario proposed by Carl Schmitt from a dual perspective: first, by observing the author's way of interpreting secularisation; and second, by exploring the source of political order. For the author, secularisation is a way of (re) discovering the foundation of the political, explored in the key of a hermeneutic language. In other words, for Schmitt, the political is a secularised form of theology, and its essence consists in a *complexo oppositorum* that does not act as a rigid agent but is transformed by the elasticity of theology. Consequently, using the correspondence between theological and

political concepts, the present work highlighted Schmitt's arguments when he claims that the state has lost its monopoly over the political, so that the reaffirmation of the political theology becomes the natural scenario. Essentially, the stake of Schmitt's work was to restore the political, using not a sociology of concepts, but a theologico-political hermeneutic circle. Thus, what gives Carl Schmitt's political theology a polyphonic character is the multidisciplinary and integrative thinking of the author.

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