The Jerusalem School: The Theopolitical Hour

Nitzan Lebovic

Recent critical theory has brought together two different traditions of political theology. An intellectual history of the concept traces both to the German 1920s and the German Jewish 1940s. Carl Schmitt, the reactionary "crown jurist of the Third Reich," initiated the first tradition; a small group of German Jews who immigrated to Palestine forged the second. Both traditions grew from a severe political crisis: in the earlier case, it was the German defeat of 1918; in the latter, the outbreak of World War II and the persecution of the Jews. Such moments show that when everything collapses, when life itself cannot be taken for granted, politics is simultaneously strengthened and undermined. Quite recently we have seen the revival of both aspects of political theology in post-9/11 theory. As I show below, the history of political theology problematizes some current concepts used by Giorgio Agamben.

A Time of Decision: Buber, Schmitt, Agamben

In *State of Exception* (2005) Agamben writes: "The aim of this investigation into the urgency of the state of exception 'in which we live' was to bring to light the fiction that governs this *arcanum imperii* [secret of power] par excellence of our time."[1] Agamben insists that the state of exception, concentration

camps, racial policies, total war could not work without the "general and inde-terminate causes that had penetrated ever more deeply into German and Euro-pean legislation in the twentieth century."[2] In other words, into the shape of modern democracy. In accordance with Schmitt's critique of liberal govern-mental forms, Agamben follows the definition of exclusionary politics and the three principal rules of Schmitt's *Political Theology*: the secularization of theological concepts, the sovereign's absolute authority in the "state of excep-tion," and its expression through the sovereign's sole decision concerning the friend and the enemy. Consequently, Agamben's own notion of *arcanum imperii* implies a set of suppositions about the roots of current politics; the growing separation of fiction and reality; political manipulation and daily life; and, most important, a meaningful duration that leads from the eighteenth-century enlightened sovereign to the formation of modern democracy, before and after World War II.

From a structural perspective—Agamben's argument is strictly struc-tural at this point—to expose the "secret of power," one must find and expose the most radical moment of the political, embedded in its very nature. Such a hermeneutics of exposure highlights the parallels between the paradigmatic moments of modern politics—the post-1918 Germany, the critique of German Jews after the rise of Nazism, and the American reaction to 9/11. The Wei-mar Constitution's article 48 affirmed the right of the head of state to suspend civil rights and declare a state of emergency; this is what permitted Hitler to turn his democratic authority into demagogic totalitarianism in 1934.[3] This was the process Schmitt prepared in both *Political Theology* (1922) and *The Concept of the Political* (1927, 1932).[4] Agamben links this exception and relation to the law to a tradition leading directly to George W. Bush's Patriot Act, passed by Congress in October 2001. The American reaction to a state of emergency abrogated a range of legal protections for the sake of pursuing an internal enemy.[5] What ties the legal precedents of a prefascist Germany to current American politics is a century of temporal and political stagnation,

2. Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 171–72.

3. Agamben, *State of Exception*, 14.

4. As Heinrich Meier indicates, *The Concept of the Political* was the only text Schmitt pub-lished in three editions (1927–33) and the only one to grow from one edition to the other (*Carl Schmitt, Leo Strauss und der Begriff des Politischen* [Stuttgart: Metzler, 1988], 14–15).

5. "What is new about President Bush's order is that it radically erases any legal status of the individual, thus producing a legally unnamable and unclassifiable being" (Agamben, *State of Exception*, 3).

too conscious of its fragility to waive its right to bans and exceptions. In other words, what constitutes the essence of politics even in democracy is what Schmitt defined as the ultimately theological concepts that underpin sovereignty and circumscribe the law. To criticize both, Agamben turns back to the critique by the German Jewish thinkers Walter Benjamin, Gershom Scholem, and, most recently, Jacob Taubes and his Paulinian exigency.[6] As Vivan Liska notes, "Agamben's writing belongs to the political-theological tradition of the twentieth century, and the inspiration given to it by Jacob Taubes, who himself transcended the differences between the Christian sacred history and Jewish messianism."[7]

However, the tradition Agamben relies on avoids a one-dimensional view of democracy by using both the affirmative and critical view of political theology. If Agamben leaps back from the history of current democratic crises to a messianic eradication of the law, Buber and Taubes follow a version of political theology that strives to limit and control the law while distinguishing a messianic moment from a political one and radical critique from actual politics.

6. In his next book, *The Time That Remains*, Agamben draws inspiration from Taubes and Benjamin to move closer to the roots of the same definition of political theology. Ultimately, he locates the threshold of the political in the division between the apostle and the prophet. However, if in his previous works of political theory Agamben analyzes a "German" political theology—namely, the one formed by Schmitt and Benjamin—in his most recent book he offers a different approach, one grounded in a concrete theological presence: for Agamben, the Paulinian "now-time" guides Schmitt's and Benjamin's temporal and political horizon. For Agamben, an emphasis on a Paulinian theology of the present, or what Martin Buber first called "the characteristic stamp of the time" a half century ago (*Two Types of Faith: A Study of Interpenetration of Judaism and Christianity*, trans. Norman P. Goldhawk [Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2003], 166; hereafter cited as *TTF*), implies an absolute rejection of current political forms and a return to a Paulinian temporality of the present. In contrast to the Jewish focus on a "divine kingdom" of the past and an obscure messianic future, Agamben adopts a Paulinian equation between "messianic modality" and exigency (*The Time That Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans*, trans. Patricia Dailey [Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005], 39); hereafter cited as *TTR*). In other words, the messianic people comes into its own after a political crisis precipitates a temporal vacuum. This leads to a total loss of faith in existing political systems and a passive temporality that appears as a political and theological alternative to the active temporality of prophecy (*nevu'a, nabi*) and law. As Agamben puts it: "Once he divides the law into a law of works and a law of faith, a law of sin and a law of God—and thus renders it [the law] inoperative and unobservable—Paul can then fulfill and recapitulate the law in the figure of love. The messianic plērōma of the law is an *Aufhebung* of the state of exception, an absolutizing of *katarēgsis* [no-longer-at-work]" (*TTR*, 108).

7. Vivan Liska, *Giorgio Agambens leerer Messianismus: Hannah Arendt, Walter Benjamin, Franz Kafka* (Vienna: Schlebrügge.Editor, 2008), 7. My translation.

Historically speaking, Buber's story line opens with the constitutive moment of 1913, when the collection of essays *Vom Judentum* (*On Judaism*) was published with a warm dedication to Buber and included his three seminal lectures on Judaism. The second moment is that of Buber's emigration to Palestine, in 1938, and the writing of *The Prophets* (publ. 1942), at a moment of deep desperation. The third comes immediately after World War II, when political theology became a far more complexly articulated body of thought: in the late 1940s and early 1950s the German Jewish Left took up a part of Schmitt's legacy to undermine any notion of convention and the normative. Its first signs could be traced in the opposition between Paulinian *reste* and Jewish *nevu'a* in Buber's *Theopolitical Hour*, Taubes's *Political Theology of Paul*, and Hugo Bergman's work with Buber and Taubes. As I show below, the German Jewish insistence on pacifist interpretation to political theology won immediately its affirmative interpretation: Geulah Cohen, an ex-terrorist and later the "mother of the Jewish settlers," used the ideas of Buber, Bergman, and Taubes, all leftists, to justify terrorism and oppression from the right. Yet what brings all those Jewish thinkers together, during the early 1950s, is how they transmuted Schmitt's political theory into a blueprint for action shaped by concrete political and theological expectations. For Buber, Bergman, and Taubes, political theology or the state of exception should be restricted to critique and not allowed to extend to exclusionary political solutions (Cohen) or to messianic and *apolitical* answers (Agamben). Sharing with Schmitt and Cohen a deep suspicion in liberal democracy, they still envisioned a better polis to come.[8]

Buber: Apocalypse and "Theopolitical Realism"
In 1942 Buber hid references to Schmitt's *Political Theology* in his analysis of Isaiah. He turned to the book of Isaiah to understand the destruction of the people of Israel and concluded that the prophet's idea of sacredness was "the movement of God into the world, and into man." What was the result of this movement? "A type of existence that leads the people to life through death,

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8. This is the group I identify in the article as the "Jerusalem School." Previously, David Myers has written about the "Jerusalem school" and identified it with the central European group that helped establish the Hebrew University. In this article I add to his characterization a philosophical-political element, namely, the commitment to a "theopolitical hour." For further reading, see David Myers, "Was There a 'Jerusalem School'? An Inquiry into the First Generation of Historical Researchers at the Hebrew University," *Studies in Contemporary Jewry* 10 (1994): 66–92.

as the sacrifice follows the process of sanctification."[9] For Buber, the God who made this possible was a "world aggressor" (*Takif-Olam*), "an absolute aggressor, for he is absolutely separated from the world but not without it."[10] Buber's analysis followed the principles of Schmitt's theory of sovereignty and its logic of secularization and politicization. Buber referred implicitly to Schmitt's political theology already in the introduction to *Königtum Gottes* (*Kingship of God*), completed in February 1932. Four years later he attacked Schmitt's notion of sovereignty in "Die Frage an den Einzelnen" ("The Question of the Single One"). The question Buber placed in front of Schmitt, or his fellow supporters of fascist power, was whether the "possibility of physical killing," which Schmitt affirms in his characterization of *the political*, is not in fact

> the intention of physical killing. For Schmitt's thesis carries a situation of private life, the classic duel situation, over into public life. This duel situation arises when two men experience a conflict existing between them as absolute, and therefore capable of resolution only in the destruction of the one by the other. . . . Every classic duel is a masked "Judgment of God." That is what Schmitt, carrying it over to the relation of peoples to one another, calls the specifically political.[11]

Hardly six years after he had written this harsh attack on Schmitt's political theology, and four years after his forced immigration to Palestine, Buber titled a critical—almost heretical—analysis of the divine voice *The Theo-political Hour* (*HaSha'a Ha'Theo-Politit*) and characterized that voice as the world aggressor. This was the moment of decision for Buber himself, when he finally embraced the very political theology he had fiercely rejected in 1936. In the midst of the extinction of European Jewry, Buber sounded almost cool as he explored the migration of theological vocabulary into the realm of the profane and explained the need to define one's enemy as clearly as possible. The "sacred seed" had germinated, and thanks to the "revival through selection" it would flourish by culling nine out of ten Jews (to cite Isaiah's prophecy). According to Buber, the sacred seed was literally

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9. Martin Buber, *Torat Ha'Nevi'im* (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1975), 123. My translation. Hereafter cited as *Torat*.

10. Ibid., 119. Buber points out that only when plague and war occupy the land does Josiah call God "King," that is, when God is urged to reveal himself and consecrate a new king or a prophet (ibid., 117).

11. Martin Buber, *Between Man and Man*, trans. Ronald Gregor Smith (London: Collins, 1971), 98. The essay first appeared in English in the 1947 edition of this collection.

realized by Isaiah, by naming his son She'ar Yashuv ("a remnant will return") (*Torat*, 123).

After a catastrophe the people's remains bear the ashen signs of sacredness. These signs, Buber argued in *Two Types of Faith* (1950), attest to a violent moment of contact between the heavenly and the earthly spheres, "a beginning in time" (*TTF*, 8). To trust in the divine is to know how to ask for God to retreat back to the heavenly sphere: "For God conceals Himself from the time in which he lives, concealing himself from him, the most exposed son. . . . Because he knows that God is only hidden, he is safe" (*TTF*, 168).[12]

Buber regarded this revival of community and sacredness as a belated result of the ancient theological battle between the Jewish prophets (Isaiah) and the Christian (Paul), between two forms of faith: the Jewish *emunah* and the Christian *pistis*.[13] Taubes—who studied with Buber—later explained the opposition by pointing to Paul as a mediator between two views of community and political consciousness.[14]

Despite his conviction of the necessity of a Schmittian opposition between the annihilatory and the realist kinds of "theopolitics," Buber preserved the value of an independent ethics, beyond conflicts and above all traces of violence. This was why he insisted that "the impact of Isaiah's prophecy cannot be misunderstood: behind every statement about disaster stands a veiled choice" (*Torat*, 124). This, he continued, is the choice between "salvation and holocaust, [which are] so entangled with each other that it is the role of the prophet to interpret and demonstrate the right path out and beyond the catastrophe." In other words, the prophet had to consider the possible political and theological implications of his interpretations. Where was this choice supposed to lead? Buber concluded that Isaiah and all of the other Jewish prophets were trying to produce what he called a "theopolitical realism" that could resist the power of kings and assert the human claim to absolute sovereignty. "To show that at times they are expected to go beyond religious activities . . . sometimes it [the prophecy] turned into [a call] to rebel" (*Torat*, 141). In other words, distancing faith from religious dogma meant a political com-

12. Buber identified the secular and anti-Zionist Franz Kafka with the image of the "most exposed son." This view is diametrically opposed to the recurrent biopolitical interpretation of Kafka by Agamben, Mladen Dolar, Eric Santner, and others.

13. Buber saw both Greek-Paulinian *pistis* and the Jewish-prophetic *emunah* as theological embodiments of the idea that "*kairos* is fulfilled" (ibid., 26).

14. "At the center of Judaism lies the idea of the covenant, the concept of a community that inaugurates itself from God . . . [and] the possibility of receiving grace and love as an undeserved divine gift" (Jacob Taubes, *The Political Theology of Paul*, trans. Dana Hollander [Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004], 122–23; hereafter cited as *PTP*).

mitment to critique; it was often enabled by the catastrophic event, but it had to distance itself from its temporal fixation.

The prophet, in Buber's account, had political and theological roles, and both were informed by pure, divine knowledge. The prophet represents, then, a paragon of the critical theorist, who returns to the primal scene where language itself was formed and can ignore normative inferences. Nevertheless, in social and political terms, the prophet was first and foremost responsible for the betterment of his community, as Jewish law insists. This meant that, in contrast to the Paulinian *pistis*, which was "born outside the historical experience of nations," *emunah* assumed the possibility of radical political change within a long historical duration (*TTF*, 172). "The world of prophecy," Buber wrote, "is in fact the world of historical reality, that is, a reality seen to the brave person who dares to believe. That is a certain kind of politics, this is *theopolitics*, and its interest is to fix a certain situation in the divine ruling, until the people come closer to fulfilling its task, the beginning of a divine kingdom" (*Torat*, 125). The revolutionary cheerfulness of this segment and its offer "to fix" the divine ruling did not win much, if any, attention.

Since Hermann Cohen, many had interpreted the prophets as the greatest Jewish hermeneuts: rebellious, loud, very nearly ungodly. But Buber's interpretation offered a surprising twist: while resisting the usual separation of politics and theology, he believed that when the prophet applied religious ethics to the political realm, the situation often exploded: "When this explosion took place, it often had a messianic character, not revolutionary" (*Torat*, 125). A "revolutionary" fusion of the political and theological spheres meant arming the earthly with dangerous power; the messianic meant detonating it. A messianic attitude would have been wrong here, aiming at the populist rather than the ethical. Was such an approach indefensible? Not necessarily. According to Buber, Isaiah described the messiah as an "adviser" to God, "a political figure" (*Torat*, 125). This meant that the messiah was quite similar to a prophet: his task was to unite the different paths (*drachim*) of God with the unfolding of the godly name (*shem*). But a populist messiah too-readily neglected the universal aspect of his duties: "Unlike [the prophet] Micah, who claims that after the revelation every nation will still follow the 'name of its God,' Isaiah's consistent opinion is that God's name would be revealed, along with its paths. This is the God that is revealed also to the Gentiles . . . and cares for them as he cares for the people of Israel" (*Torat*, 140). The messiah, a sort of superprophet, would translate this universal concern into the political realm through action.

Buber's theory was courageous. It also advanced far beyond any claim he had made before the rise of fascism or his immigration to Palestine in 1938. Obviously, the post-1938 Buber was willing to take the theological deeper into the political and vice versa. He did not hesitate to contradict normative notions of religion and faith, often indicating the human errors of the prophets. Nor did he hesitate to break the theological silence the Zionist Yishuv was trying to maintain.[15]

Buber's path to the radical theopolitical critique of the 1940s was gradual. In 1932 he had begun to seek an ethical alternative to Schmitt's concept of political theology: the prophets, he explained, had been part of a historically oriented "theopolitisches Geschehen" (theopolitical happening) dedicated to forming a partnership between the state and religion.[16] In 1936 a discussion of Schmitt's theory followed a short analysis of the Paulinian theory of natural hierarchy and Spengler's ideas about biology. Buber contrasted the three theories with his claim that "history is following not a struggle for power and domination but the relation to a responsible power in time."[17] In other words, Buber saw the decisionist moment as what *precedes* the crowning of the sovereign, separated from him or his authority—the opposite of any biopower.

Buber's opposition to Schmitt was somewhat modified after his emigration to Palestine and even more so after the establishment of the Israeli state ten years later. Buber then resumed the discussion of political and theological power. He returned to the threshold between life and death, this time criticizing the new Jewish state directly for ignoring its theological roots. Did Buber believe that it was headed in the direction suggested by Schmitt, who spoke of modern politics as an unconscious secularization of theological concepts? Buber clearly outlined the perils of such a trajectory, setting it in the context of a "cold" and "warm" war to come. He believed that the West and the Middle East were enmeshed in the same destructive net of pure power, which led to stark distinctions between friends and enemies. In 1947, in the Hebrew version of the text, the allusions to Schmitt as "a teacher of the law" are obvious:

> All relative valuation of the state rests for the most part just on the fact of plurality. . . . The accumulated power of the master thrived on drawing profit from—so to speak—*latent exceptional conditions.* . . . Thus in times like ours the cold war tends to become *the normal historical condition.* Already

15. See a discussion of this silence in Oz Almog, *Sabre* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1997), 139.
16. Martin Buber, *Königtum Gottes*, 2nd ed. (Berlin: Schocken, 1936), xv.
17. Martin Buber, *Die Frage an den Einzelnen* (Berlin: Schocken, 1936), 78. My translation.

at the beginning of our historical period we saw teachers of the law appear who, obedient to this trait of the times, defined the concept of the political so that everything disposed itself within it according to the criterion "friend-enemy," in which the concept of the enemy includes "the possibility of physical killing." The practice of states has conveniently followed their advice. Many states decree the division of mankind into friends who deserve to live and enemies who deserve to die, and the political principle sees to it that what is decreed penetrates the hearts and reigns of men.[18]

In the introduction to the third edition of *Kingship of God* (1955), written in Hebrew in Jerusalem, Buber took on the air of a decisionist prophet, a critical thinker, as he traced the etymology of Eastern terms for kingship: "The leading, preceding tribal god is designated with the term *malk*, possibly meaning 'the decider,' that is, above all, the one who decides, from time to time, the path to be entered upon. . . . In Israeli[te] exodus history, JHWH is called *melekh*, that is, the one who goes on ahead of the wandering people."[19] Choosing the right path, Buber said, meant choosing life rather than death. This was the task of a simple navigator, but however simple, a path and a guide were exactly what "the normal historical condition" was missing.

Buber's adoption of Schmitt's theory did not go unnoticed. Buber pointed out that, according to the evangelist German theologian Wilhelm Michaelis,

the proximity of my "direct theocracy" [i.e., the direct involvement of divine authority in the world] to the concept "theopolitics" is dangerous. The reproach is quite understandable to me. When I speak in Israel about theopolitics, I mean . . . action of a public nature from the point of view of the tendency toward the actualization of divine rulership. . . . This is what it [theopolitics] comes to: The realization of the all-embracing rulership of God is the *Proton* and *Eschaton* of Israel.[20]

In *Two Types of Faith*, a book about Paul that he dedicated to Bergman, Ernst Simon, and Isaak Heinemann, Buber again declared that Isaiah's narrative was born out of the "realization in the totality of life, and especially when

18. Martin Buber, "The Validity and Limitation of the Political Principle," in *Pointing the Way: Collected Essays*, trans. Maurice Friedman (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1957), 216. The original text, in Hebrew, was signed in 1947.

19. Martin Buber, *Kingship of God*, trans. Richard Scheimann, 3rd ed. (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities, 1990), 52.

20. Ibid., 57–58; my translation from the Hebrew. There is a difference between the Hebrew edition and the English translation, with the latter giving "I can *not* understand this fear." See Martin Buber, *Malchut Shamaim* (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1965), 49.

the promise arises from amidst catastrophe, that . . . *a remnant remains*" (*TTF*, 29). The reasoning—in contrast to the usual reading—was not striving to reach any traditional identity or communal unity. In the end, Buber was saying that after the apocalyptic catastrophe, human beings would gain not only the flourishing of the seed into a strong people but in fact a better god, who would not differentiate between Jews and non-Jews. In such a scenario, sanctification through sacrifice and death (*kiddush haShem*, the sanctification of the name), revival and regathering, is moved by other actors, messiahs, or those who think themselves messiahs. Buber was reluctant to acknowledge the positive role of those who marched beyond the theopolitical into the purely political or the messianic realm. His type of decision revealed the human, not the exception, the realist prophet rather than the messianic figure, the heretic alongside the believer.[21] In other words, here, with war and emergency, mass death and global threats, Buber suggested that the "true state of exception" was a horrible moment that extended beyond theopolitics and had to be ended.

Taubes: Time Is Distress

Five years after the publication of Buber's *Prophets*, Taubes, a young scholar from an Orthodox Galician family, published *Abendländische Eschatologie* (*Occidental Eschatology*), an investigation of the potential of a new history embedded in an eschatological perspective. If Buber proposed a parallel course to the one taken by the prophets and ended his "statement of disaster" by announcing a Jewish revival and a new God, Taubes focused on "the place where the substance of time and the substance of eternity—death and life—cross paths."[22] Two short years after the end of the most horrible destruction the Jewish people had ever known, Taubes offered no comforting words. As he explained in a 1987 interview: "There is no eternal return, time does not enable nonchalance; rather, it is distress."[23] Against the passive hope of those confronting the end of the world, Taubes emphasized in 1947 the need for an immediate decision: the time for a Buberian "veiled choice" had passed. Taubes had in mind a Schmittian operation from within the destructive situation: it involved using and abusing destruction as a tool, acknowledging its inevitability. The apocalypse, he argued, entailed "a form-destroying and a forming

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21. Martin Buber, *Darko shel Mikra* (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1964), 117.
22. Jacob Taubes, *Abendländische Eschatologie* (Munich: Matthes und Seitz, 1991), 4.
23. "Jacob Taubes," in *Denken, das an der Zeit ist*, ed. Florian Roetzer (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1987), 317; "Jacob Taubes: 'Apocalypse from Below,'" trans. Joshua Robert Gold, *Telos*, no. 134 (2006): 145.

power. . . . If the demonic, destructive element is missing, the petrified order, the prevailing positivity of the world cannot be overcome."[24] For Taubes, there was nothing worse than this "positivity," which for him implied normativity.

After the publication of his book on eschatology, Taubes moved to the United States, where he met Leo Strauss, a critical follower of Schmittian political theology. In 1951, at the invitation of Scholem, he moved to Hebrew University with a generous grant. Although brief, Taubes's time in Israel was productive. As the rich and unpublished collection of his correspondence proves, Taubes started to work on ideas published in *The Political Theology of Paul* immediately after his arrival. In letters to Bergman and Simon he returned again and again to Paul as a liminal figure between Jewish and Christian theologies and between the two accompanying forms of the political. He was eagerly reading Schmitt and investigating how to use Schmitt's ideas in a Paulinian context. What Schmitt offered Taubes—no doubt after the latter had read Buber and discussed his ideas with Bergman and Simon—was a new way to approach Paul. The new Paul was both a follower of Isaiah (the idea of sacred remains was seductive to Taubes) and a critic of Jews "kept in captivity under the law" (*TTF*, 82–83). This figure would be simultaneously inside and outside the law.

Perhaps Taubes saw himself as such a figure: Scholem sent him packing when he learned that Taubes had betrayed his confidence. In 1952, after Scholem stopped his scholarship, Taubes had to return to America. While everyone acknowledged Taubes's great intellectual power—Bergman, the first rector of Hebrew University, described his abilities and knowledge as "absolutely exceptional"—many knew something of his disreputable behavior.[25] Yet everyone seems to have admired his chutzpah and his verve. It certainly required a measure of confidence to announce that

> faith according to Paul must be understood in the emphatic sense as faith in the Messiah, who by an earthly measure cannot be the Messiah who hangs condemned on the cross. . . . You can read up on that in the Acts of the Apostles, that's the way the apostles of the first hour experienced it, and they ask: When is the Kingdom coming, *basileia*? After all, these are political concepts. The problem is there. (*PTP*, 49)

24. Taubes, *Abendländische Eschatologie*, 10. See "Jacob Taubes: 'Apocalypse from Below,'" 147.
25. Undated letter to search committee, Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati, Nachlass Hugo Bergman, National Library in Jerusalem, Arc 4-o 1502, file 1435. Taubes's eccentricity is well described by his colleagues and acquaintances from the time, as well as in a novel by Susan Taubes, his wife at the time (*Divorcing* [New York: Random House, 1969]).

According to Taubes, the problem with Schmitt was that "he doesn't see this dialectic that moves Paul, and that the Christian church after 70 [the year the second temple was destroyed] has forgotten, that he adopted not a text but a tradition, that is, the folk traditions of church antisemitism" (*PTP*, 51). Taubes, in other words, moved the usual separation between Judaism and Christianity from year 0 to year 70. He separated the "first apostles" from the later—postdestruction—tradition of the church, and a twisted understanding of Paulinian theology as the source of modern anti-Semitism, camouflaged at the heart of secularized politics. Doing this, he shaped two kinds of temporality: the prophetic, rebellious, and moral, to which he ascribed Paul's theology, and the postdestruction tradition of the church. The threshold was represented in the temporality of destruction. Reviving and correcting this tradition could be done only by a Jewish interpreter who knew the two sides of destruction and its *Kairos*: the prophetic/Paulinian and the fathers'/post-Paulinian. The destruction of the temple, and religious order with it, made time itself change form and blocked an ingrained prophetic rebelliousness at the midst of the kingdom. Taubes extended the analogy deeper into modern Jewish thought, naming his predecessors, all theoreticians of radical politics and secularized theology. He beseeched his audience to focus on its enemies and critics no less than on its propagators: Schmitt, Franz Rosenzweig, Benjamin, and the later Buber—not the Buber of *I and Thou* (1923). All four, and himself as a result, were interested in attacking the law of the state and undermining its absolute authority (*PTP*, 63–64). All four understood the false claim modern politics made in the name of the law while eradicating its theological roots. More specifically, Buber and Taubes—the two thinkers who were obsessed with Schmitt and Paulinian theology during the 1950s—pleaded with Jewish political theology to overcome its primal scene, the destruction of the temple and the exile, to overcome its own threshold and state of exception.

Taubes's influence can be made out in recent works of political theology, though few of these pay any attention to the context I have pointed to here. Agamben's powerful analysis is a case in point. But before diving back into Agamben, let us consider another radical approach to politics and theology during the 1950s, which formed a strong friendship between Taubes, Bergman, and the mother of the Jewish settlers movement in the West Bank, Geulah Cohen. Bergman, who brought Taubes and Cohen together, also introduced them to Buber, his admired teacher.

The Jerusalem School: The Pacifist, the Critic, the Terrorist

Shmuel Hugo Bergman was born in Prague in 1883. He is known as a key figure in the German Jewish organization of Prague, Bar-Kochba, which he

Figure 1. Geulah Cohen, on the day she received her MA degree, 1953, with Hugo Bergman (to her right, with mustache: first rector of Hebrew University, 1935–38) and Natan Rotenshtreich (to her left, another disciple of Bergman, and later rector of Hebrew University and vice president of the Israel Academy of Science and Humanities), as well as other members of the philosophy department at Hebrew University

directed between 1901 and 1905, according to the principles of Ahad-Haam and Buber. In 1924 Bergman moved to Jerusalem, where he founded and directed the National Library and where he opened a dialogue with Palestinian intellectuals and political leaders. During 1935–38 Bergman served as the first rector of Hebrew University in Jerusalem, and it was in this capacity that he secured Buber an academic position and convinced him to immigrate to Palestine. Starting in 1938, Bergman and Buber met on a daily basis and designed and carried out plans to reform Jewish education in Palestine, to begin a Jewish-Palestinian dialogue, and to fight against all enemies of democracy and dialogue—foremost of which was the secular Zionist institution in Palestine.

When Taubes first arrived in Jerusalem in late 1950, it was Bergman who introduced him to Buber and to Cohen. Later, after things went sour, Bergman tried to make peace between Taubes and Scholem—between Taubes and the world. He failed. Even after learning the full extent of Taubes's mendacity, Bergman kept in touch with him, trying to get another scholarship to keep him in Jerusalem and later exchanging letters on topics close to both men's hearts: political theology, comparative readings of the Old and

New Testaments, Paul's letters to the Romans and the Corinthians, the need to radicalize modern religion so that it might act as a force for humanism in politics.

Shortly after he met Taubes, Bergman asked him to meet his student and a right-wing activist, Cohen. Why was Bergman interested in such a connection? As the correspondence shows, in his mind, they all shared a deep interest in philosophy of religion and political radicalism, and in the messianic solutions that both offered. Cohen, a former member of Lochamei Cherut Israel (Freedom Fighters of Israel), or LECHI, remained primarily committed to praxis, though she also took great interest in theory. The child of a traditional Yemenite family, she filled her diaries with kabbalistic and messianic images of the kingdom to come. As she reported in her memoirs, *A Story of a Warrior*: "When I joined the boys for one of their missions, I felt the spark of primordial fire, the same spark that would burn in me years later on giving birth." "Nothing," she declared, "is as holy as this war; nothing compares to it. This war is taking place on the land of our forefathers, the land of the kingdom . . . that awaits its redemption."[26]

The conflict Cohen wrote about was the one that LECHI waged against the British in Palestine. She had joined the tiny terrorist group in her twenties; her strong ideological convictions drew admiration from both friends and enemies. Her organization, commonly known as "the Stern gang," was considered the most dangerous in Palestine. So committed was LECHI to forcing the British out of Palestine that during the 1940s it kept up its attacks until the defeat of Nazism, despite the united front Yishuv had formed with the colonial power.

After the last British soldiers left Palestine, Cohen enrolled at Hebrew University and studied philosophy with the leading thinkers of the time. Her teachers—Bergman, Buber, and Scholem—had been instrumental in creating the first peace organization in Palestine. Brith Shalom (Covenant of Peace) was established in 1925 and dissolved completely in 1940 after a series of crises. An excellent student, Cohen soon became one of Bergman's favorites. He wrote letters and recommendations and introduced her to radical new thinkers, trying to convince her to abandon violent action for nonviolence and philosophical discussion.

Among the people Cohen met through Bergman was Taubes. In a 1951 letter the latter thanked his friend:

26. Geulah Cohen, *Sipura Shel Lochemet* (Tel Aviv: HaMidrasha HaLeumit, 1995), 41, 137.

> Yesterday I postponed my study of ontology and went to see Geulah (so
> you see I took your advice finally), eventually finding her. We sat together
> till after midnight, and I came to see how much messianic yearning roils
> behind her nationalist thinking. I said, "The goal should not be to reach the
> kingdom [*Malchut*], but first to produce a man worthy of it." . . . Geulah
> answered, "The empty vessel is ready to accept the wealth of sacredness
> [*Shefa Kodesh*]."[27]

After this scriptural foreplay, Taubes and Cohen strolled in the streets of
Jerusalem, discussing the radical options offered by a messianic temporality,
by Schmittian political theology, and by the new politics of the Jewish state.
Cohen ultimately found Taubes's mind "both amazingly sharp and absolutely
nuts." After graduating she turned to journalism and politics, becoming one
of the principal leaders of the radical right wing and the settlers' movement.[28]
In her political activity, extending to the present, Cohen has consistently and
insistently returned to an antinormative messianic discourse while stating
that "there is no hatred between me and the Palestinians. They are the enemy
in a legitimate struggle on the land."[29] But what does she mean by *legitimate*,
having advocated using "all available means" to take possession of the land?[30]
Cohen is a nonpracticing Jew, and she does not see her messianic perspective
as in any way religious. Her politics ascribes sacredness to the Zionist enter-
prise without appealing to divine law.[31]

Bergman found these incipient ideas and their embodiment in a beauti-
ful young woman fascinating. In time, he and Cohen would form a deep friend-
ship that lasted almost to his death. Despite Bergman's commitment to dia-
logue and peace, he was fascinated by the ideals of those carrying the torch
of messianic politics. Borrowing from Buber's *Prophets*—a book Bergman

27. Taubes to Bergman, 1951, Nachlass Hugo Bergman, National Library in Jerusalem, Arc 4-o
1502, file 134.

28. Interviews with Geulah Cohen, Jerusalem, August 20, 2006, and March 21, 2008. Cohen is
still active in various political circles and has a weekly radio program. During our interview she
complained bitterly about the loss of messianic yearning by the "corrupt" right wing; nowadays,
she said, she had "no more rivals or friends like Bergman and Buber."

29. Interview with Cohen.

30. In interviews in newspapers and other media, Cohen often claims: "It was a mistake not to
expel all Arabs from the West Bank during the Six Days' War. There is no doubt they wanted to anni-
hilate the state of Israel" (Yaram Netanyahu, "Unsheathing with Geulah Cohen," Jewish supplement
to *Maariv*, May 29, 2005, www.nrg.co.il/online/11/ART1/013/636.html [accessed April 2, 2008]).

31. During the evacuation of settlements in the Gaza strip, Cohen called for civil disobedience
and claimed, not without irony, that "jail is democratic too" (report to Yediot Achronot, January 5,
2005, www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-3028740,00.html [accessed April 2, 2008]).

read in manuscript—one might say that Bergman thought a great deal about the humane aspect of every ethical "adviser" to God. He extended such ideas as far as possible and thought Jewish politics "criminal" for diverging from the righteous code of divine moral conduct. His radical stand against the Zionist institution and consensus—an opposition he shared with Cohen from the opposite side of the fence—expressed itself in moments of radical crisis. One such moment was the 1929 massacre of Jews in Hebron, which Bergman interpreted as a watershed in the relationship between the two collectives and blamed entirely on the Zionist leadership.[32] Immediately after the war of independence in 1948, Bergman and Buber warned the newly founded state that it bore a direct responsibility for the hundreds of thousands of Palestinians who had fled their homes. Bergman and Buber did not refrain from calling the Zionist movement "a mistake" or from accusing David Ben-Gurion and its leaders of creating a violent and secular messianism.[33]

Bergman's long dialogue with Cohen continued not only because of his endless curiosity about her own convictions but also because he hoped to convince her of the benefits of peace and humanism. For him, action had to be linked to philosophical reflection guided by the Jewish prophets. He was not always the most judicious preacher; he accused his former student of being "the same as the Italian fascists I met during World War I" and brusquely rejected her arguments with the comment "All this talking about the kingdom [*Malchut*] is very well for the Gentiles, but not the Jews."[34] He appreciated her "yearning" and enthusiasm and admired her knowledge of Jewish sources, but he resisted her attempts to turn this utopian longing into political reality.[35]

32. Meeting protocol, October 25, 1930, in Shmuel Hugo Bergman, *Tagebücher und Briefe* (Königstein: Jüdischer, 1985), 316.

33. See Ben-Gurion to Bergman, July 18, 1960, Nachlass Hugo Bergman, National Library in Jerusalem, Arc 4-o 1502, file 702. Ben-Gurion said that he was "shocked" to read such forceful condemnations from the leading intellectuals of the day. Ben-Gurion rejected Bergman's plea for a Jewish interpretation of state and religion that would replace secular Zionism.

34. Bergman to Cohen, February 27, 1962, in Nachlass Hugo Bergman, National Library in Jerusalem, Arc 4-o 1502, file 1558.

35. No careful study of Bergman's politics has been written. Here I shall only point out the recurrent conflicts he had with the Zionist movement's secular leadership. He championed the two-state solution, which many view as anti-Zionist at heart. For recent literature on Bergman's earlier period, from Prague to Brith Shalom, see Scott Spector, *Prague Territories: National Conflict and Cultural Innovation in Franz Kafka's Fin de Siècle* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 135–59; and Steven E. Aschheim, *Beyond the Border: The German-Jewish Legacy Abroad* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), 6–44. Among recent studies by Israeli scholars, the best are Shalom Rahzbi, "The Personalities of Central Europe in 'Brith Schalom' Society" (diss., Tel Aviv University, 1993; in Hebrew); Zohar Maor, "Mysticism, Regeneration, and Jewish Rebirth: The Prague

How could political theology link such different souls and political rivals? A possible answer is Bergman and Buber's long-term relationship. Historically speaking, Bergman's career was a by-product of Buber's famous series of lectures delivered between 1909 and 1911 to the Bar-Kochba Zionist group in Prague. Bergman was among the group's founders, and it had been his idea to invite Buber to speak. He was also among those working to achieve Buber's Zionist vision, and to that end he helped Hans Kohn edit the well-known collection *Vom Judentum* (1913). Both Buber's lectures and the accompanying texts by young Prague intellectuals, some of them close friends of Franz Kafka, became foundational texts for the budding Zionist movement.

Bergman's own article, in that collection, takes as its subject the medieval concept of Jewish martyrs and then invites us to reflect on that period while turning away from its messianic message. The opening of the article speaks of the "separation of God from the world" and the position of humanity in the midst of such a separation. In 1942 Buber would address a similar theme and the inherent notion of crisis, and this was in turn echoed in Taubes's analysis of the "eschaton" at the heart of "empty time." All three Jewish theopolitical thinkers start with a "crisis of the hour" at the heart of Jewish theology but employ a rebellious and revolutionary tone to characterize this essentially negative event. Bergman wrote, shortly before Benjamin's "Theological Political Fragment" (1916), that violent means must say something about the very heart of piety, which in turn defines the very heart of the political. The political and the theological must be separated to be reattached. At this early stage, Bergman believed wholeheartedly that an idealist politics of Zionism could be this utopian solution to the gap. An immanent transcendence, then, was supported by the communal return to the roots of biblical language and faith. Bergman wrote: "The meaning of the sacred [*Heilig*] is in what rests entirely on itself [*ganz und gar auf sich gestellt ist*]; the transformation of consciousness into action takes place lucidly, without conflicts or misgivings. *Kiddush HaShem* is the direction of this act: prayer is a moral law not from the outside but from our own being." "Every word said by a non-Jew about Judaism turns

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Circle during the Early 1900s" (MA thesis, Hebrew University, 2004; in Hebrew); Dimitry Schumsky, "From Bilingualism to Binationalism: Czech-German Jewry, the Prague Zionists, and the Origins of the Binational Ideal in Zionism, 1900–1930" (diss., Haifa University, 2005; in Hebrew); and Yfaat Weiss, "Central European Ethnonationalism and Zionist Binationalism," *Jewish Social Studies* 11 (2004): 93–117. None of the above refer to Bergman's political activity after the mid-1930s. A closer examination of Bergman's radical politics during the 1920s and early 1930s will be found in the forthcoming volume on the early Israeli peace movement edited by Adi Gordon, ed., *The Jewish-Muslim Conflict in Palestine and the First Peacenik Movement* (forthcoming, in Hebrew).

to *Kiddush HaShem*. . . . In the present, Zionism is our *Kiddush HaShem*."[36] Bergman's emphasis on the fundamental concept of Jewish martyrology was a clear attempt to avoid the militant aspect of Zionism as a territorial movement while explaining the urgent need to find a secure place for persecuted Jews. During the years, facing a growing colonialist streak in political Zionism, Bergman distanced himself from it and moved closer to Buber's theopolitical critique.

This is how Bergman commented on his 1913 article, six decades later, to Cohen:

> About sixty years ago, before World War I, an article of mine titled "Kiddush HaShem" ["Sanctification of the Name"] appeared in a book published in Prague. I concluded the article with the words "Zionism is our *Kiddush HaShem*." Since then I have often asked myself: Would I still have written those words today? You, dear Geulah, would never hesitate before answering. Even in a moment of crisis, you would say, "The land was given to us by the Great One [*Gevura*, 'heroic'], and we obey." I cannot use such language, even if I felt that way when I was young. . . . I have to ask myself: What does such a prediction mean, when we deliver it in a political language [*Lashon Politi*]? I have no right to affirm or negate the Great One through my own opposition.

Bergman ended the letter by recalling a historical moment of transformation:

> I remember the first time Buber came, in 1927, and I went to welcome him, he told me in one of our first discussions, "I have a bad feeling because we came here without asking permission from those populating the land." . . . Today I read a report from an eyewitness from Bet-Nuba, near Latroon. In Bet-Nuba the houses are built of beautiful stone; some of them are magnificent. Around each house there are olive trees, apricots, grapevines, orchards, and cypress trees. Around each new plant is a small mound. Between the trees are vegetable gardens, tidy and freshly hoed. At noon came the first bulldozer and smashed the first house on the outskirts of the village. In one run the cypress trees and olive trees were all gone. Within ten minutes the house had been turned into a ruin, with whatever odds and ends were inside. After the destruction of three houses, a long line of refugees from Ramala appeared. And I ask myself: Is this *Kiddush HaShem*?[37]

36. Hugo Bergman, "Heiligung des Namens," in *Vom Judentum: Ein Sammelband*, ed. Hans Kohn (Prague: Verein Jüdischer Hochschüler, 1913), 41, 42.

37. Bergman to Cohen, November 20, 1972, in Nachlass Hugo Bergman, National Library in Jerusalem, Arc 4-o 1502, file 1558.

Cohen provided Bergman and Taubes with a certain limit case they needed in an urgent theopolitical hour. Like them, she found that the secularization of Jewish theological concepts implied a particular interpretation of the present; like them, she believed in the necessary moment of decision in a state of exception; and like them, she believed in the necessary presence of an enemy that would precipitate the manifestation of sacredness and divine authority. Unlike her teachers, Cohen took this all literally, and she ignored all ethical claims and philosophical abstractions. Put simply, Cohen was their closest theopolitical ally and their most distanced and estranged interpreter; among themselves they often labeled her a fascist. If the same theoretical perspective set all four against the Zionist institution, the teachers worked with philosophy and theology, the student with radical political action. Their state of exception was embedded in the force of Jewish faith; hers relied on actual political praxis and an attempt to bring about a permanent state of emergency.

Only once we have traced the path leading from Bergman's 1913 article to the Jerusalem of 1942 and then of 1952 can we fully appreciate the importance of Buber's *Theopolitical Hour*. Buber, Bergman, and Taubes shared a certain negative view of modern Jewish consciousness as being in a state of posttragedy and posttragic temporality: catastrophe was immanent and permanent; therefore it must be overcome. If Zionism proved the wrong path, the task of finding the true one forced an innovative intellectual search into the heart of politics and theology or, better, into where the politics and theology first met. Bergman and Taubes never ceased to argue with Cohen, who preferred a metaphorical and kabbalistic notion of heroism and *Malchut* to any sort of pacifist martyrology.

Still, an evident sign of the "Jerusalem school" is their shared suspicion of democracy or, rather, of how it was used to flatten and suppress disagreements. In his diary Bergman discussed Schmitt's political theology, which he found relevant even if terribly pessimistic:

> What Masaryk emphasized as a great service to democracy—"democracy is discussion"—is treated like a thing of the past. The worst of it is that, from a practical standpoint [Schmitt], [like] all other enemies of democracy, is quite right to claim that a human discussion of the problem will never create the Lord [*Herr*] who creates humans; this is the same point fascism and Hitler made. Is there no third way? Discussion is certainly sacred: God's voice erupts through man. . . . But in a practical sense he [Schmitt] is correct. Is there a way out? I see none.[38]

38. Hugo Bergman, diary entry, May 14, 1956, in Bergman, *Tagebücher und Briefe*, vol. 2 (Königstein: Athenäum, 1985), 218.

Where Political Theology Leads to Agamben

In more than one way, Buber and Bergman, Taubes and Cohen are still the best representatives of Jewish political theology. They all present a specific historical condition for the post-Holocaust transformation of that discourse. It was their work and their time that shifted a profascist discourse from its smoky haven in Nazi Germany to an extraordinary critique of liberal democracy. Political theology was where antinormative critics from the radical Left and the radical Right met, cooperated, and learned from each other before going their separate ways.

After he had returned to the United States from Israel, Taubes was hired by Beacon Press to oversee a special series on radical philosophy; he invited Buber and Schmitt to join.[39] Buber accepted the invitation and under Taubes published *Paths in Utopia* (first published in German, 1949), in which he criticized Schmitt for misinterpreting the history of political revolutions.[40] Taubes also orchestrated the invitations that brought Buber to America in 1957 to give a series of lectures. Schmitt rejected the invitation but opened a dialogue with Taubes that finally led to the 1986 lectures about the political theology of Paul, an idea Taubes had raised in his exchange with the Jerusalem school of political theology during the early 1950s.[41]

Throughout all this Taubes continued to challenge Buber. In June 1953 he congratulated his older friend on his seventy-fifth birthday and went right on to provoke him with some new theopolitical suggestions. First he recalled the three famous speeches on Judaism in which Buber had outlined a political and religious utopia. Taubes described the rise of the Israeli state, presenting it as an unconscious retreat of politics to a moment before the logos: "The state of Israel is the physical element, coming before the state of the gods." He echoed the argument that had been central to Buber's distinction between the two branches of the Judeo-Christian tradition—"The origin of the Jewish *emunah* is in the history of a nation, that of the Christian *pistis* in that of individuals"—but his conclusion was different, closer to Paul than to Buber:

39. See the correspondence between Taubes and Buber, in Nachlass Martin Buber, National Library in Jerusalem, Arc.Ms.Var., file 806a.7. For the invitation to Schmitt, see *Taubes-Schmitt Korrespondenz*, ed. Martin Treml and Thorsten Palzhoff (Munich: Fink, 2008). I thank Martin Treml for sharing this letter with me.

40. Buber criticized Schmitt in a chapter dedicated to Pyotr Kropotkin's interpretation of revolution and his anarchist resistance to the state structure. Despite the critique, Schmitt's "Power-Groups" are presented here as a necessary stage on the way to the utopian "League of Leagues." See Martin Buber, *Paths in Utopia*, trans. R. F. C. Hull (Boston: Beacon, 1958), 40.

41. See esp. Taubes's correspondence with Ernst Simon, in which he details his ideas about Paul as a liminal figure, with and against Buber's interpretation in *Two Types of Faith* (Nachlass Ernst Simon, National Library in Jerusalem, Arc 4-o 1751, Taubes file).

> As Plato tells his disciples in *The Republic*, and as Ezekiel practiced with
> his students in exile, the act of assembling the masses together is necessary
> to bringing the polis closer to justice and fulfillment. You are asking for the
> concept of the prophetic, or the prophetic element in the soul and the spirit
> of the economy of Israel. But the prophet lived until the exilic time in a
> self-understood unity. . . . However, at the moment when this togetherness
> collapsed, the critical prophet changed into a *law-giver* who also took care
> of cults and rites. . . . If prophetic charisma fails, one should consider pro-
> ceeding to the philosophic path of a struggle [*Auseinandersetzung*] to
> ground the rule [*Satzung*].

Taubes ended this section of his letter by reminding Buber that "Plato failed . . .
to see the *coming polis*."[42] In other words, prophets like Ezekiel or philoso-
phers like Plato should be replaced by a total philosophy that distances itself
from both politics and theology while admitting the Gordian knot that ties
them. Buber, from this perspective, failed to see that prophecy as well could
and should be historicized. The hermeneutic principle shifted in Taubes's anal-
ysis from the prophets and their realist function in the world to the boundary
separating a pre- and postdestructive era. The polis to come had to free itself
from that very distinction of two forms of temporality: the future-oriented
telos of the prophets and the untimely circulation of the *Jetztzeit* (now time).

Like Buber, Taubes admitted the utter failure of the Zionist messianic
claim; unlike Buber, he pleaded for a philosophic declaration of war against
the supporters of secular and messianic nationalism.[43] In his letter he echoed
Buber's complaints about his failure to convert others to the idea of Zionism
as a spiritual Jewish center. Both agreed that Zionism had become a militant
ideology and lost its ethical legitimacy, but while Buber continued to advo-
cate a prophetic and charismatic approach, Taubes believed that the time had
come to admit failure and move on.[44]

42. Taubes to Buber, June 7, 1953, Nachlass Martin Buber, National Library in Jerusalem, Arc.
Ms.Var., file 806a.7. My emphasis.

43. This was a declaration made in the spirit of a Romantic battle cry, as Jacques Rancière
describes it: "Thus is attested the living hope of seeing injustice and error vanish and the dispersed
populations unite in one body: not a Leviathan submitted to an imperious head and a regulated inter-
play of organs, but a supple and harmonious form of the multiple, resembling clouds stretched out
across the summer sky" (*Short Voyage to the Land of the People*, trans. James B. Swenson [Stanford,
CA: Stanford University Press, 2003], 17).

44. In his letters to Bergman, Taubes expressed his rejection of Zionism as a failed attempt for
political messianism, on the one hand, and a "negation of Jewish avant-garde," on the other. The
Israeli state, he claimed, was reducing Jewish spirituality to an impossible "ideal of normal exis-
tence" (Taubes to Bergman, undated [early 1952], Nachlass Hugo Bergman, National Library in
Jerusalem, Arc 4-o 1502, file 1453).

As Eva Geulen explains:

> [Agamben] marks the field of political theology, and the secularized rela-
> tion between the law and its genesis. As an essential figure of that field he
> mentions Carl Schmitt, the author of two books about political theology.
> [Schmitt] formed such a strong analogy between law and religion that his
> very definition characterized it as sovereign: all pregnant concepts of mod-
> ern political science are secularized theological concepts.[45]

What interests Agamben is not an attempt to overcome the crisis and form
a theopolitical individual, a positive figure who could redefine and reemerge
in the midst of a new democratic plurality. Rather, Agamben is interested
in the place of the sacred *in* politics and in the moment where law—and its
language—are created, namely, the *Jetztzeit*. For him, the figure of the "sacred
man," *Homo sacer*, turned to mark an untimely judicial entity, the negative of
the subject in any democratic system.[46] His sacred man is the ideal nonactor,
who awaits the end of all politics. In other words, if Buber and Bergman are
interested in translating theological concepts to the political realm while main-
taining a clear distinction between the ethical and nonethical, Taubes and
Agamben are more interested in the power and potential such concepts carry
for a radical critique of culture. This leads Taubes back to the moment before
the sovereign ban, before politics, and before the separation between Judaism
and Christianity. Agamben goes even farther, and beyond, and follows the
temporal logic of the postdestructive moment and the Christian tradition
Taubes criticized. His Paul, in contrast to Taubes's, is forever a messianic Paul,
forever hopeful and forever passive. The logical conclusion of his Schmittian-
Paulinian perspective is that the inherent exception of the political will lead
to its inevitable collapse; there is no need to assist it, or, better, one *should* not
help it. Any form of critical action will be used cynically to buttress a "fiction"
of critique that only strengthens the political grip in the law. Hence, when
Agamben speaks of a "political subject," he means the Paulinian subject who
violates the law by confirming it retroactively. For him, in contrast to Buber's
and Taubes's warnings, democracy is nothing but a dead end: "If democratic
dispute is understood for what it truly is, that is, the possibility of stasis or of
civil war, then this definition is pertinent . . . [and] the line between democracy
and its consensual, or postdemocratic, counterfeit . . . tends to dissolve" (*TTR*,
58). No "path of struggle" could come out of this end but crisis.

45. Eva Geulen, *Giorgio Agamben zur Einführung* (Hamburg: Junius, 2005), 134.
46. Ibid., 138.

I have tried to show that a theory of political theology must be grounded in the deep notion of rupture felt during the 1940s and 1950s. As we struggle to connect our lives and institutions to political realities very different from those that Buber, Cohen, Taubes, and Bergman faced, a revival of the ideas they promoted needs to be carefully calibrated for these differences. A recent surge of interest in the theology of Paul makes a new sort of political theology, a post-Schmittian sort, possible. In my view, the idea of retrieving a moment beyond any political convention holds great promise, but a certain messianic inclination strikes me as dangerous. If Agamben cites the same passage Buber analyzes, he does that without referring to Buber or to the legacy of 1940s and 1950s political theology. In his view, the story of the remnants is a story of Paulinian *Kairos*, not of a German Jewish attempt to save democracy by saving radical critique. If Buber interprets Isaiah and Jeremiah as examples of theopolitical realism that should guide modern democratic regimes, Agamben interprets Isaiah through Paulinian eyes: "The exemplary passage, which Paul even cites, is the messianic prophecy of Isaiah 10:20–22: 'On that day, the remnant of Israel, the survivors of the house of Jacob, will no more lean on the one who struck them'" (*TTR*, 54). According to this theory, "the remnant is precisely what prevents divisions from being exhaustive and excludes the parts and the all from the possibility of coinciding with themselves. The remnant is not so much the object of salvation as its instrument. . . . This remnant is the figure, or the substantiality assumed by a people in a decisive moment, and as such is the only real political subject" (*TTR*, 56–57). If there is a son here, he is not Buber's and Taubes's call for action. Agamben summarizes: "The idea of a messianic remnant is already contained in what Yahweh announces to Isaiah as the son's name: Shear Yashuv, literally meaning 'a remnant will return'" (*TTR*, 54).

Here, at the heart of political theology, lies the choice between the political (theopolitical realism) and the postpolitical aspects of Agamben's theory. If Buber separated the prophet from the baptist while Taubes bound them together, both hoped that the prophet would offer a radical solution, and both acknowledged the arbitrary element of the law. Agamben, in contrast, distinguishes the Jewish prophet and the Christian apostle, only to invoke, as Paul does, a nonpolitical existence with no future horizon:

> However one understands this closure, the prophet is essentially defined through his relation to the future. . . . This is what marks the difference between the prophet and the apostle. The apostle speaks forth from the arrival of the Messiah. At this point prophecy must keep silent, for now prophecy is truly fulfilled. . . . This is why Paul's technical term for the

> messianic event is *ho nyn kairos*, "the time of the now"; this is why Paul is
> an apostle and not a prophet. (*TTR*, 61)

Writing under the impact of two wars, as well as the emerging threat of an end-less war with neighboring states, Buber and Bergman were striving for a model of political responsibility, casting the prophet as an active and dynamic person. Between the "empty vessel" and the carrier of the "sacred seed," between the nearly messianic rebel and the apostle, it was he—the theopolitical realist—who was elected to explode time itself and to rise against the kingdom.