

## CALL FOR PROPOSALS

### Deprovincializing Political Theology: Postcolonial and Comparative Approaches

A workshop organized by Vincent Lloyd (Villanova University) and Robert Yelle (LMU Munich)

October 26-27, 2019 at LMU Munich

Having begun in the last century as a mode of reflection on the legacy of Christian traditions for the modern, ostensibly secular, European political order, the discipline of political theology has now emerged as an interdisciplinary project that links studies of religion across the humanities and social sciences. This expansion beyond its original cultural context provokes several questions. What does political theology mean outside of Europe and Christianity? What resources do other traditions offer for framing alternative theories of sovereignty, polity, and belonging?

From Carl Schmitt's early observations concerning the analogy between monotheism and monarchy, to Ernst Kantorowicz's explorations of *The King's Two Bodies* in medieval Christian thought, to more recent work by such scholars as Giorgio Agamben, the questions of political theology have been posed and answered largely in terms of categories derived from biblical or at least "Western" traditions, including both their Jewish and classical pagan branches. Scholars from within Christian and Jewish traditions have responded to the critical discourse of political theology, and these responses have often remained centered in Europe.

As a mode of genealogical critique of secularism, this focus on Jewish and Christian traditions makes sense. Secular modernity emerged largely in and through the development of European cultures, including through the colonial encounter. However, growing recognition of the Christian genealogy of many European political ideas raises, at the same time, the question of whether other cultures also have political theologies and, if so, how these might differ from their Christian and post-Christian counterparts. This question becomes especially salient in cultural contexts where some of the foundations of a distinctively European political theology—most obviously, monotheism—would appear to be lacking.

Abrahamic monotheism has been identified as the ideological basis for several tendencies supposedly distinctive of political theologies derived from the Bible, including their exclusivity and intolerance (Jan Assmann); their iconoclasm; their concept of divine right, based on an analogy between monarchy and monotheism (Schmitt and many predecessors, including Robert Filmer); and their concept of divine omnipotence, as suggested by biblical accounts of miracles, divine command, and *creatio ex nihilo*. Arguably, none of these tendencies is present in the same way or to the same degree in some other major traditions. For example, some early Hindu accounts of the divine origins of kingship resemble medieval Christian notions of divine right. Yet overall, the "Mosaic distinction" would appear to be lacking in Hindu traditions. Does this mean also that the political corollaries of monotheism are absent? Even in the case of Islam, we cannot simply assume that monotheism has had consequences for political thought identical to those that have unfolded in European traditions.

Is it the case that the European political theology is indeed derived, not from the universal requirements of any sovereign order (as Schmitt sometimes claimed), but rather from specific Christian underpinnings? Or is it the case that a fundamentally similar political ideology, one which depends on the logic of sovereignty rather than on parochial cultural assumptions, can indeed be found elsewhere? How we answer such questions will have important consequences for the

methodological focus and self-understanding of political theology as a discipline. And such questions can be answered, if at all, only by placing political theology in conversation with non-Western discourses.

The purpose of this workshop is to explore such questions by bringing together scholars from a variety of disciplines who can speak regarding different traditions. These disciplines include history, religious studies, political theory, cultural and literary studies, anthropology, and critical theory. Examples of the kinds of approaches we would welcome are: the use of diverse archives and ethnographies to interrogate some of the categories traditionally addressed by scholars of political theology, such as sovereignty, the state of exception, and the representation of the body politic; novel readings of the intersection of religious authority and political power in different cultures; and reflections on the implications of the anthropological or postcolonial turn for political theology as a discipline.

We would welcome proposals from all who are interested in discussing such questions. Dissertation chapters and draft articles would also be welcome, as part of the workshop will consist of a focused reading of works in progress, as well as of key texts. Proposals consisting of a brief vita and a 150-250 word abstract of the work to be presented are due September 9. LMU Munich and Villanova University will provide accommodations for those who attend the conference, and will aim to defray their travel expenses as fully as possible. Please indicate in your proposal whether you are able to reimburse any portion of your own travel costs. Proposals should be sent to both [vincent.lloyd@villanova.edu](mailto:vincent.lloyd@villanova.edu) and [robertyelle@hotmail.com](mailto:robertyelle@hotmail.com).

Some of the papers will be included in a proposal for a special issue of the journal *Political Theology*.

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