


# Introduction to Political Theology: The Next Generation

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The onset of the 2020s has presented humanity with a multitude of global predicaments. Some are marked by ethical, ideological, socio-political, and economic instabilities; others are viewed as threats (e.g., pandemics, climate and water crises, the rise of antiglobalization, nationalist, and nativist movements), with some even considered “elevated” threats (e.g., large-scale wars between dominant and emerging military powers). On a societal level, we have seen an ever-increasing number of people becoming “unsettled”, physically, morally, and ethically. This is perhaps a byproduct of what has sometimes been described as “liquid modernity” (Bauman 2000).

These and other expanding threats seem ubiquitous, having, for the most part, revealed the inadequacies of such traditional solutions, including democratic deliberations, wide-scale public reasoning, the balance of power and deterrence, large-scale transnational negotiations between/among sovereign nations and transnational organizations, and signing treaties and cooperation deals. Modernization, which includes a range of secularization processes worldwide, seems incapable of fulfilling some of its (intended) core missions, such as establishing the contents of human moral progress and emancipation from inauthentic ways of life.

If we were to allow ourselves to perceive this gloomy picture as being pregnant with a novel set of imaginaries and political opportunities, we could also allow some liberties in presenting how they can be understood from a variety of perspectives. The wide lens of political theology can provide a range of imaginaries that could help us consider and perhaps even start to, at least theoretically, resolve some of these emergencies – on global, regional, and local levels.

The aim is to review the span of a range of political theological imaginaries, some of which could even help us incorporate theories of authenticity, highlight the human potential to do “good,” and offer insights in how to sustain life on Earth as we know it. The effort here is directed toward developing potentialities for large-scale justice, freedom, and other values with a place in the ultimate horizon of human life. This proverbial horizon stretches beyond our time and space, and, perhaps, transcends human life’s physical components. In this Anthropocene epoch and its postsecular and, arguably, postliberal moment, humanity is engaged in discussing (co)existential possibilities and alternative modes of political life, perhaps even radical modes of political life centered on potentialities and deliberations of how to live well together with people with whom we may disagree (Arendt 1994).

The Abrahamic religious and other traditions have the potential to offer thought-provoking departure points in this regard. Their interpreters can potentially offer an exploration of the contents and consequences of the ultimate horizon of the human life. For instance, which political theologies rooted in these and other religious traditions propose alternative critical imaginaries and political opportunities for an authentic and sustainable future? Assume, for a moment, that these traditions could enable us to imagine politics as a secondary or even a penultimate activity, an undertaking that calls for critical analyses that traverse beyond (neo)liberal and secularist conceptions of politics and economics. Some consider these to be the only horizons through which humans find purpose and meaning; others disagree (Hallaq 2019).

Such arguments, however (un)convincingly outlined, are too fatalistic in light of the many bubbling imaginaries within and beyond the Abrahamic faith traditions (De Vries



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and Sullivan 2006). Therefore, it is imperative that we include, develop, and even rise above the evolving narratives found within liberation theology, Western-centered public theology, traditional religious and neoliberal dogmatics, including racial supremacist politics, and engage with the core existential issues that impact human survival (see Rabaka 2009).

How can humans live beyond these neoliberal and secularist horizons, commonly asserted to be the *only* ways to realize all political ventures as “salvation” projects? Is it even possible to imagine human existence beyond the economic horizon and the calculations of mutual interests and capitalist zero-sum outcomes? If so, then it is also possible to probe deeper into assumptions of the possibility of redemption within the framework of modern politics and economics. This probing into new modes of political theology takes heed of human political experiences and ethical systems incorporating human authenticity, dignity, coexistence, and even truth as important elements of the Abrahamic political imaginaries and its potential to generate sustainable living conditions for all.

On the one hand, Christian, Islamic, and Jewish political theologies centered on imaginaries that prioritize determining the truth, maintaining faith, and considering sacrifice might offer constructive and perhaps even fruitful ways of rethinking, reconceptualizing, and even revolutionizing how we understand human conditions within or beyond the broad project of modernity. The project that seems to be narrowly constrained by political and economic iterations of (neo)liberalism and secularism. On the other hand, these same traditions have demonstrated tendencies to generate mimetic forms of Schmittian conceptions of liberal and secular(ized) political theologies that have potential to be similarly inhibiting and authoritarian.

This Special Issue aims at presenting a range of (re)considerations and explorations of which, how, and where political theologies, internal and external to the Abrahamic traditions, can support the quest for attaining deeper understandings of the potentials in struggles to improve the human condition. Herein we can perhaps recognize some of the prospects for generating sustainability of dignified human and animal life on Earth through critical engagement with today’s global predicaments. The goal here is to present a variety of political theological conceptions and imaginations of the ultimate horizon of human life in a postliberal and postsecular world. In other words, what world is possible beyond the Enlightenment conceptions of human coexistence, authenticity, truth, religious ethics, and liberty?

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