

## CARL SCHMITT AND FRANZ ROSENZWEIG POLITICAL THEOLOGY VS. MESSIANIC META-POLITICS

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**Roberto Navarrete Alonso.** *Los tiempos del poder. Franz Rosenzweig y Carl Schmitt*, preface by Miguel García-Baró. Madrid: Escolar y Mayo, 2017, 280 pages.

Roberto Navarrete's book presents a quite unexplored comparative survey of Carl Schmitt's and Franz Rosenzweig's views on political theology. The book does not aim to investigate the possibility of a direct relation between the two thinkers, which never existed or at least cannot be proved. The only time when Schmitt directly referred to Rosenzweig—in a 1948 note included in *Glossarium* (1991), he actually misinterpreted Rosenzweig's own specificity by deeming it typical of a certain Jewish liberal tradition. To be sure, thinkers such as Leo Strauss and Walter Benjamin found great inspiration in Rosenzweig's thought, and thus Rosenzweig may be regarded to a certain extent as a hidden source for their critique of Schmitt's political theory. However, Navarrete's book does not follow this historical-philosophical path and concentrates instead on the theoretical level, providing a detailed account for the genealogy of Rosenzweig's and Schmitt's conceptions of politics and historical time, their notion of history, messianism, and eschatology. In particular, the book shows how in dealing with political theology both Rosenzweig and Schmitt faced the same questions and to some extent they even provided similar answers. However, they ultimately arrived at rather opposing views. Navarrete's main argument is that Rosenzweig's most important work, *The Star of Redemption* (1921), and in particular its third part, can be fruitfully read as a sort of critique *ante litteram* of Carl Schmitt's political theology.

The ground on which such a comparison between Rosenzweig and Schmitt can take place is the philosophical debate on secularization and political theology. First of all, Navarrete emphasizes the legitimacy of a political-theological interpretation of the third part of *The Star*

of *Redemption*. The first chapter starts with a focus on Rosenzweig's critical observations on «messianic politics» (*messianische Politik*), one of the main concepts in the *Star of Redemption*. In particular, Navarrete pinpoints to what Rosenzweig calls one of the «dangers» to which Christianity is inclined, namely the secularization of God by dint of the deification of the world. These remarks clarify how Rosenzweig was well aware of all the perils contained in the contemporary philosophical debate on secularization. Paradoxically as it may seem, in Rosenzweig's eyes the re-enchantment of the world is the result of the secularization process that began with the Protestant Reformation and the radical separation between Church and the State. The reunion of *auctoritas* and *potestas* in the secular sovereign is the condition of the absolutization of politics and of its new dangerous sacralization. Rosenzweig shows how the complete secularization of Christianity coincided with the deification of the State, of war, and of universal history, as it is made clear for example by Hegel in the last part of his *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*.

In the second chapter, Navarrete moves on to clarify many relevant insights in Schmitt's notion of political theology. In particular, the chapter calls for a juridical-political reading of Schmitt's theory of sovereignty. This interpretation has two important consequences. First: it means that the link between Schmitt's political theology and Catholic political theory should be understood only functionally and formally, and in no way through a dogmatic identification of the two models. Second: the book argues as well against merely decisionistic interpretations of Schmitt's theory that came to label Schmitt as an ideologue in Hitler's regime. According to Navarrete, it is true rather the opposite, as the Hitlerian State should actually be regarded as a permanent state of exception—or an *Unstaat*, as suggested by Franz L. Neumann. In contrast, Schmitt's theory endorsed a political configuration that aimed to represent a stable juridical order. Navarrete refers specifically to Schmitt's famous *Über die drei Arten des rechtswissenschaftlichen Denkens* (1934), in which the jurist reaffirms his institutionalism and the importance of a concrete order. What is more, Navarrete traces the origin of this conception in Schmitt's previous texts from the Weimar period, and in particular in his geopolitical writings. In this sense, Navarrete's most important contribution to the reception of Schmitt's thought has to be found precisely in the effort to interpret his political theology in a strictly juridical-political way. That is, from a historical-conceptual perspective, and not from a theological, confessional, or institutional point of view.

In the third chapter, Navarrete tried to capture the novelty of Rosenzweig's *Star of Redemption* in relation to Hegel and the paradigm of German historicism. The chapter offers a genealogy for Rosenzweig's late political thought through an analysis of his previous writings, including his *Habilitationsschrift* on Hegel and the State. Penned in the trenches of the *Balkanfront* during the First World War, Rosenzweig's early political compositions—to which belong for example writings such as *Globus* and the so-called *Makedonikusaufsätze* (1917)—not only reveal a geo(theo)-political interpretation of history that finds its roots in the reading of Hegel, but show a surprising analogy, both thematic and methodological, with Schmitt's later model of the «large spaces» (*Großraum*). This affinity should not surprise, especially if one takes into account the common Hegelian filiation of both Rosenzweig's and Schmitt's political reflection. In this context, Navarrete provides a subtle analysis of *Globus*. He sees this text as the laboratory of an interpretation of history and of a political theological approach that later on—i.e. in the *Star of Redemption*, Rosenzweig will think anew, criticizing in particular the dangers of its absolutization. From a historical-political point of view, Rosenzweig's early geo(theo)-political visions, here surprisingly close to Schmitt's, were connected

to his faith—before and during the First World War—in Germany’s leading political and military vocation with a view to creating under its aegis a new transnational Mitteleuropean space. The defeat of Germany in the First World War and the failure of Rosenzweig’s hopes are to be counted among the reasons for his later meta-historical turn.

Against this background, Navarrete’s most important contribution lays perhaps in the attempt to establish a parallel between Rosenzweig’s and Schmitt’s geo(theo)-politics of universal history, as sketched respectively by Rosenzweig in *Globus* and by Schmitt first in *Land und Meer*—published during the Second World War, and later on in *Der Nomos der Erde*. It appears for example that in *Globus* we may already trace the Schmittian antagonism between land powers and sea powers. This antagonism, Navarrete argues, corresponds to the friend/enemy distinction that Schmitt later applied to Catholicism and Protestantism, but also to Catholicism and Judaism. Navarrete pushes the affinities between Schmitt and Rosenzweig even further. Both thinkers would agree that the globalization of the world reflects a depoliticizing tendency, and yet here a fundamental anthropological difference between them has to be noted. While for Schmitt, depoliticization implies also a form of dehumanization; in contrast, Rosenzweig never reduced the human being only to its mere political condition. Already in his early writings Rosenzweig argued for the overcoming of the political, and—to borrow a Schmittian term—in favor of the globalizing perspective of the sea, which he charged with eschatological meanings. On the contrary, Schmitt could not conceive any other plan other than his anthropological politics organized according to the basic friend/enemy distinction. This different anthropological conception, Navarrete argues, is mirrored in the *Star of Redemption*. There, Rosenzweig envisions a different possibility of living in time and experiencing the world, which he finds encapsulated in the meta-political and meta-historical dimension of Jewish existence.

In the fourth chapter, other significant differences between Rosenzweig and Schmitt are investigated. According to Navarrete, Schmitt developed a kind of Marcionite view, according to which Judaism has to be considered “the enemy.” However, Navarrete shows how this characterization has not to be interpreted in a racial but in a pure theological-political sense. What is more, Schmitt’s Marcionism has to be regarded as *sui generis*, insofar as in Schmitt there is no gnostic rejection of the world. Quite the opposite, history and the mundane have been assigned the role of the *katechon*, of defending the *status quo* against Judaism’s aspirations to universalism and to the technification of the world. Such a task ascribed to universal history excludes any possibility to find a redemptive-messianic meaning within the mundane. This opposes clearly to Rosenzweig, who never stopped to see universal history as the stage in which redemption occurs. What is more, as Navarrete convincingly proves in the fifth chapter, the development of Rosenzweig’s own philosophical and political thought is the result of a direct confrontation with coeval gnostic temptations, which brought him to a complete different interpretation of time and history. As concerns Schmitt’s vision of Judaism, Navarrete criticizes any attempt to trace any sort of anti-Semitism in Schmitt’s thought, arguing that his theories have nothing to do with the biological and racial antisemitism of Nazi ideology. Instead, Navarrete sees Schmitt in line with a certain anti-Judaic discourse typical of the Catholic Church (at least until Second Vatican Council), and thus with a sort of Marcionism that pinpoints to the radical difference between Judaism and Christianity from a theological-political point of view.

Surprisingly, Navarrete shows that it is precisely this Marcionist view that Rosenzweig originally shared and eventually abandoned. Following more recent scholarly findings in

Rosenzweig research, Navarrete interprets Rosenzweig's supposed conversion to faith based in revelation precisely as the result of the rejection of an earlier Marcionite creed, which resulted in the acceptance of the mundane and of its pivotal role in the process of redemption. Here Navarrete pinpoints to another substantial difference between Rosenzweig and Schmitt. Unlike Schmitt, in Rosenzweig's political-theological model Judaism is invested with the role of the *katechon*. Judaism's meta-political vocation in the *Star of Redemption* is precisely meant to prevent Christianity from falling into an absolutization of its redemptive mission as a consequence of its messianic politics, i.e. forgetting that the world is still to be redeemed. There is no doubt that Rosenzweig still attributed a messianic value to universal history even in the *Star of Redemption*. In other terms, it is true that Rosenzweig did not deny the validity of Hegel's metaphysics of history, i.e. his idea of a secularization of the Spirit. And yet he rejected its encompassing pretensions. If such a conception of history corresponded for Rosenzweig to the philosophical expression of Christian truth, then the meta-historical and the meta-political function of Judaism in the *Star of Redemption* is precisely to de-divinize and secularize both history and politics.

While most of scholarly publications on Rosenzweig concentrated exclusively on his «return» to Judaism and on his turn from philosophy to religion, this book has the merit of scrutinizing the link between the *Star of Redemption*, *Hegel and the State* and Rosenzweig's other early political writings. The reader will find here a meticulous analysis that relates the genesis of Rosenzweig's later masterpiece to the more mundane philosophical questions that occupied him before and during the First World War. It is only by virtue of this encompassing picture that it becomes possible to illuminate all the far-reaching insights of Rosenzweig's political-theological concerns. Indeed, thanks to this genealogical perspective the third part of the *Star of Redemption* can be finally appreciated as a (meta)political-theological treatise and also conceived in its radical antithesis to what will later emerge as the Schmittian paradigm. As concerns Schmitt's political-theological view, through the careful analysis of its genealogy and the comparison with Rosenzweig's, showing both their similarities and differences, Navarrete's book stands out as an important contribution, in particular with regard to the relevance of Schmitt's Hegelian filiation and to the importance in his thought of the opposing relation between Judaism and Christianity.

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