they live in. For the Western societies they have immigrated to are founded on Hobbes' principle of the Great Separation. These societies recognize no political claim that is based on divine revelation alone.

In this mismatch between Europe's secular politics and Islamic religious faith lie the major points of friction in contemporary Europe. Different European countries have adopted different strategies to cope with them — some countries forbidding religious symbols (like the head scarf) in public places, but others permitting them. This diversity of the responses to the theological challenge is itself a problem. However, the more basic problem is the inability to address the challenge properly. And this we cannot do unless we first recognize the deep discursive differences that separate the believing Muslims from the European societies they inhabit.

On first sight, Mark Lilla's learned book sharpens concepts and formulates arguments that may help us understand the chasm that divides the groups. On second thought, however, the book may be too limited to provide a deeper discussion of the relationship between theology and politics in the contemporary West. For the book discusses Protestant versions of the Christian tradition; it says little about other theologies. The book may, however, help diagnose the problem that informs a contentious issue of politics in the contemporary West.

On *The Stillborn God*

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The Stillborn God presents many provocations and many difficulties. First and foremost has to do with theology itself. Lilla gives a somewhat cursory discussion of political theology in the first chapter of the book — readers new to political theology must rely on the words of "some" writers or "Christian thinkers" (36, 37, 41, 45), while those familiar with political theology can identify these "some" as Augustine, or John of Salisbury, or the jurists. Indeed, it is odd for a book devoted to understanding political theology's nefarious influence on Western politics to pay so little attention to actual theology. Especially given Lilla's likely audience, a more extended discussion of at least one of these theologians,

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rather than the more broad categorizations he gives, would have helped. Or, barring that, perhaps Lilla could have discussed a contemporary scholar of political theology in order to fill in the gaps — Oliver O'Donovan, for instance.

However, this lack of discussion about the theologians seems indicative of Lilla's methodology. In this first chapter (before the Hobbesian "Great Separation"), his methodological assumption seems to be that those thinkers who took revelation seriously can tell us nothing useful about political theology itself. This method leads Lilla to choose some odd examples of political theologians in modernity, specifically Rousseau, Kant, and Hegel (the Judas in *The Stillborn God*'s morality play). As Lilla himself notes, none of these thinkers took Scripture seriously as revealed Truth, and indeed tended toward a more amorphous (and perhaps sentimentalist or merely social-utilitarian) notion of religion. The only actual (Christian) theologian Lilla analyzes with any degree of depth is Karl Barth, writing over 260 years after Hobbes.

Why should Lilla choose such an infelicitous method in considering political theology? His definition of "orthodoxy" gives us a clue. Answering the claim that Barth and Franz Rosenzweig were "neo-orthodox" thinkers, Lilla writes, "...there was nothing orthodox about their thinking, which did not *appeal dogmatically to miracles, biblical inerrancy, or fanciful cosmologies*" [emphasis added] (267). Such a caricature would be amusing in a purely polemical work, but presumably pamphleteering is not Lilla's aim. Alas, this notion of orthodoxy is implicit throughout Lilla's book, which explains *The Stillborn God*'s allergy to examining theology *as theology*.

The larger project of *The Stillborn God*, however, perhaps indicates why theology is discussed in such a cursory manner: specifically, his defense of the "Great Separation." The "Great Separation" refers to Hobbes' move away from a political realm concerned with religious issues (such as miracles and "fanciful cosmologies"), instead focusing on the more mundane, concrete issues of human interaction in civil society — as Lilla writes, "Hobbes showed the way out by doing something ingenious: he changed the subject" (75). Under this view, theology must always be a danger to political discourse. Given Lilla's examination of theology, it appears that the separation of theology and politics should not be limited to practical politics, but indeed even the history of ideas.

It does appear that Lilla is familiar with scholars of political theology, even if they are not cited or mentioned. In particular, one can hear echoes of Eric Voegelin in *The Stillborn God*. As one example, the discussion on

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Gnosticism (27–28) follows lines similar to that of Voegelin. Indeed, it appears that Lilla shares some similar ideas with Voegelin on Gnosticism and political theology, although Voegelin is never cited. Why this absence? Among the potential reasons, two come to mind. First is the methodology of *The Stillborn God*: while Lilla tends to downplay the truly theological, Voegelin gave it pride of place (admittedly, through the prism of his somewhat esoteric style). The second reason is the result of a major difference between Voegelin and Lilla. Voegelin's notion of political religion distinguishes between Gnostic theologies (leading to such things as Nazism and Communism) and true theologies. Indeed, Voegelin himself implies that the Augustinian (or Neoplatonic) notion of "in-betweenness" is the preferred alternative. For Lilla, however, there seems to be no room for any "acceptable" religion — rather, *all* religion for Lilla must be political religion, and all theologies that make substantive claims on political life must be of a type with Voegelin's Gnosticism.

But even allowing for the lack of theology in a book about political theology, *The Stillborn God* has other problems where clarification is needed. Let us consider two major elements: the "Great Separation" of religion and politics brought about by Hobbes, and Lilla's implicit claim that the return of political theology (in its Messianic form) helped prepare the ground for Nazism in Germany. We will start with the second point first.

While Lilla never explicitly writes that political theology led to Hitler's rise, it is generally implied through his discussion of Hegel and beyond. He does explicitly note that political theological language could be used to justify the Nazi regime, but this is merely truistic and not terribly interesting. Perhaps he left the argument implicit to avoid historical objections: specifically, what about the Messianic movement in Russia before Hitler and the Messianic movement in China after Hitler? While Russia was Christian, certainly Lenin and the Bolsheviks faced a very different political theological situation in the Orthodox East from Hitler and the Nazis in the Catholic/Protestant West — while the theologies may have focuses on similarly fatuous "miracles" and the like, these differences were far from minor.

But, even more to the point, what of the rise of Mao and his Communists in China? Even moreso than the cults surrounding Hitler and Stalin, Mao's regime was the most horrendous Messianic political religion of the twentieth century, both in terms of the sheer loss of life as well as the overwhelming nature of its attempts to "re-educate." its

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subjects. But how could this occur in China, where the type of theology that Lilla describes was at best a small element in the society and culture? If we follow Lilla's implicit argument, either the Chinese converted to Christianity in numbers beyond the wildest dreams of any missionary, or the "Mandate of Heaven" and other Chinese religious ideas not only contained Messianism within them, but also included a Messianism that was exceptionally similar to that in Orthodox Russia and Catholic/Protestant Germany. In other words, either the highly unlikely or the patently absurd.

But what did the Messianic movements in Germany, Russia, and China share? They all shared a certain notion of the State. This brings us to the second problem, the Hobbesian "Great Separation" that Lilla describes and supports. Lilla describes the liberals' actions (taken from Hobbes' reform) in this way: "...they wanted simultaneously to protect modern man from the cycle of superstition and violence into which political theology inevitably led, and to reorient him away from metaphysical questions he could not hope to answer and towards more mundane pursuits" (93). What Lilla does not emphasize, either with the liberals or Hobbes himself, is the role of the State in the newly naked public square.

This problem is clearer with Hobbes and his notion of the State as an "earthly god." Hobbes aimed to remove the influence of Church and faith on politics not by simply denying the importance of theology to the government, but by *replacing* the authority of the Church with that of the State (be it in terms of what should be feared, "freeing" the universities, and so forth). So, too, with the liberal thinkers: while they were not as dictatorial as Hobbes, they shared with him the idea of State supremacy — on all issues of importance, the churches hold the same institutional importance as (rather eccentric) chess clubs, while the State remains the final arbiter. While natural rights were supposed to found the State and protect its subjects from the Leviathan, there was no institutional defense of the population (such as a Church) against the State, leaving only the atomized individual against the earthly god. The political religions of the twentieth century took this State supremacy for granted — whether these groups sought a State system based on eugenics or on the dictatorship of the proletariat, they understood that the State served as the final judge of good and evil, was itself the Alpha and the Omega of society. One might speculate, then, that Nazism is not the result of some reactionary political theology, but the fruit of the "Great Separation" — that the State finally took its own divinity seriously.

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