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From the Three Bodies of Christ to the King's Two Bodies: The Theological Origins of Secularization Theory

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This article traces the influence of theology on one particular strand of secularization theory that emerged from the work of Ernst Kantorowicz and Marcel Gauchet. It shows how Kantorowicz's classic text, The King's Two Bodies*, was deeply indebted to the insights of one of the leading Catholic theologians of the twentieth century: the French Jesuit Henri de Lubac. By tracing the influence of de Lubac's work on Kantorowicz and, through him, on the secularization theory developed by Marcel Gauchet, the article uncovers a surprising convergence between theology and the secular disciplines. In the process, it draws attention to the limitations of secularization narratives that focus on the premodern theological origins of modern political concepts, by showing how they struggle to account for the ongoing role and relevance of theology in a modern context.*

Since its publication in 1957, *The King's Two Bodies*—Ernst Kantorowicz's classic study of medieval political theology—has become required reading for historians of medieval and early modern Europe. In it, Kantorowicz traced in painstaking historical detail the medieval origins of the legal fiction that the king possessed two bodies—an individual, mortal body and an immortal body politic. Showing how this idea was elaborated on the basis of medieval theological models, Kantorowicz suggested that it created the conditions for the emergence of the modern state. The lines of continuity that he sketched between medieval theology and modern European political formations eventually attracted the attention of philosophers such as Marcel Gauchet, who molded the historian's insights into a more explicit theory of secularization.[1] In a 1981 essay largely responsible for introducing Kantorowicz to French readers, Gauchet explained what he took to be the book's pivotal contribution to secularization theory.[2] "What Kantorowicz allows us to

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[1]See, for instance, Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Modern Prison* (New York, 1975), 28–9; Claude Lefort, "The Permanence of the Theologico-political?", in Hent de Vries and Lawrence Sullivan, eds., *Political Theologies: Public Religions in a Post-secular World* (New York, 2006), 148–87; Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford, 1998), Ch. 5; Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA, 2007), 161, 192, 392, 446, 460, 712.

[2]Marcel Gauchet, "Des deux corps du roi au pouvoir sans corps: Christianisme et politique," *Le Débat* 14 (1981), 133–57. *The King's Two Bodies* was translated into French in 1989.

understand," Gauchet argued, "are the premises, within the person of the monarch, for the key passage from a power occupied in person to a *power that is by nature impersonal* … which is to say, the passage as well from a power founded on religion to one whose essence is secular."[3] In other words, Gauchet credited Kantorowicz with articulating a theological genealogy of the modern democratic state—one that Gauchet relied on to formulate his own theory of secularization.

In the very same article in which Gauchet introduced his audience to Kantorowicz, the French philosopher also cited another work of medieval history that is rather less well known today. Written by the French Jesuit theologian Henri de Lubac in 1944, *Corpus Mysticum* had in fact played a central role in Kantorowicz's own argument, as the historian himself acknowledged.[4] Though little known today outside the fields of theology and medieval history, its author was one of the most important Catholic theologians of the twentieth century. Henri de Lubac was one of the architects of a new theological approach known as the *nouvelle théologie*, which inspired many of the changes wrought by the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s.[5] And he was also a key player in the political and intellectual debates that consumed Europeans in the mid-twentieth century, seeking to carve out a new role for theology in the secular public sphere. During World War II, de Lubac would put this vision into practice by helping to lead the "spiritual resistance" to Nazism in France.

In what follows, I show how the account of secularization advanced in *The King's Two Bodies* and later taken up by Gauchet depends in crucial respects upon de Lubac's argument in *Corpus Mysticum*. In doing so, my goal is to articulate a theological genealogy of a certain strand of secularization theory. Doing so, I argue, uncovers an important area of convergence between modern theology and secular historiography, philosophy, and political theory.

And yet, this convergence also undermines in some respects the narrative of secularization developed by Kantorowicz and Gauchet and reveals the limits of theories of secularization that focus on tracing the premodern theological origins of modern political concepts and institutions. Such a theological genealogy of secular modernity has become a key theoretical framework for the recent interdisciplinary scholarship on political theology and secularization. Inspired in part by accounts such as Kantorowicz's or the work of Carl Schmitt, who famously claimed that "all significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularized theological concepts," historians, anthropologists, literary scholars, philosophers, and political theorists have produced a raft of works highlighting the theological origins of various modern concepts and institutions.[6] These have shown us how many

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[3]Ibid., 148, emphasis in original.

[4]Henri de Lubac, *Corpus mysticum: L'Eucharistie et l'église au moyen âge. Étude historique* (Paris, 2009).

[5]On the *nouvelle théologie* see Sarah Shortall, *Soldiers of God in a Secular World: Catholic Theology and Twentieth-Century French Politics* (Cambridge, MA, 2021); Hans Boersma, *Nouvelle Théologie and Sacramental Ontology: A Return to Mystery* (Oxford, 2009); Gabriel Flynn and Paul D. Murray, eds., *Ressourcement: A Movement for Renewal in Twentieth-Century Catholic Theology* (Oxford, 2012); Jürgen Mettepenningen, *Nouvelle Théologie—New Theology: Inheritor of Modernism, Precursor of Vatican II* (London, 2010).

[6]Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, trans. George Schwab (Chicago, 2005), 36. Scholarship that examines the theological origins of modern concepts and structures

features of the contemporary political landscape—its concept of time, its legal and ideological structures, and even secularism itself—derive from a (usually Christian) theological framework. But there is something puzzling about this recent explosion of scholarship on political theology: how rarely theology itself—by which I mean the discipline of theology and works by professional theologians—enters into the discussion, at least in a modern context.[7] This no doubt reflects the tendency to focus on the premodern theological origins of modern political concepts. The effect of such an approach, I argue, is to reduce theology's moment of efficacy to the premodern past, leaving us with few resources to understand the ongoing role of theology in a modern political context, including its role in the development of secularization theory itself.

Revealing the debt that Kantorowicz and Gauchet owed to Henri de Lubac thus indicates the limits of the contemporary scholarly fascination with theological genealogies of secular modernity, specifically the difficulty they face in making sense of the role and relevance of modern theology. To understand the theological origins of modern ideas and institutions, I argue, we need not reach all the way back to the premodern period. Focusing instead on the more recent past and examining the role that theology has played in the development of secularization theory and political theology gives us a better sense of the ongoing interaction between theology and secular political thought today. In the process, it throws into question the secularity of secularization narratives themselves, revealing their own theological origins and the way they can be deployed to serve both secular and theological ends.

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Kantorowicz famously opened his magnum opus by presenting the reader with a curious legal concept unearthed from the annals of Tudor jurisprudence—the idea that the king possessed two bodies. In his body natural, the king was like any other human being—subject to infirmity, old age, imbecility, and eventually death. But the Tudor jurists argued that the king possessed another body, a body politic, which was not subject to these infirmities. Invisible and immutable but existing within time, the king's body politic bore the dignity of the royal office. It was a legal fiction that framed the king and his subjects as members of a single

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is voluminous, but standouts include Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford, 2003); Giorgio Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory: For a Theological Genealogy of Economy and Government* (Stanford, 2011); Gil Anidjar, *Blood: A Critique of Christianity* (New York, 2014); Amos Funkenstein, *Theology and the Scientific Imagination from the Middle Ages to the Sixteenth Century* (Princeton, 1986); Michael Allen Gillespie, *The Theological Origins of Modernity* (Chicago, 2008); Regina Schwartz, *Sacramental Poetics at the Dawn of Secularism: When God Left the World* (Stanford, 2008); Devin Singh, *Divine Currency: The Theological Power of Money in the West* (Stanford, 2018); Eric Nelson, *The Theology of Liberalism: Political Philosophy and the Justice of God* (Cambridge, MA, 2019); Larry Siedentrop, *Inventing the Individual: The Origins of Western Liberalism* (Cambridge, MA, 2014); James Simpson, *Permanent Revolution: The Reformation and the Illiberal Roots of Liberalism* (Cambridge, MA, 2019).

[7] For instance, the most authoritative collection to date on the subject of political theology contains thirty-five essays, but only two are the work of professional theologians (one of whom is the Pope Emeritus): De Vries and Sullivan, *Political Theologies*.

body. In the words of one of these jurists, "he is incorporated with them, and they with him, and he is the Head, and they are the Members … as to this Body the King never dies."[8] This might seem like a mere legal curiosity, but Kantorowicz insisted that it had dramatic political implications. By drawing a distinction between the king's two bodies, this legal fiction paved the way for the moment in the seventeenth century when the English Parliament would turn the king's body politic against his body natural and declare the king a traitor to the King. In other words, Kantorowicz implied that the historical arc of this strange legal doctrine ultimately curved towards constitutionalism, as the body of the individual king came to seem increasingly ancillary to the functioning of the symbolic political order.[9]

The bulk of Kantorowicz's analysis, however, focused on a much earlier moment. After presenting his reader with the powerful political stakes of the two-body doctrine, Kantorowicz returned to the tenth century to retrace the origins of this legal fiction. His account proceeded through three stages, each associated with a particular model of kingship. The first—Christ-centered kingship—envisioned the king as the possessor of a double nature at once human and divine. In this respect, the king (or, in this period, the emperor) imitated Christ, with the caveat that Christ was both human and divine by nature, whereas the king was human by nature and became divine only by grace at the moment of his consecration. This Christomimetic model of kingship was rooted in a Carolingian distribution of spiritual and temporal authority, before priesthood and kingship were fully disarticulated. Because this model of kingship remained within the symbolic order of the Church, Kantorowicz insisted that it could not be properly considered a "political theology" in its own right.[10] With the eleventh-century Investiture Controversy, however, the spiritual powers of the king were increasingly transferred to the clergy, allowing for the state to achieve a sacral status "independent of the Church, though parallel to it."[11] It did so, Kantorowicz explained, by articulating a law-centered model of kingship that preserved the double nature of Christlike kingship within a secular legal framework, figuring the king as both the author and subject of the law. In this way, the ecclesiastical properties of kingship were "translated into new secular and chiefly juristic modes of thinking and thus survived by transference in a secular setting."[12]

The decisive moment in Kantorowicz's narrative was the late medieval shift to a third model of kingship, centered this time upon the polity. This was crucial because, where the previous models involved "mutual borrowings and exchanges" at the level of the spiritual and secular leadership, the focus of this exchange now shifted from the individual ruler to the ruled collective.[13] It was at this point in his

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[8]Edmund Plowden, *Commentaries or Reports*, quoted in Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology* (1957) (Princeton, 1997), 13.

[9]Here I echo Kahn's interpretation of *The King's Two Bodies*. See Victoria Kahn, "Political Theology and Fiction in *The King's Two Bodies*," *Representations* 106/1 (2009), 77–101; Philippe Buc, *The Dangers of Ritual: Between Early Medieval Texts and Social Scientific Theory* (Princeton, 2001), 233–4.

[10]Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies*, 87.

[11]Ibid., 192.

[12]Ibid., 115.

[13]Ibid., 193.

narrative that Kantorowicz turned to Henri de Lubac. The Jesuit theologian supplied Kantorowicz with the theological model he needed in order to account for the transition to polity-centered kingship—the idea that the Church is the mystical body (*corpus mysticum*) of Christ. Kantorowicz made plain his debt to de Lubac in one of the opening footnotes to his all-important fifth chapter, acknowledging that "in the following pages I have merely ransacked the wealth of his material … and his ideas."[14] And yet, de Lubac's was by no means the only, the most exhaustive, or even the most famous account of the *corpus mysticum* ecclesiology in circulation at the time Kantorowicz was writing. The vision of the church as the "mystical body" of Christ had undergone a major revival in Catholic theology during the 1930s and 1940s, culminating in the papal encyclical *Mystici Corporis Christi* in 1943.[15] Why, then, did Kantorowicz find himself drawn in particular to de Lubac's account, which was actually rather critical of the mystical-body ecclesiology?

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At this point, it is worth setting Kantorowicz aside for a moment to delve deeper into de Lubac's text and the circumstances of its production. Henri de Lubac entered the Jesuit order in 1913 and his formation was profoundly marked by two events: World War I, in which he served and was wounded, and the extremely bitter anticlerical campaign in France that culminated in the separation of Church and state in 1905 and drove tens of thousands of religious (including the Jesuits) into exile.[16] These experiences convinced de Lubac of the urgent need for new theological tools capable of bridging the gulf between the Church and the modern world. But he found little inspiration in the neoscholastic theology that had dominated the Church since the Vatican-led revival of Thomas Aquinas's thought in the 1870s.[17] De Lubac was particularly alienated by this system's rationalism and the sharp distinction it drew between the natural and supernatural orders, which he thought had unwittingly reinforced the secularization of European life. "The relative autonomy it accorded to nature" was "a temptation to independence," he warned, and "the most resolute secularists found in it, in spite of itself, an ally."[18] But he was also alienated by the politics closely associated with this model in French clerical circles, where neoscholasticism frequently went hand in

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[14] Ibid., 194 n. 4.

[15] Notable works from this period include Émile Mersch, *Le corps mystique du Christ* (Louvain, 1933); Karl Adam, *Das Wesen des Katholizismus* (Augsburg, 1924); Palémon Glorieux, *Pour la formation religieuse de nos militants: Au centre de notre enseignement. Corps mystique et apostolat* (Paris, 1934); For an overview of the French-language mystical-body theology see J. Eileen Scully, "The Theology of the Mystical Body of Christ in French Language Theology, 1930–1950," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 58/1 (1992), 58–74.

[16] See Patrick Cabanel and Jean-Dominique Durand, eds., *Le grand exil des congrégations religieuses françaises, 1901–1914* (Paris, 2005).

[17] Leo XIII called for this Thomist revival in his 1879 encyclical *Aeterni Patris*. On the Thomist revival see Gerald McCool, *Nineteenth-Century Scholasticism: The Quest for a Unitary Method* (New York, 1989); McCool, *From Unity to Pluralism: The Internal Evolution of Thomism* (New York, 1989).

[18] Henri de Lubac, *Surnaturel: Études historiques* (1946) (Paris, 2010), 153; de Lubac, *Catholicisme: Les aspects sociaux du dogme* (Paris, 1938), 242.

hand in hand with support for the far-right nationalist and royalist movement known as the Action française.[19]

The Vatican condemnation of the Action française in 1926 broke apart this politico-theological alliance, opening the way for new forms of Catholic engagement in public life and new theological models to go along with them. Into the vacuum stepped philosophers and theologians like de Lubac, who abandoned the Catholic royalists' goal of reversing the separation of Church and state. But this did not mean that de Lubac simply embraced liberal democracy and the secularization of public life. Instead, like many French Catholics in the 1930s, he sought to carve out a way for the Church to be in but not of the secular public sphere, and to articulate a Catholic alternative to both liberalism and the growing threat of "totalitarian" ideologies.[20] He found the resources for this model by turning back to the work of the church Fathers, who had been overshadowed by the dominance of neoscholasticism. This effort at retrieval, or *ressourcement*, would become his signature theological project and a centerpiece of what became known as the *nouvelle théologie* ("new theology"), which went on to inspire many of the changes wrought by the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s.[21] What de Lubac found in the Church Fathers was, in sharp contrast to neoscholasticism, an emphasis on the unity of the natural and supernatural orders. And he was also drawn to the ecclesiology of the Church Fathers, which allowed him to frame the Church as the only human institution capable of transcending the excesses of both liberal individualism and totalitarian collectivism. This at once political and theological project informed the Jesuit's various theological works, many of which took the form of historical studies designed to demonstrate how scholasticism had abandoned the more traditional formulations of the Church Fathers.

Corpus Mysticum exemplified just such an approach.[22] In it, de Lubac sought to show that the theological vision of the Church as the "mystical body of Christ," expressed most famously by Pope Boniface VIII in *Unam Sanctam* (1302), was in fact unknown to both St Paul and the Church Fathers. Instead, they had referred to the Church quite simply as the "body of Christ." According to the Catholic tradition, Christ possesses three bodies: the historical body of Jesus of Nazareth, the

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[19]On the relationship between neoscholasticism and the Action française (AF) see Jacques Prévotat, *Les catholiques et l'Action française: Histoire d'une condamnation, 1899–1939* (Paris, 2001), 441–8; André Laudouze, *Dominicains français et Action française, 1899–1940: Maurras au couvent* (Paris, 1989). The relationship between the natural and supernatural orders played a central role in these theological debates over the AF. See Shortall, *Soldiers of God*, 50–60; Peter Bernardi, *Maurice Blondel, Social Catholicism, and Action Française: The Clash over the Church's Role in Society during the Modernist Era* (Washington, DC, 2009).

[20]On the Catholic conception of, and response to, totalitarianism see Shortall, *Soldiers of God*; Giuliana Chamedes, *A Twentieth-Century Crusade: The Vatican's Battle to Remake Christian Europe* (Cambridge, MA, 2019); James Chappel, *Catholic Modern: The Challenge of Totalitarianism and the Remaking of the Church* (Cambridge, MA, 2018); Chappel, "The Catholic Origins of Totalitarianism Theory in Interwar Europe," *Modern Intellectual History* 8/3 (2011), 561–90.

[21]On the impact of the *nouvelle théologie* at the Second Vatican Council see Shortall, *Soldiers of God*, Ch. 7; John O'Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II* (Cambridge, MA, 2008), 63, 88–9, 147–8.

[22]The book initially appeared as a series of articles in the Jesuit theological journal *Recherches de science religieuse* 29 (1939), 257–302, 429–80, and 30 (1940), 40–80, 191–226. After its publication in 1944, de Lubac subsequently revised the book in 1949. It was this revised edition that Kantorowicz drew upon in *The King's Two Bodies* and it is the version I cite here.

sacramental body of the Eucharist, and the ecclesial body of the Church. In *Corpus Mysticum*, de Lubac foregrounded the strong relationship between the Eucharist and the Church (the second and third bodies) affirmed by the Church Fathers. They had understood that the mystery and significance of the Eucharist lay in its power to enact the Church by incorporating the faithful with each other in and through their incorporation in Christ. "Quite literally," de Lubac wrote, "the Eucharist *makes* the Church … Through its hidden power, the members of the body achieve unity among themselves by becoming more fully members of Christ."[23] Far from just an individual communion with the divine, the Eucharist was thus an indispensably social affair.

According to de Lubac, when the term "mystical body" was initially used in the ninth century to distinguish one of Christ's three bodies, it in fact designated the Eucharist rather than the Church. But through a "curious exchange of places," the term was progressively transferred from the Eucharist to the Church, as theologians reacting to the eleventh-century Berengarian heresy sought to emphasize the "real presence" of Christ in the Eucharist.[24] By the twelfth Century, the sacramental body would be conceived as the "true" or "real" body of Christ, in contrast to the "mystical body," which came to designate the Church. In other words, de Lubac argued, the triple body of Christ was now reduced to a binary opposition between the *corpus verum* and the *corpus mysticum*, between the "real body" that died on the cross and was present in the sacrament and the "mystical body" (the Church). For de Lubac, this transition reflected a broader shift from the more inclusive formulations of the Church Fathers to the sharp analytical distinctions of medieval scholasticism. Its effect was to individualize Eucharistic piety and dilute ecclesial solidarity by disarticulating the celebration of the Eucharist from the edification of the ecclesial community.

This might seem like an arcane foray into the intricacies of medieval Eucharistic theology, but for de Lubac it possessed momentous political and theological implications. Here it is crucial to grasp the *counter*-political theology and the secularization narrative that were implicit in de Lubac's account.[25] Conceiving of the Church as a "mystical body" disarticulated from the Eucharist risked more than just the dilution of ecclesial solidarity, he believed. It also made possible an analogy between the Church and secular political bodies that left the Church vulnerable to the forces of secularization.

To show this, de Lubac returned to the formulation from *Unam Sanctam* with which he had opened the book—the notion that the church is "one mystical body, of which the head is Christ."[26] De Lubac read this document as a basically theocratic bid by Pope Boniface VIII to subsume rival secular powers within the unity of the ecclesial body and position himself as its rightful head, in his capacity as the vicar of Christ. Although this gesture was meant to expand the power of the Church, de Lubac suggested that it actually had the reverse effect because it reduced the Church to a juridical body akin to the state. As a result, the "mystical body

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[23]De Lubac, *Corpus mysticum*, 104, emphasis in original.
[24]Ibid., 88.
[25]For a more detailed exposition of de Lubac's counter-political vision see Shortall, *Soldiers of God*.
[26]De Lubac, *Corpus mysticum*, 13.

would now be conceived … in terms of an analogy with human societies." By "thus applying to the juridical and social order a word whose resonances were entirely 'mystical' and spiritual," de Lubac concluded, *Unam Sanctam* marked "a sort of degeneration of the *corpus mysticum*, exposing ecclesiastical power to the resentment of the temporal rulers and the polemics of their theologians."[27] The effect of this slippage from mystical body to juridical body was that the secular powers would henceforth appropriate the term "mystical body" to hallow their own institutions, conceived as separate entities existing alongside the mystical body of the Church. In this way, de Lubac suggested, the theocratic pretensions of the medieval papacy effectively reduced the Church to the level of the secular body politic and thus opened the way for a secular political appropriation of the mystical-body concept. The Church itself had become an unwitting agent in the secularization of European life. This was precisely the argument that Kantorowicz would develop much more fully in *The King's Two Bodies*.

But de Lubac was keenly aware that the political dangers of the mystical-body theology were not limited to the medieval past. After France surrendered to the Germans in 1940, he had played a leading role in the "spiritual resistance" to Nazism. Along with fellow Jesuits Pierre Chaillet and Gaston Fessard and against the orders of his Jesuit superiors, de Lubac had launched the clandestine resistance journal *Témoignage chrétien* in 1941, the goal of which was to demonstrate the fundamental incompatibility between Nazism and Christianity.[28] Though de Lubac, Chaillet, and Fessard managed to elude the Gestapo and Vichy authorities, their close friend and fellow Jesuit Yves de Montcheuil was not so lucky. In August 1944, just two weeks before the liberation of France, he was captured and executed by the Gestapo while serving as a chaplain to the resistance fighters of the Maquis. Yet the position taken by these Jesuits was very much a minority one within the French Church, and the war therefore forced de Lubac to grapple with the extent to which Catholic theology, and specifically the concept of the mystical body, might have played into the hands of fascist and authoritarian ideologies.

For de Lubac, the political context of the 1940s thus gave new urgency to the effort to revive the ecclesiology of the Church Fathers, and he made these political stakes clear in the conclusion to *Corpus Mysticum*. In light of "the tragic needs of our time," he warned, it was all the more important to anchor the Church firmly in the mystery of the Eucharist. Otherwise, "the very strength of the communal aspirations which can be felt everywhere throughout the Church today, and which are driving the liturgical movement in particular, cannot be without peril. Here or there, they could degenerate into a naturalist impulse."[29] What worried de Lubac was the possibility that Catholics might identify the communal language of the mystical-body theology with the goals of earthly communities like the nation, race, or class. His reference to the liturgical movement suggests that he was particularly concerned that the vitalist and communitarian yearnings of the German

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[27]Ibid., 129–30.

[28]On *Témoignage chrétien* and the "spiritual resistance" see Shortall, *Soldiers of God*, Chs. 3, 4; Renée Bédarida, *Les armes de l'esprit: Témoignage chrétien, 1941–1944* (Paris, 1977); Étienne Fouilloux, *Les chrétiens français entre crise et libération: 1937–1947* (Paris, 1997), esp. Ch. 8; Bernard Comte, *L'honneur et la conscience: Catholiques français en résistance, 1940–1944* (Paris, 1998), esp. Ch. 7.

[29]De Lubac, *Corpus mysticum*, 293.

liturgical movement had led some into the arms of National Socialism.[30] These concerns were well founded, for the bio-theological metaphor of the *corpus mysticum* had proven particularly vulnerable to a *völkisch* appropriation in Germany. The theologian Karl Adam, for instance, had explicitly yoked this theology to the ideology of the Third Reich in a 1933 essay in which he used the corporeal metaphor of the mystical body, with its differentiated organs, to argue that ethnonational identity (something he defined in terms of "blood purity") was in no way incompatible with the universality of the Church.[31] But it was not just Catholics that de Lubac was worried about. As an early architect of "political religions" theory, he believed that secular ideologies such as Nazism and communism also tended to appropriate theological concepts for their own ends.[32] He went so far as to suggest that "the idea of the Reich itself [was] conceived after the fashion of the idea of the mystical Body in Christianity."[33] *Corpus Mysticum* in a sense expanded upon this point by situating Nazi political theology in a longer genealogy of secular political appropriations of the mystical-body concept that extended back to the Middle Ages.

De Lubac's efforts to revive a vision of the Church rooted in the sacramental unity of the three bodies of Christ must therefore be understood, at least in part, as a bid to resist the logic of political theology—the secular political deployment of ecclesiastical symbols. Such a logic presupposes an analogy between theology and the political, between Church and state, which de Lubac rejected. By reviving the Eucharistic ecclesiology of the Church Fathers, the Jesuit sought to remind Catholics that the Church was a body with no secular analogue. The fact that it was *the* body of Christ, continuously enacted in and through the sacrament of the Eucharist, set it apart from any other social or political body and guarded against the temptation to translate its aims into secular political terms. Eucharistic ecclesiology thus furnished de Lubac with a means to salvage the communal focus so central to the mystical-body theology while making this theology less susceptible to political misappropriation. "By preaching with insistence the meaning and purpose of the Eucharistic mystery, we are combating in a direct and effective manner one of the principal errors of the present day," de Lubac explained in 1942. "Everywhere, men are searching for a communal doctrine, a communal spirituality. We possess that spirituality. It is the doctrine of the Church on herself. But we know it only too poorly."[34]

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[30]See John Connelly, *From Enemy to Brother: The Revolution in Catholic Teaching on the Jews, 1933–1965* (Cambridge, MA, 2012), 68–78.

[31]Karl Adam, "Deutsches Volkstum und katholisches Christentum," *Theologisches Quartalschrift* 114 (1933), 40–63, at 58–9. See Robert Anthony Krieg, *Karl Adam: Catholicism in German Culture* (Notre Dame, 1992), 119. Krieg also points out, however, that the mystical-body ecclesiology could serve both pro- and anti-Nazi purposes. See Krieg, *Catholic Theologians in Nazi Germany* (New York, 2004), 164–70.

[32]On the concept of "political religion" see Eric Voegelin, *Political Religions*, trans. T. J. DiNapoli and E. S. Easterly (Lewiston, NY, 1986); Raymond Aron, *The Dawn of Universal History: Selected Essays from a Witness of the Twentieth Century*, trans. Barbara Bray, ed. Yair Reiner (New York, 2002), 161–202.

[33]Henri de Lubac, "Les fondements religieux du nazisme et du communisme," in de Lubac, *Résistance chrétienne au nazisme*, ed. Renée Bédarida and Jacques Prévotat (Paris, 2006), 195–307, at 289.

[34]Henri de Lubac, "La portée sociale de la messe: Rapport présénté aux Journées nationales de Lyon (avril 1942)," reprinted in de Lubac, *Corpus mysticum*, 381–90, at 390.

Of course, de Lubac's historical narrative also demonstrated how far the Church had diverged from this patristic model since the twelfth century. In other words, his account rested on a narrative of secularization—a narrative that was clearly directed against the theological approach with which he disagreed. When, in the final chapter of *Corpus Mysticum*, de Lubac tracked the impoverishment of theology as it shifted "from symbolism to dialectic," he established a very clear hierarchy between the Church Fathers and the scholastic theologians responsible for transforming the "symbolic inclusions" of the Fathers into "dialectical antitheses."[35] By demonstrating the limitations of the scholastic worldview, what de Lubac was really attacking was the neoscholastic theology that dominated the Church in his own day, and which he devoted his career to combating. For de Lubac, the tendency to distinguish, separate, or analyze was the hallmark of scholasticism in both its medieval and modern iterations. And he believed that this tendency made it an "unconscious accomplice … of secularism," unwittingly reinforcing the secularization of European life more broadly.[36] History played a central role in this critique of neoscholasticism because it allowed de Lubac to show how scholastic models—particularly late scholastic ones—had distorted or departed from the tradition of the Church Fathers. In other words, history, and the history of secularization in particular, was a theological weapon for de Lubac—one he could mobilize against his theological opponents.

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Though he was not a Catholic and was in fact quite suspicious of the Church, Kantorowicz found in de Lubac's account the key resources for his own secularization narrative. To recapitulate, Kantorowicz turned to de Lubac at the moment of transition between the second (law-centered) and third (polity-centered) models of kingship that he examined in *The King's Two Bodies*. This shift marked the crucial transition from a political theology focused on the individual person of the king to one anchored in the collective life of the polity. De Lubac's description of how the *corpus mysticum* designation shifted from the Eucharist to the Church in the twelfth century, finding its highest expression in *Unam Sanctam*, equipped Kantorowicz with the necessary link between these two models of kingship. And it also explained why polity-centered kingship had emerged when it did.

Recapitulating de Lubac's account of the transformation in Eucharistic theology and ecclesiology, Kantorowicz reiterated the Jesuit's argument that the formulation advanced by Boniface VIII marked "the beginning of the so-called secularization of the mediaeval Church."[37] The effect of transforming the "mystical body" from a sacramental concept into a sociological one, as de Lubac had shown, had been to reduce the Church to a juridical body like any other. This in turn allowed for the transfer of ecclesiastical concepts to the secular sphere.

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[35]De Lubac, *Corpus mysticum*, 254. This critique was not lost on contemporary Thomist theologians. See, for instance, Yves Congar, "Bulletin d'écclésiologie," *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 31 (1947), 83–88.

[36]Henri de Lubac, "Remarques sur l'histoire du mot 'surnaturel'," *Nouvelle revue théologique* 61/3 (1934), 225–49, 350–70, at 364.

[37]Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies*, 197.

"To the extent," Kantorowicz explained, "that the Church was interpreted as a polity like any other secular corporation, the notion *corpus mysticum* itself was charged with secular political contents." In this way, "the new ecclesiological designation of *corpus mysticum* fell in with the more general aspirations of that age: to hallow the secular polities as well as their administrative institutions."[38] Drawing upon de Lubac's work thus allowed Kantorowicz to account for the particular timing of the shift to polity-centered kingship, when the theological transformation described by de Lubac converged with the revival of the Aristotelian concept of the body politic.[39] Unlike the earlier model of Christ-centered kingship, moreover, this third model of kingship constituted a political theology in its own right, because it figured the secular body politic as a *corpus mysticum* that was distinct from, but akin to, the mystical body of the Church.

Even more significantly, de Lubac's account provided Kantorowicz with a politico-theological model that yoked the collective body of the people to the individual body of the king. As the Jesuit had shown, the progressive conflation of the first and second bodies of Christ had reduced the three bodies of Christ to a binary distinction between the true body of Christ and the mystical body of the Church. This development was crucial to Kantorowicz's story. "Here, at last," he concluded, "in that new assertion of the 'Lord's Two Bodies'—in the bodies natural and mystic, personal and corporate, individual and collective of Christ—we seem to have found the precise precedent of the 'King's two Bodies.'"[40] Nevertheless, it took several hundred years for this analogy between the two bodies of Christ and the king's two bodies to be perfected. The theological developments traced by de Lubac would dovetail with subsequent innovations in jurisprudence, such as the legal fiction of the one-person corporation, to culminate eventually in the concept made famous by the Tudor jurists. By the sixteenth century, the king had come to be figured as both a mystical body politic—bearing the immortal dignity of the royal office—and a natural body. In this way, he achieved a kind of immortality akin to, but independent of, Christ's and no longer reliant on a transcendent source of legitimacy. Summarizing his argument in the very last paragraph of the book, Kantorowicz once again singled out the central importance of the theological shift that de Lubac had tracked for the genesis of early modern political theory. "The King's Two Bodies," he concluded, "is an offshoot of Christian theological thought and consequently stands as a landmark of Christian political theology."[41]

Although Kantorowicz's account of this genealogy was deeply indebted to de Lubac, his evaluation of its outcome was dramatically at odds with the Jesuit's. For Kantorowicz, these developments in medieval political theology ultimately tended in the direction of immanence and equality—a narrative that served to authorize the author's own secular humanist politics. These commitments emerged most clearly in the book's concluding chapter devoted to Dante's model of "man-centered kingship." Such a model hinged upon the scholastic distinction between

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[38]Ibid., 203, 197.

[39]Kantorowicz also gives a succinct overview of these developments in "*Pro Patria Mori* in Medieval Political Thought," *American Historical Review* 56/3 (1951), 472–92, esp. 485–6. Here, once again, the historian acknowledges his debt to de Lubac and *Corpus Mysticum*.

[40]Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies*, 199.

[41]Ibid., 506.

the natural and supernatural ends of the human person—a distinction de Lubac had, of course, devoted his life's work to counteracting, precisely because he perceived it as complicit in the secularization of European life.[42] Kantorowicz drew a similar conclusion but attached a very different normative valence to it. He showed how Dante had radicalized this distinction to produce a blueprint for a *corpus mysticum humanitatis*—a universal human community modeled on the Church but entirely distinct from it and self-sufficient: "Dante, in order to justify the self-sufficiency and sovereignty of the *universitas generis humani* [corporate body of humanity], appropriated, like the jurists, theological language and ecclesiastical thought for expressing his views concerning the secular body politic; and thereby he arrived at the construction of 'a secularized imitation of the religious notion of the Church.'"[43] Whereas the *corpus mysticum* of the Church necessarily excluded non-Christians and was structured hierarchically, Kantorowicz insisted that the *corpus mysticum humanitatis* envisioned by Dante was a truly universal and egalitarian community. The poet had recognized that, like Christ and the king, the human person also possessed two bodies: an individual mortal body and the corporate body of humankind. While the first was subject to illness and death, the second endowed each person with a sovereign "dignity that never dies." Taking Dante as his mouthpiece, Kantorowicz thus portrayed his own cosmopolitan, secular humanism as the logical outcome of the historical trajectory traced in *The King's Two Bodies*.

This vision of a "man-centered kingship" has often been interpreted as a response to the political theologies that swept across Europe in the first half of the twentieth century and forced Kantorowicz, a Jew, to flee Germany in 1938.[44] More specifically, *The King's Two Bodies* has been read as an intervention in the heady debates over political theology in Weimar Germany, and as a rejoinder to the work of Carl Schmitt in particular.[45] Kantorowicz's narrative would seem to support Schmitt's theory that "all significant concepts of the modern theory of

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[42]As we have seen, de Lubac perceived this distinction as the characteristic feature of neoscholasticism. De Lubac's *Surnaturel* sought instead to show that human life possesses one end rather than two (natural and supernatural), because the desire for the beatific vision is built into human nature itself.

[43]Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies*, 463. Kantorowicz is here quoting Étienne Gilson, who shared de Lubac's opposition to neoscholasticism. He sought "to return to Saint Thomas himself" rather than reading him through his sixteenth-century commentators. Étienne Gilson, *Lettres de M. Étienne Gilson adressées au P. de Lubac et commentées par celui-ci*, ed. Jacques Prévotat (Paris, 2013), 59.

[44]See, for instance, Kahn, "Political Theology and Fiction." This is despite what Kahn calls Kantorowicz's "coy disclaimer" in the preface: "it would go much too far, however, to assume that the author felt tempted to investigate the emergence of some of the idols of modern political religions merely on account of the horrifying experience of our own time in which whole nations, the largest and smallest, fell prey to the weirdest dogmas and in which political theologisms became genuine obsessions defying in many cases the rudiments of human and political reason." Ibid., xviii.

[45]See Kahn, "Political Theology and Fiction"; Richard Halpern, "The King's Two Buckets: Kantorowicz, *Richard II*, and Fiscal *Trauerspiel*," *Representations* 106/1 (2009), 67–76; Alain Boureau, *Kantorowicz: Stories of a Historian*, trans. Stephen G. Nichols and Gabrielle M. Spiegel (Baltimore, 2001), 103–6; Montserrat Herrero, "On Political Theology: The Hidden Dialogue between C. Schmitt and Ernst H. Kantorowicz in *The King's Two Bodies*," *History of European Ideas* 41/8 (2015), 1164–77; Carl Landauer, "Ernst Kantorowicz and the Sacralization of the Past," *Central European History* 27/1 (1994), 1–25, at 19. Robert Lerner, however, rejects the notion that Kantorowicz was responding to Schmitt. See Robert E. Lerner, *Ernst Kantorowicz: A Life* (Princeton, 2017), 347.

the state are secularized theological concepts." For Schmitt, the logic of political theology indicated the need for a God-like sovereign who exceeds the law—a position that, in the 1930s, led him into the ranks of the Nazi Party.[46] Kantorowicz was certainly aware that this was one of the forms that political theology could take in the modern world. Elsewhere, he acknowledged the way the "originally venerable and lofty idea" of the mystical body had been "terribly distort[ed]" in the service of "ultra-modern statisms," such as the Third Reich and Italian fascism.[47] And indeed, Kantorowicz himself had not always been immune to the siren song of far-right politics even if he never embraced Nazism. As a member of the Freikorps, he had battled communists in the streets of Berlin and Munich following World War I, and in 1919 he joined the circle of disciples around the enigmatic poet Stefan George. Styling himself the leader of a "Secret Germany," George called for the spiritual renewal of Germany and the replacement of the liberal Weimar Republic with a new Reich.[48] These ideas found expression in Kantorowicz's first book, an unabashedly heroic and unacademic portrayal of the Hohenstaufen emperor Frederick II that was widely interpreted as a celebration of German nationalism.[49] But in *The King's Two Bodies*, Kantorowicz seemed to repudiate his youthful politics and the more troubling manifestations of political theology. Instead, his narrative held out the possibility that the secularization of theological categories might serve a more democratic, bureaucratic, and egalitarian politics.[50]

In making this claim, Kantorowicz echoed de Lubac's account of secularization and the antifascist politics that informed it, but he also differed from the Jesuit in his ultimate evaluation of the possibilities of political theology. For de Lubac, no human community could ever rival the Church in its unity and scope, and the logic of political theology was therefore both theologically inadmissible and politically dangerous. In making this claim, de Lubac echoed an argument made by one of Carl Schmitt's main interlocutors, the theologian and Catholic convert Erik Peterson. In his polemic against Schmitt in the 1930s, Peterson argued that no analogy was possible between the Christian God and the political sovereign because of the doctrine of the Trinity, and thus all forms of political theology were necessarily

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[46]Schmitt also had his own complicated relationship to Catholicism, one that was most evident in his early work *Roman Catholicism and Political Form* (1923), and in the last two chapters of *Political Theology*. He was excommunicated in the 1920s, however, and moved away from Catholicism. And though he was much taken with the political power of Catholicism, even these early works do not suggest a particularly deep theological grounding.

[47]Kantorowicz, "*Pro Patria Mori*," 491–2.

[48]On Kantorowicz's relationship to the George-Kreis see Martin A. Ruehl, "'Imperium transcendat hominem': Reich and Rulership in Ernst Kantorowicz's *Kaiser Friedrich der Zweite*," in Melissa S. Lane and Martin A. Ruehl, eds., *A Poet's Reich: Politics and Culture in the George Circle* (Rochester, NY, 2011), 204–47. The precise politics of the George-Kreis are much debated. While Ruehl stresses its ambivalent relationship to *völkisch* ideology, Robert Norton treats George's circle as a precursor to Nazism. See Norton, *Secret Germany: Stefan George and His Circle* (Ithaca, 2002), xvii.

[49]The discrepancies between the style and politics of this work and *The King's Two Bodies* has given rise to the idea that there were "two Kantorowiczes." For an overview of this debate see Brett Edward Whalen, "Political Theology and the Metamorphoses of *The King's Two Bodies*," *American Historical Review* 125/1 (2020), 132–45, at 137.

[50]See Kahn, "Political Theology and Fiction"; Buc, *The Dangers of Ritual*, 234.

illegitimate.[51] De Lubac took a very similar position, and in a book published a year after *Corpus Mysticum*, he went on to suggest that even the most lofty forms of secular humanism—of the kind Kantorowicz espoused—had a way of devolving into inhumanity.[52] Nevertheless, Kantorowicz and de Lubac deployed a very similar secularization narrative, even if they differed in their evaluation of its outcome.[53] Both dissented from a model that conceived of the relationship between theological and secular political concepts in linear or unidirectional terms. Instead, they argued that it was precisely because the Church increasingly began to act like a state that the state could fashion itself as something like a Church. The relationship was a chiasmatic one, by which the theological and the political increasingly came to mirror one another.[54] Driving this process was a logic of doubling, division, and dialectic that rent apart what was once unified and thereby inaugurated the possibility of political theology.

And yet, one important difference remained between their respective secularization narratives. Though Kantorowicz resisted a linear, teleological theory of secularization, the trajectory of his account nevertheless moved very clearly from transcendence to immanence, and from the universal Church to the universal human race. As with so many theological genealogies of secular political concepts, then, his narrative tended implicitly to confine theology's political power to the premodern past. As a theologian, and one who looked to theology as the main bulwark against secular political theologies in his own day, this was a position that de Lubac evidently could not share. For one thing, the temporal vision that underwrote the Jesuit's work resisted the logic of historicism that informed historical scholarship such as *The King's Two Bodies*. Central to de Lubac's project of *ressourcement* was the notion that the patristic sources of the Catholic tradition were not locked in the distant past but could be reactivated in the present, since theology was a living tradition. And this meant that it still had an important political role to play in the modern world. To be clear, de Lubac did not wish to return to the medieval alliance of throne and altar. He recognized that the separation of Church and state was an irreversible fact of modern life, and one that had actually liberated the Church from an unholy alliance with the powers of this world. But this did not mean that the Church and theology no longer had a role to play in public life. Rejecting the liberal notion that the Church should confine itself to the private sphere, de Lubac insisted on the political value of theology as a bulwark against

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[51]Peterson responded to Schmitt's argument in his 1935 book, *Monotheismus als politisches Problem*. In the 1940s and 1950s, de Lubac and Peterson became quite close and Kantorowicz likewise cites Peterson in *The King's Two Bodies*, though his work was much less central to Kantorowicz's argument than de Lubac's was. See György Geréby, "Carl Schmitt and Erik Peterson on the Problem of Political Theology: A Footnote to Kantorowicz," in Azid Al-Azmeh and János M. Bak, eds., *Monotheistic Kingship: The Medieval Variants* (Budapest, 2005), 31–61.

[52]Henri de Lubac, *Le drame de l'humanisme athée* (Paris, 1945).

[53]Here I differ from Jennifer Rust, who argues that Kantorowicz distorted de Lubac's account. It is important to distinguish between the secularization narrative that informs both of their works, and the normative judgment they respectively attached to it. The fact that they diverged radically on the second point, I argue, did not prevent them from broadly agreeing on the first. See Jennifer Rust, "Political Theologies of the *Corpus Mysticum*: Schmitt, Kantorowicz and de Lubac," in Graham Hamill and Julia Reinhard Lupton, eds., *Political Theology and Early Modernity* (Chicago, 2012), 147–76.

[54]Kahn, "Political Theology and Fiction," 94.

anti-Christian ideologies and the overweening power of the state—a role he sought to enact through his own resistance activities. While he and Kantorowicz arrived at a similar account of the origins of secularization, then, de Lubac believed that this process was necessarily destined to remain incomplete and that the eternal message of the Church would continue to shape human history.

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De Lubac's influence on the development of secularization theory did not end with Kantorowicz. In the 1980s, *The King's Two Bodies* became a key resource for philosophers and historians—particularly in France—seeking to make sense of the origins and structure of modern democracy. This wave of interest in Kantorowicz coincided with the "antitotalitarian moment," when Marxism and revolutionary politics lost its privileged position in French intellectual life following the events of 1968 and the landmark publication of Alexander Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipelago* in 1974.[55] One effect of the antitotalitarian turn was a "liberal revival" pioneered by the circle around Raymond Aron, which returned to the work of nineteenth-century French liberals such as Alexis de Tocqueville and Benjamin Constant. Others, however, eschewed the mantle of liberalism and might more properly be described as "post-Marxist" or "neo-republican."[56] But what united all of these intellectuals was a shared interest in the historical and theoretical foundations of democracy—a theme most evident in the work of Claude Lefort, Marcel Gauchet, François Furet, Pierre Manent, Cornelius Castoriadis, and Pierre Rosanvallon. This concern led them to probe the precise relationship between democracy and totalitarianism, as well as to revisit the historiography of the French Revolution.

As Marcel Gauchet and Pierre Nora observed, these intellectual developments in the 1970s and 1980s also helped to inaugurate "the return of religion as a central object of social theory and a legitimate object of secular reflection."[57] While some interpreted the decline of Marxism as a victory for secular politics over totalitarian political religions, for many French philosophers—including Lefort and Gauchet—the prospect of a fully disenchanted politics was a source of some anxiety. As Warren Breckman has noted, the antitotalitarian moment undermined

[55]On the antitotalitarian moment in France see Michael Scott Christofferson, *French Intellectuals against the Left: The Antitotalitarian Moment of the 1970s* (New York, 2004).

[56]On the "liberal revival" see Stephen W. Sawyer and Iain Stewart, eds., *In Search of the Liberal Moment: Democracy, Anti-totalitarianism, and Intellectual Politics in France since 1950* (New York, 2016), which offers a welcome corrective to the triumphalist accounts by Tony Judt and Mark Lilla. On "post-Marxism" see Warren Breckman, *Adventures of the Symbolic: Postmarxism and Democratic Theory* (New York, 2013). On "neo-republicanism" see Émile Chabal, ed., *France since the 1970s: History, Politics, and Memory in an Age of Uncertainty* (London, 2014), Part 3. Gauchet and Lefort in particular seem to fit awkwardly under the rubric of a "liberal revival." See Noah Rosenblum, "Rethinking the French Liberal Moment: Some Thoughts on the Heterogeneous Origins of Lefort and Gauchet's Social Philosophy," in Sawyer and Stewart, *In Search of the Liberal Moment*, 61–83.

[57]Marcel Gauchet and Pierre Nora, "Aujourd'hui," *Le Débat* 50 (May–Aug. 1988), 147, also quoted in Warren Breckman, "Democracy between Disenchantment and Political Theology: French Post-Marxism and the Return of Religion," *New German Critique* 32/1 (2005), 72–105, at 75.

the metanarratives that had grounded both socialism and democracy, and it was not at all clear whether a disenchanted democracy could stand on its own two feet, or whether it might require a sacral foundation—a question already raised by the German Catholic jurist Ernst-Wolfgang Böckenförde.[58] The decline of Marxism also favored the return of religion to French intellectual life because it rescued religion from the superstructural irrelevance to which Marxist theory had confined it. This was particularly evident in the historiography of the period, as historians such as François Furet sought to revise the classic Marxist account of the Revolution's origins. Kantorowicz's argument in *The King's Two Bodies* became an important resource both for the political theory of Gauchet and Lefort, and for the new histories of the French Revolution that emerged in the 1980s and 1990s, which privileged the role of political representations over socioeconomic factors.[59] And by reviving the work of Kantorowicz, these philosophers and historians also frequently relied (albeit indirectly) on de Lubac's insights, ensuring the theologian's continuing impact on secular intellectual life.

It was Marcel Gauchet who was largely responsible for systematically introducing French audiences to the work of Ernst Kantorowicz in a series of articles published in 1981 in *Le Débat*—the journal he cofounded with Pierre Nora.[60] Here, Gauchet figured *The King's Two Bodies* as nothing less than a genealogy of political modernity—one that illuminated the origins of democracy and the sovereign nation-state. Kantorowicz himself had avoided making grandiose claims of this sort and had concluded his story in the sixteenth century, but Gauchet picked up where Kantorowicz had left off and transformed his narrative into a much more linear and explicit theory of secularization. The key moment in the birth of modern politics, for Gauchet, was the transition from the embodied sovereignty of absolute monarchy to the disembodied sovereignty of representative democracy. He credited Kantorowicz with explaining this transition by showing how the concentration of power in the body of the king had paradoxically paved the way for the disembodiment of power. Reiterating the three models of kingship traced by Kantorowicz, Gauchet singled out the transition to "polity-centered kingship" as the key moment in this story. And this is where he turned, just as Kantorowicz had done, to the theological transformation traced by Henri de Lubac.

Prior to this moment, Gauchet explained, the king sought to mimic Christ's role as mediator between heaven and earth. His function was to incarnate divine exteriority within human society. This is why the theological transformation that de

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[58] Breckman, "Democracy between Disenchantment and Political Theology," 72–105. This point is also made by Michael Behrent, "Religion, Republicanism, and Depoliticization: Two Intellectual Itineraries. Régis Debray and Marcel Gauchet," in Julian Bourg, ed., *After the Deluge: New Perspectives on the Intellectual and Cultural History of Postwar France* (Lanham, 2004), 325–349. Böckenförde's famous "dictum" that "the liberal, secularized state is nourished by presuppositions that it cannot itself guarantee" is laid out in Ernst Böckenförde, "Die Entstehung des Staates als Vorgang der Säkularisation," in Böckenförde, *Staat, Gesellschaft, Freiheit: Studien zur Staatstheorie und zum Verfassungsrecht* (Frankfurt, 1976), 60.

[59] On Kantorowicz's influence on Gauchet and Lefort see Daniel Steinmetz-Jenkins, "French *Laïcité* and the Recent Reception of the German Secularization Debate into France," *Politics, Religion and Ideology* 12/4 (2011), 433–47, at 437–8, 441, 444; Breckman, *Adventures of the Symbolic*, 163, 172–3, 318 n. 89.

[60] Gauchet, "Christianisme et politique"; Marcel Gauchet, "Des deux corps du roi au pouvoir sans corps: Christianisme et politique 2," *Le Débat* 15 (Sept.–Oct. 1981), 147–68.

Lubac had outlined in *Corpus Mysticum* was so significant. Like Kantorowicz, Gauchet ascribed a central role to the development of the *corpus mysticum* concept and its transfer from the Church to the state at precisely the moment when territorial nation-states were beginning to emerge. The *corpus mysticum* theology supplied an alternative model of kingship—one that transformed the king into the physical embodiment of the mystical body of the nation rather than the incarnation of divine alterity. Gauchet characterized this as a shift from "incarnated power" to "incorporated power," from a logic of exteriority to a logic of interiority. The king no longer represented the otherness of the divine, but rather the internal congruence between state and society, which had the "ineluctable effect of bringing the rationale for human organization back down to earth."[61] This shift within the symbolic foundations of monarchical power thus marked a crucial step in the secularization of European politics.

The other key feature of the *corpus mysticum* concept, for Gauchet, was the way it bound the individual body of Christ/the king to the collective body of the Church/nation, introducing an entirely "new economy of the co-definition of the collective organism and its royal head."[62] The effect of constituting the nation as a body in and through the physical body of the king, Gauchet argued, was to heighten the identity and solidarity of the national body. But the more the nation came to be figured as a body, the less it depended upon a physical body to signify it. The body of the king became increasingly ancillary to the unity and coherence of the national body, opening the way for the disembodiment of political power and the rise of popular sovereignty. In other words, concentrating power in the body of the king paradoxically marked "the beginning of a movement beyond the political economy of the body; the start of the very process by which the framework of the age-old and necessary incarnation of power would gradually come undone."[63] Gauchet thus credited Kantorowicz with revealing that the "incorporated power" of the thirteenth-century monarchies contained within it the symbolic roots of democratic sovereignty.

Gauchet expanded these insights into a much broader theory of secularization in his celebrated 1985 work *The Disenchantment of the World*. In it, he sought to show how democratic autonomy had emerged from the bosom of religious heteronomy, and the transcendence of God in relation to humanity had given way to the secular transcendence of the state over society. In this narrative of secularization, Gauchet endowed Christianity with a pivotal role. Far from bridging the gulf between the world and the beyond, he argued, the doctrine of the Incarnation in fact radicalized the tension between transcendence and immanence Introduced by the advent of monotheism. By making Christ the sole mediator between heaven and earth, Christianity had actually heightened the separation between the two, placing Church and state on an inevitable collision course. The source of secularization was therefore to be found within Christianity itself, making it the "religion for departing from religion."[64] The advent of modern secular politics was the inevitable outcome of Christianity's constitutive tension working itself out.

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[61]Gauchet, "Christianisme et politique 2," 166.

[62]Ibid., 151.

[63]Ibid., 158.

[64]Marcel Gauchet, *The Disenchantment of the World: A Political History of Religion*, trans. Oscar Burge (Princeton, 1997), 101.

But this was a remarkably ahistorical argument and it left Gauchet with few resources to explain precisely how and when secularization had in fact occurred. Here, Kantorowicz (and, by extension, de Lubac) furnished Gauchet with the historical details he needed to anchor his secularization narrative. Following Kantorowicz, Gauchet identified the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries as the pivotal moment of transition, when spiritual and temporal authority were disentangled and the state began to claim a sacral authority distinct from the Church. Like his predecessors, Gauchet attributed this development to the backlash against papal hierocracy and the rise of new politico-theological models such as the *corpus mysticum*, which was taken over and secularized by emerging nation-states.[65] By endowing temporal authority with its own secular sacrality, Gauchet argued, these symbols emancipated the political order from its dependence on a transcendent God and thereby opened the way for representative democracy:

> Once the split between this world and the beyond has caused political authority to take responsibility for representing and organizing collective-being, then individuals will soon exercize sovereignty, whatever royal trappings of authority remain. The State colossus is first strengthened, only to open itself up later to its subjects. By deepening the separation from its subjects, the State ends up being identified with them, in that those who submit to power will eventually claim the right to constitute it.[66]

Transcendence was not abandoned, but simply transferred to the state. And just as divine transcendence had opened the way for worldly self-sufficiency, the transcendence of the absolutist state paradoxically opened a space for popular sovereignty. Within this long historical trajectory from religious heteronomy to secular autonomy, the politico-theological transformations of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries constituted "the major turning point" for Gauchet. Echoing Kantorowicz, he identified this moment as "the beginnings of modern politics."[67]

Religion and theology played an ambivalent role in Gauchet's narrative. Central to his account was the claim that religion, and in particular Christianity, continued to structure modern politics—that Christian transcendence and heteronomy were not overcome in modern democratic societies, but simply secularized and transposed onto the relations between state and society. The constitutive division and duality at the heart of Christianity, which made it the "religion for departing from religion," was therefore preserved within representative democracy. And this was important because, like his teacher Claude Lefort, Gauchet believed that this element of division and heteronomy at the heart of democracy was precisely what distinguished it from totalitarianism.[68] In this way, the legacy of Christian

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[65]Ibid., 140–43.

[66]Ibid., 58–9.

[67]Ibid., 142.

[68]Claude Lefort also played a key role in the dissemination of Kantorowicz's thought in France, but he developed a rather different understanding of the relationship between theology and the political. Whereas Gauchet looked to the heteronomy inherited from religion as a bulwark against totalitarianism, Lefort instead saw totalitarianism as the modern extension of the theological desire to incarnate social unity in the form of a body. See Lefort, "The Permanence of the Theologico-Political?"; Carlo Invernizzi Accetti,

transcendence continued to perform crucial work in a modern secular context as the foundation and guarantor of democratic structures.[69] As with Kantorowicz, Gauchet's theological genealogy of modern political institutions thus provided these institutions with a kind of sacral weight, which is perhaps why both of them accorded such a central place to the theology of the *corpus mysticum* in their respective accounts of the emergence of the modern state.

But Gauchet was equally at pains to stress that these institutions have become well and truly secular and no longer depend on religion for their authority. In other words, Christianity had to furnish democracy with a sacred foundation without threatening the secular self-sufficiency of this system in its contemporary incarnation. This explains the ambivalent place that religion occupied in Gauchet's account. On the one hand, he insisted that "the age of religions has been definitively closed," that religion has become a matter of individual belief and no longer structures collective life. On the other hand, he argued that "religion is neutralized within the universe it has decisively contributed to shaping," and consequently, "if we have surpassed the religious, it has not left us, and perhaps never will."[70] Religion has made the world we currently inhabit, in other words, but we can only comprehend it and the world it created once we have departed from it. This double gesture, by which Gauchet at once invoked and disavowed democracy's debt to religion, was a key feature of his secularization theory.

This double imperative tells us much about the particular role that theology played in the secularization narrative that emerged from the work of Kantorowicz, and especially Gauchet, and why their shared debt to de Lubac is significant. Such a narrative acknowledged that modern politics was historically indebted to Christian theology, but only on the condition that theology no longer present a live alternative to secular political projects in the present. It thus rested on both an affirmation and a denial of the relationship between modern politics and theology. And what squared these competing imperatives was the logic of periodization, which identified theology with premodernity. If Kantorowicz and Gauchet attended to the theological origins of modern political formations, they projected the moment of convergence between the two deep into the historical past. But the effect of such a periodization was to reduce the role of theology in the modern world to the legacy of its premodern power, obscuring the many ways in which theology continues to manifest itself in public life quite apart from the secular formations it helped to fashion. De Lubac's own life story is a case in point. His resistance activities during World War II, not to mention more recent examples such as Latin American liberation theology, testify to the continuing power of theology in a secular political context.

The secularization narrative advanced by Kantorowicz and Gauchet thus makes it very difficult to appreciate the way the "mutual borrowings" between theology and political thought that Kantorowicz observed in the medieval past have

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"Can Democracy Emancipate Itself from Political Theology? Habermas and Lefort on the Permanence of the Theologico-political," *Constellations* 17/2 (2010), 254–70.

[69] Warren Breckman makes a very similar argument. See Breckman, *Adventures of the Symbolic*, 173–6; Breckman, "Democracy between Disenchantment and Political Theology," 100–1.

[70] Gauchet, *Disenchantment of the World*, 200, 59.

continued well into the secular present.[71] And of course one example of such a "borrowing" is the debt that both Kantorowicz and Gauchet themselves owed to de Lubac. That these secular historians and philosophers continued to draw on the work of a theologian well into the late twentieth century indicates that the interaction between theology and political thought did not come to an end with the advent of modernity and the secularization of political affairs. It also suggests that secularization narratives themselves may be far from secular. To see this, however, it is necessary to shift our attention away from the empirical validity of secularization narratives, to their status *as* narratives—argumentative devices with their own history and strategic aims. Setting aside the question of whether or not secularization has occurred allows us to better examine the work performed by secularization narratives themselves. Doing so brings into focus the surprising convergence between the secular and its suppressed other, revealing how narratives of secularization can emerge from the field of theology and be mobilized to serve both secular and theological ends.

And yet, as this particular narrative of secularization has been folded into historical scholarship, it has become increasingly difficult to recognize the work it performs as a narrative. For it is not just philosophers like Gauchet who have turned to Kantorowicz since the 1980s. Prompted by the waning prestige of Marxism, the "cultural turn" in historiography, and the impending bicentennial of the French Revolution, French historians began to articulate a "revisionist" account of the origins of the French Revolution—one that challenged the traditional Marxist emphasis on the role of socioeconomic forces. The pioneer of revisionism was François Furet, a key architect of the antitotalitarian moment. Drawing on the work of the Catholic historian Augustin Cochin, Furet sought to dethrone the dominant Marxist interpretation of the French Revolution.[72] Historians writing in the wake of Furet followed suit, privileging the symbolic order of political culture over socioeconomic factors and ascribing newfound political agency to representations—whether of the king, the people, or the nation. In this context, *The King's Two Bodies* became an influential text in the historiography on the prehistory of the Revolution, albeit largely through the mediation of Kantorowicz's student Ralph Giesey, who helped to draw out the implications of his teacher's magnum opus for the French context.[73] In his foundational work on the origins of the French Revolution, for instance, Roger Chartier describes the events of 1789–93

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[71]Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies*, 193.

[72]François Furet, *Penser la Révolution française* (Paris, 1978). On Furet's antitotalitarianism, see Christofferson, *French Intellectuals against the Left*, Ch. 6. For an overview of these historiographical debates see Steven Laurence Kaplan, *Farewell, Revolution: The Historians' Feud, France, 1789/1989* (Ithaca, 1995); Lynn Hunt, *Politics, Culture, and Class in the French Revolution* (Berkeley, 1984), 1–16.

[73]Giesey's most important work in this vein was *The Royal Funeral Ceremony in France* (Geneva, 1960). For a summary of Kantorowicz's influence on French historiography see Ralph E. Giesey, *Cérémonial et puissance souveraine: France, XVe–XVIIe siècles* (Paris, 1987), 9–19. Examples of the influence of Kantorowicz and Giesey on French Revolution historiography include, but are not limited to, Roger Chartier, *The Cultural Origins of the French Revolution,* trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Durham, NC, 1991), Chs. 5, 6; Dale van Kley, *The Religious Origins of the French Revolution: From Calvin to the Civil Constitution of the Clergy, 1560–1791* (New Haven, 1996), 18–24; Sarah Melzer and Kathryn Norberg, eds., *From the Royal to the Republican Body: Incorporating the Political in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century France* (Berkeley, 1998), *passim*.

as the culmination of a "transfer of sacrality" from Christian symbols and the king to the nation, and endowed changes to the theory of the king's two bodies with a key role in this process of "symbolic disenchantment."[74] Through the influence of Kantorowicz and Giesey, a theological genealogy of modern political concepts has thus become embedded in historical scholarship.

In the process, historians have often relied (albeit indirectly) on the work of Henri de Lubac. For instance, in a 2002 book on discourses of representation during the Revolutionary era, Paul Friedland recapitulates de Lubac's argument that the *corpus mysticum* concept was transferred from the Eucharist to the Church (though he attributes this argument to Kantorowicz and Giesey). Friedland then goes on to show how this concept, which he calls "the fundamental organizing principle of premodern political re-presentation," served to bind the French into a unified modern nation-state. "One of the most important legacies of the corpus mysticum," he concludes, was that, "long after the term itself had fallen by the wayside, generations of French political theorists still assumed that the very concept of nationhood necessarily implied the existence of a solitary (general) will."[75] In this way, the secularization narrative outlined by de Lubac, Kantorowicz, and Gauchet has made its way into contemporary historiography on the prehistory of the French Revolution, obscuring its very status as a narrative with a particular set of political aims and a history of its own.

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The theory of the king's two bodies articulated by Kantorowicz and taken up by Gauchet has now become a key theoretical resource for scholars from a variety of disciplines whose work engages with the interconnected themes of religion, politics, and secularization. Within this literature, it represents only one strand of a much broader interest in the theological roots of secular political concepts. Through the combined influence of Schmitt, Kantorowicz, and Gauchet, as well as philosophers like Hans Blumenberg and Karl Löwith, the theological genealogy of secular political concepts has become a significant theoretical framework for contemporary scholarship on secularism and political theology.[76] Drawing upon these theoretical resources, scholars have shown how the characteristic features of modern politics—from sovereignty and capitalism, to religious freedom and human rights, to the idea of progress and even secularism itself—have their roots in the realm of theology.[77] Very often, the implicit thrust of such accounts is to discredit various liberal projects by showing that they remain bound to an illiberal theological past that vitiates their benevolent aims from within.[78] But, as the

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[74]Chartier, *Cultural Origins of the French Revolution*, 109, 113.

[75]Paul Friedland, *Political Actors: Representative Bodies and Theatricality in the Age of the French Revolution* (Ithaca, 2002), 30, 31. To be clear, though, Friedland views the Revolution as reversing the logic of representation that underwrote the *corpus mysticum*.

[76]Karl Löwith, *Meaning in History: The Theological Implications of the Philosophy of History* (Chicago, 1949).

[77]See the works cited in note 6.

[78]This critique can come from very different perspectives. On this point see Udi Greenberg and Daniel Steinmetz-Jenkins, "The Cross and the Gavel," *Dissent* 65/2 (2018), 106–13; Udi Greenberg, "Radical

work of Kantorowicz and Gauchet attests, a theological genealogy can also be used to buttress these selfsame projects by providing them with a sacred weight they might otherwise lack. In both cases, such a genealogy is mobilized as evidence of the persistent power of the theological past in the secular present.

And yet, a genealogy of these secularization narratives themselves—such as the one presented in this article—suggests a different reading. As I have argued, these accounts tend to disavow theology in the very act of arguing for its contemporary legacy. The effect of focusing on the premodern theological origins of modern political concepts is to treat theology as something that existed in the past but whose formal features have now been taken over by the political, obscuring the many ways in which theology continues to ramify in modern public life beyond the secular political formations that it helped to fashion. Instead, theological genealogies of modern political concepts tend to reduce theology's effects to the traces left by its premodern power. And yet, even if a modern political concept can be shown to derive from theological origins, it does not follow that the concept continues to operate theologically in the present. There is no reason to believe that such a concept is any less secular for having emerged from a theological context and that its past uses necessarily determine its contemporary meaning. What this suggests is that, far from revealing the persistent power of theology at the heart of secular modernity, theological genealogies of secular concepts do not fundamentally question the secular nature of modern politics. Indeed, one might even say that they reinforce it, by quarantining theology safely in the premodern past.

This may go some way towards explaining one of the more remarkable features of the contemporary scholarship on political theology: how rarely the discipline of theology and the work of theologians in fact enter into the discussion, at least in a modern context. This may have to do with the initial dominance of Schmitt within this literature and the extent to which it has tended to approach theology as an instrument with which to critique secular political formations, rather than seeking to illuminate the contemporary role of theology in its own right.[79] Recent scholarship has begun to reverse this trend, however, by attending to the contribution that theologians such as Erik Peterson made to interwar debates on political theology and revealing the impact of religious thought on twentieth-century European politics more broadly.[80] Rather than reinscribing the opposition between theological premodernity and secular political modernity, such work makes it possible to grasp the many ways in which theology and secular political thought continue to

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Orthodoxy and the Rebirth of Christian Opposition to Human Rights," in Sarah Shortall and Daniel Steinmetz-Jenkins, eds., *Christianity and Human Rights Reconsidered* (Cambridge, 2020), 103–18.

[79]This is particularly the case with scholarship in the tradition pioneered by Talal Asad in works such as *Formations of the Secular* and *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore, 1993).

[80]On Peterson and the interwar political theology debates see the special issue of *New German Critique* 35/3 (2008), esp. György Geréby, "Political Theology versus Theological Politics: Erik Peterson and Carl Schmitt," ibid., 7–33; Nicholas Heron, *Liturgical Power: Between Economic and Political Theology* (New York, 2018). On the impact of Catholic religious thought in particular on twentieth-century European politics see Shortall, *Soldiers of God*; Chamedes, *A Twentieth-Century Crusade*; Chappel, *Catholic Modern*; Piotr Kosicki, *Catholicism on the Barricades: Poland, France, and "Revolution," 1939–1956* (New Haven, 2018); Connelly, *From Enemy to Brother*; Samuel Moyn, *Christian Human Rights* (Philadelphia, 2015).

interact in the present, including, as I have shown here, the role that theology has played in the development of secularization theory itself.

The case outlined in this article is only one example of such an interaction, and it reveals the limits of thinking the relationship between politics and religion in terms of a one-directional transfer from the premodern theological realm to the modern political one. It shows that we need not reach all the way back to the premodern past to understand the continuing power of theology in the modern world. Instead, theologians like Henri de Lubac articulated a role for theology in the public sphere and influenced the work of secular political theorists and historians well into the late twentieth century. This sort of interaction continues to play out today in debates over the public role of religion, such as the high-profile exchange between Jürgen Habermas and the future Pope Benedict XVI or the recent interest in St Paul on the part of secular philosophers.[81] And yet, such interactions between theologians and secular intellectuals are difficult to comprehend if we remain bound to the kind of secularization narrative outlined above. The story of de Lubac's influence on the work of Kantorowicz and Gauchet reveals the difficulty with such narratives and the logic of periodization that informs them.[82] It draws attention to the work performed by the periodizing cut between theological premodernity and secular modernity, and the way this periodization renders certain forms of interaction between theology and modern thought illegible. By historicizing this secularization narrative itself, it becomes possible instead to imagine the relationship between theology and the political as one that operates in both directions and continues into the present. And doing so allows us to bring the "theology" much more squarely back into the literature on political theology.

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[81]See Jürgen Habermas and Joseph Ratzinger, *The Dialectics of Secularization: On Reason and Religion* (San Francisco, 2006). This interest in St Paul has sparked a host of interactions between secular theorists and theologians. See John Milbank, Slavoj Žižek, and Creston Davis, *Paul's New Moment: Continental Philosophy and the Future of Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI, 2010).

[82]See Kathleen Davis, *Periodization and Sovereignty: How Ideas of Feudalism and Secularization Govern the Politics of Time* (Philadelphia, 2008).