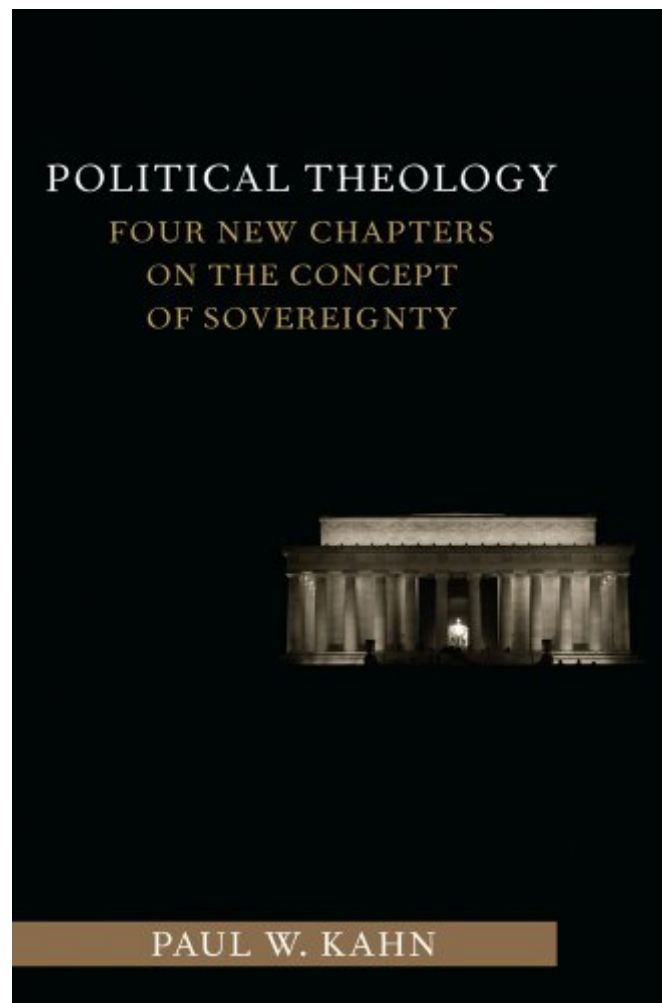


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Political Theology: Four New Chapters On The Concept Of Sovereignty (Columbia Studies In Political Thought / Political History)



Synopsis

In this strikingly original work, Paul W. Kahn rethinks the meaning of political theology. In a text innovative in both form and substance, he describes an American political theology as a secular inquiry into ultimate meanings sustaining our faith in the popular sovereign. Kahn works out his view through an engagement with Carl Schmitt's 1922 classic, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*. He forces an engagement with Schmitt's four chapters, offering a new version of each that is responsive to the American political imaginary. The result is a contemporary political theology. As in Schmitt's work, sovereignty remains central, yet Kahn shows how popular sovereignty creates an ethos of sacrifice in the modern state. Turning to law, Kahn demonstrates how the line between exception and judicial decision is not as sharp as Schmitt led us to believe. He reminds readers that American political life begins with the revolutionary willingness to sacrifice and that both sacrifice and law continue to ground the American political imagination. Kahn offers a political theology that has at its center the practice of freedom realized in political decisions, legal judgments, and finally in philosophical inquiry itself.

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Customer Reviews

Kahn begins and ends his review of Carl Schmitt's "Political Theology" with an expression of American exceptionalism. Where does it come from and is it justified? In the end, freedom is only found in a realist idea of political theology because liberalism, absent of the "exception to the rules" lacks freedom. Kahn is really explaining how national interest, a state's existence, has become the highest order. It's the realist stance that butts heads with Yoder's idolatry (putting state's interests above morality is like making the state an idol). "The popular sovereign... is the mystical corpus of the state, the source of ultimate meaning for citizens (pg 121)." My thought; Is God sovereign because He can make exception to his own laws or because He is the only one who truly understands the physical and spiritual laws of all existence? Kahn doesn't address this. When we take the idea of sovereignty, God's sovereignty, and apply it to state power, we now get Schmitt's dictum that, "All significant concepts of modern theory of the state are secularized theological concepts." And when you secularize theological concepts you may confuse the original intent. Kahn holds that political theory is not as helpful as political theology. Theology understands sacrifice while liberalism is confused by it. Can anyone apply political theology to humanity without knowing the character of God? To say that humans have freedom because we are able to act in exception to a law is not the same as Schmitt's divine creation where God worked the ultimate exception to all laws. God is all loving AND just, all the time. Kahn barely mentions the moral dualism but it has to be implied.

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