

Introduction

The broad aim of this volume is to highlight the significance of theological readings of scripture for contemporary political theology. Indeed, theological readings of scripture—especially premodern theological readings of scripture—have great potential to illuminate the sociopolitical issues at the center of political theology. Yet political theology tends to neglect this font of resources. Although divine revelation is recognized as a key concept in political theology, and biblical scholars increasingly understand scripture to contain political dimensions, scripture is often marginalized in most scholarly discussions of political theology.¹ As a corrective to this problem, the contributors of *Reading Scripture as a Political Act* attempt to demonstrate how scripture functions in the “theopolitical imagination” of theologians from the earliest Christian centuries to the present day.² Before describing the aim of the volume in greater detail, and specifying what we mean by the phrases “reading scripture as a political act,” and “theological reading of scripture,” it will be helpful to explain the rationale for this collection of essays in the

1. As Ivan Illich pointed out over four decades ago, the marginalization of scripture is itself an issue of dire political consequence. See Ivan Illich, “The Powerlessness of the Church,” in *Celebration of Awareness: a Call for Institutional Revolution* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1969), 95–104.
2. We borrow this term from William Cavanaugh, who uses it to speak of how theological presuppositions relate to conceptions of the political. See his *Theopolitical Imagination: Christian Practices of Space and Time* (New York: T&T Clark, 2003).

context of contemporary views of political theology and the political dimension of the Bible.

Divine Revelation as a Crucial Concept in Political Theology

The term “political theology” originated with Carl Schmitt, who argued “all significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularized theological concepts.”³ Since Schmitt, the concept of “political theology” has been used by scholars to refer both to a critical stance toward aspects of modern society, as well as to the relationship between religion and politics. Over the course of the twentieth century, the term became associated with theologians (especially Jürgen Moltmann, Johann Baptist Metz, and Gustavo Gutiérrez) and intellectual movements in Europe and Latin America. According to Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, the political theologies that emerged in these contexts criticized secularization and the privatization of religion in Europe and confronted the sharp contrast between elites and the poor in Latin America.⁴ These thinkers and movements offered “a political hermeneutic of the Christian message, underscoring the centrality and reality of the promise of God’s Kingdom.”⁵ Today, however, the term political theology is increasingly used to refer to theological analysis of a variety of sociopolitical issues, including war, economic injustice, racism, and the concept of religious violence.⁶

3. Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, trans. George Schwab (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985), 36.

4. Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, Klaus Tanner, and Michael Welker, eds., *Political Theology: Contemporary Challenges and Future Directions* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2013), 37–60 (38).

5. *Ibid.*, 37.

6. Examples include: Vincent Lloyd, ed., *Race and Political Theology* (Stanford University Press, 2012); Schüssler Fiorenza, Tanner, Welker, *Political Theology*; James Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* (Orbis, 2013); Bustami Mohamed Khir “The Islamic Quest for Sociopolitical Justice”; and Peter Ochs, “Abrahamic Theo-Politics: A Jewish View,” in *The Blackwell Companion to Political Theology*, Peter Scott and William T. Cavanaugh, eds. (Wiley-Blackwell,

Despite the modern origins of “political theology,” scholars also use the term to refer to premodern theopolitical phenomena. Eric Gregory argues that political theology is “anything to do with religion and politics.”⁷ It is in this broad sense of the term that scholars apply the word political theology to ancient conceptions of the civil and religious, which were frequently regarded as one and same thing—or, at least, deeply intertwined.⁸ For Mark Lilla, such mixing of religion and politics is dangerous and is especially present in premodern Christianity. It was Hobbes’s “great separation” that finally divorced religion and politics. For Lilla, political theology is “discourse about political authority based on a revealed divine nexus.”⁹ By contrast, Michael Jon Kessler suggests a definition that attempts to name that which secular and religious political theologies seem to have in common. According to Kessler, “Political theology is . . . the collection of stories we tell ourselves about our nature as humans, our aspirations for order and justice in light of the sacred, and what . . . constitutes and limits legitimate rule over our collective lives.”¹⁰ William Cavanaugh defines political theology as “the analysis and criticism of political arrangements (including cultural-psychological, social and economic aspects) from the perspective of differing interpretations of God’s ways with the world.”¹¹ Although

2006), 503–34; William T Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence: Secular Ideology and the Roots of Modern Conflict* (Oxford University Press, USA, 2009).

7. Eric Gregory, “Christianity and the Rise of the Democratic State,” in Michael Kessler, ed. *Political Theology for a Plural Age* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 99–107 (99).
8. See Paula Fredriksen’s treatment of the interrelationship of civil power and the gods in the context of the ancient Greek city and with attention to Augustine’s theology in “God’s and their Humans,” in *Augustine and the Jews: A Christian Defense of Jews and Judaism* (New York: Doubleday Religion, 2008), 3–15.
9. Mark Lilla, *The Stillborn God: Religion, Politics, and the Modern West* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2007), 23. Elsewhere, Lilla defines the term narrowly as “a doctrine that legitimates the use of public authority by appeal to divine revelation.” See “A Conversation” in Michael Kessler, ed. *Political Theology for a Plural Age* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 13–40 (43).
10. Michael Kessler, “Introduction,” in Michael Kessler, ed. *Political Theology for a Plural Age* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 1–10 (1).

definitions vary, scholars of political theology understand the concept to include analysis of the relationship of civil power and divine revelation.

Scholars are also increasingly attentive to how scripture has shaped modern political thought and events in important ways. The “stories we tell ourselves,” at least in European and North American political contexts, have not been told in light of just any narrative, but have been shaped by the Bible. Contemporary scholars of political theology, the history of political thought, and the history of Christianity have demonstrated how the Bible has shaped the political thought of certain periods and political events, even those that are often considered wholly secular. For example, Eric Nelson has shown that early modern political thought experienced a “Hebrew Revival,” in which ancient Israel was viewed as a model for republican political constitution—“the republic of the Hebrews.”¹² Although Thomas Hobbes is often viewed as a secular political theorist, John Milbank and others have argued that Hobbes is in fact a political theologian since he “reads the Bible with a political horizon.”¹³ “A substantial part of the point of the *Leviathan*,” writes Milbank, “is that he is insisting that the message of the Bible is political and not a spiritual message at all. So Hobbes’s political position is not . . . an outright secular argument.”¹⁴ In *Sacred Scripture, Sacred War*, James Byrd demonstrates how biblical texts were used extensively in making the patriotic case for the Revolutionary War, and how the Bible shaped American views of war.¹⁵ Harry S. Stout’s *Upon the Altar of the*

11. Peter Scott and William Cavanaugh, eds. *The Blackwell Companion to Political Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 2.

12. Eric Nelson, *The Hebrew Republic: Jewish Sources and the Transformation of European Political Thought*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011).

13. John Milbank, “A Conversation” in Michael Kessler, ed. *Political Theology for a Plural Age* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 13–40 (27). See also Matthew F. Rose, “Hobbes as Political Theologian,” *Political Theology* 14, no. 1 (February 1, 2013): 5–31.

14. Milbank, “A Conversation,” 27.

Nation and Mark Noll's *Civil War as a Theological Crisis* show how scripture shaped views of the morality of the American Civil War.¹⁶ It would not be difficult to think of more examples of how religious traditions and their scriptures continue to bear upon twenty-first century political orders.

Beyond the Political Implications of Scripture

Scholars are also aware that scripture can be interpreted politically.¹⁷ “Many Christians,” writes Richard Bauckham, “have recently been rediscovering the political dimension of the message of the Bible. This is really a return to normality, since the notion that biblical Christianity has nothing to do with politics is little more than a modern Western Christian aberration, which would not have been entertained by the Church in most periods and places of its history.”¹⁸ Richard Horsley has said that the “study of the Bible must be understood as an activity with political implications. . . .”¹⁹ Although an apolitical view of the Bible is indeed an aberration, and study of the Bible has political implications, these insights do not yet adequately recognize the deeply political character of the ecclesial contexts in which scripture has been read for most of history.

In order to move beyond the idea that the Bible simply has political implications, it is helpful to explain the way in which we employ the term “political act.” Whereas the popular conception of “political”

15. James P. Byrd, *Sacred Scripture, Sacred War: The Bible and the American Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

16. Mark A. Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006); Harry S. Stout, *Upon the Altar of the Nation: A Moral History of the Civil War* (New York: Penguin, 2007).

17. Richard Bauckham, *The Bible in Politics: How to Read the Bible Politically* (Louisville: Westminster J. Knox Press, 1989).

18. *Ibid.*, 1.

19. Richard Horsley, “Introduction,” in Richard A. Horsley, ed., *Paul and Politics: Ekklesia, Israel, Imperium, Interpretation* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2000), 1–16 (13).

is usually taken to refer to some activity directly related to holding civil office or gaining the support of a key constituency, we use the term in the broader, classical sense of the word and with attention to its application in ecclesial contexts. By “political,” we emphasize its origin in the Greek word *polis*, meaning a structured social body. According to this classical meaning, the church itself is a political entity. In the words of Thomas Aquinas, the community of the faithful “is a city.”²⁰ Or in the words of John Yoder, the church has the “character of a *polis*.”²¹ Because the church is one, holy, catholic, and apostolic, it cannot be reduced to one social entity among others. Nevertheless, it is a “structured” social body that is united in common belief and practice. It is the church’s political character that, in part, makes its reading of scripture a political act.

That the ecclesial context in which scripture is interpreted possesses this political character means that scripture, for most of its readers, does not function simply as a text with political implications. Rather, the act of reading scripture in and of itself—especially as this act is embedded in the church’s liturgical life—possesses a character that is both political and ecclesial at the same time. Consider, for instance, martyrdom in the early church. The significance of martyrdom lies not in the spectacle of the event, but in the fact that the martyrdom was understood as a performative reading of scripture, one that reinforced the political character of the church.²²

Indeed, as Bernd Wannewetsch has shown, “though the political relevance of worship has oftentimes been overshadowed by other accounts of both worship and politics, it was an essential feature of the

20. Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the letters of Saint Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians* (Lander, WY: Aquinas Institute for the Study of Sacred Doctrine, 2012), 237.

21. John Howard Yoder, *Body Politics: Five Practices of the Christian Community Before the Watching World* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2001), viii.

22. Rowan Williams, “Resident Aliens: the Identity of the Early Church,” in *Why Study the Past: the Quest for the Historical Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 32–59.

original self-understanding of the church from the New Testament on and has re-emerged throughout the history of Christian theology.”²³ The church’s liturgy has what might be referred to as a theopolitical aim: to confess faith in Jesus Christ, the second person of the Trinity, as Lord. And scripture pervades the liturgy: “[B]iblical narratives lay behind the fundamental structures of the liturgical year, and scriptural texts [are] ubiquitous in the form of chants and readings.”²⁴ Susan Boynton has even suggested that the reading of scripture in medieval liturgy constituted a form of interpretation that mirrored the patristic tradition: “[T]he selection and combination of biblical texts in the chants and readings of the liturgy constitute[d] a system of interpretation that paralle[ed] the readings of these same texts by patristic writers.”²⁵

Scholars of the “theological interpretation of scripture” have addressed the way that particular ecclesial contexts shape the practice of reading scripture. The theological reading of scripture, defined broadly, is a reading “whereby theological concerns and interests inform and are informed by reading scripture.”²⁶ As Stephen Fowl explains, this form of reading has been the norm for the church: “Christians have generally read their scripture to guide, correct, and edify their faith, worship, and practice as part of their ongoing struggle to live faithfully before the triune God.” Insofar as Christians have read scripture for the purpose of living faithfully, they have read the scriptures theologically. This struggle to live faithfully is

23. Bernd Wannewetsch, *The Blackwell Companion to Political Theology*, 76–90 (76). See also Wannewetsch, “The Political Worship of the Church: A Critical and Empowering Practice,” *Modern Theology* 12, no.2 (1996): 269–99.

24. Susan Boynton, “The Bible and the Liturgy” in *The Practice of the Bible in the Middle Ages: Production, Reception, and Performance in Western Christianity*, ed. Susan Boynton and Diane J. Reilly (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 10–33 (10).

25. *Ibid.*, 11.

26. Stephen E. Fowl, *The Theological Interpretation of Scripture: Classic and Contemporary Readings*, 1st ed. (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1997), xiii. See also Stephen E. Fowl, *Engaging Scripture: A Model for Theological Interpretation* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2008).

referenced in Paul's pleading with the Ephesians to "walk" in such a way that is worthy of God's calling: "I . . . beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called." (Eph. 4:1). Indeed, this kind of life, which is always a life of communion in one body, is a calling from God that Paul understands in civic terms when he refers to the believers as "fellow citizens" (Eph. 2:19). Since living faithfully includes the worship of God—a sacrificial offering of our bodies to God (Rom. 12:1)—such living cannot be separated from the material reality of the political character of the church. In this sense, the theological purposes of reading scripture are also political purposes.

Although scholars have treated how the Bible has shaped political thought and political events or have addressed what they take to be the political implications of the Bible, there is general lack of attention to how Christian theologians' readings of the Bible possessed a political character, shaped their views of civil power, or enabled them to respond to the social and political problems of their day. Indeed, in recent works on Christian political theology, comment upon the Bible is often treated as prolegomena or is ancillary to exploring the thought of modern Christian theologians and the political character of Christian doctrines. Contemporary works on political theology often mention that most theologians have assumed scripture and Christianity possessed a political character. But such references are only in passing and usually occur as introductory remarks on the political aspect of Christian theological reflection in general: "[T]he political has been present in Christian theology from its very beginnings, and throughout most of Christian history church leaders and theologians have thought and taught about politics without seeing this as an entirely separate matter—of course theology would include political theology!"²⁷ Additionally, the *Blackwell Companion to Political Theology* provides invaluable survey

of Christian political theologies in chapters mostly devoted to modern Christian theologians.²⁸ However, due to its broad nature, the *Companion* is limited in its treatments of political themes in the Old and New Testament. In addition to including primary texts in modern political theology, such as classic essays by Reinhold Niebuhr and John Howard Yoder, the *Eerdmans Political Reader in Contemporary Political Theology* only treats the exegetical presuppositions and historical significance of liberation theology as a hermeneutic. For the most part, the *Eerdmans Reader* focuses upon the political character of Christian doctrines as these relate to important political topics (such as gender, race, 9/11). Although both volumes treat the thought of modern theologians or the political character of doctrines, they do not attend to how theologians' readings of scripture shaped their political concerns. Moreover, both books situate their study within the modern period. In these ways, the light that the theological reading of scripture has cast upon the church's pilgrim journey as it struggles to walk faithfully in the world is eclipsed. We think the focus on modern theology neglects resources in premodern Christian theological readings of scripture that can illuminate contemporary concerns in political theology.

The Sacred Page in the Theopolitical Imagination of the Church

The relationship between political theology and scripture should be treated as more than a preface to Christian political theology. Insofar as scripture is the "soul of sacred theology," it is fitting that Christian political theologians attend more fully to how scripture has

27. Elizabeth Phillips, *Political Theology: A Guide for the Perplexed* (New York: T&T Clark, 2012), 3.

28. The exception is Jean Bethke Elshtain's discussion of Augustine, and Frederick Bauerschmidt's helpful chapter on Aquinas.

functioned in the theopolitical imagination of the theologians of the church.²⁹ There is much at stake here. As Mark Noll has argued, “the political use of Scripture, even extensive use of Scripture, is no guarantee that any given political appeal will be meaningfully Christian.”³⁰ Drawing upon the work of Derek Peterson’s *Ethnic Patriotism and the East African Revival*, Noll observes that the “recent experience of African Christians . . . repeats the history of Western Christianity in putting the Scriptures to use for political witness. Sometimes it has helped, other times not.”³¹ It is certain that scripture will be used in politics for better or for worse. So, how should Christians interpret scripture in light of their political contexts?

Michael Kirwan’s work, *Political Theology: An Introduction* (especially his chapter, “The Political Word of God”), also expresses concerns about the role of scripture in political theology. Kirwan explicitly points in the direction that this volume aims when he states that handling sacred texts is a lost art: “If there is one indispensable skill for doing political theology, it is probably the ability to handle sacred texts responsibly.”³² Kirwan then states what might be called a version of the problem of scripture and political theology: “[T]he gospel engenders and inspires political engagement, but offers no blueprint for specific political stances or options.” Although the editors of this book do not agree that scripture lacks specific “political stances,”³³ Kirwan’s argument that scripture does not provide a “blueprint” highlights the fact that the interpretation of scripture is

29. *Dei Verbum*, Sec 6 no. 24, Second Vatican Council, available at http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651118_dei-verbum_en.html, accessed June 1, 2015.

30. Mark Noll, “The Peril and Potential of Scripture in Christian Political Witness,” in *Christian Political Witness*, ed. George Kalantzis (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press Academic, 2014), 35–55 (37).

31. Derek R. Peterson, *Ethnic Patriotism and the East African Revival: A History of Dissent, c. 1935–1972* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

32. Michael Kirwan, “The Political Word of God,” in *Political Theology: An Introduction* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009), 161–76 (162).

crucial for any discussion of political theology.³⁴ Nevertheless, the resources Kirwan suggests for recovering the lost art of handing the sacred page are limited to three theological voices: Oliver O'Donovan, Jürgen Moltmann, and Karl Barth.³⁵

It is at this point that this volume of essays attempts to take a next step, by exploring some of the ways that the church has read scripture politically for centuries. Analyzing particular theological readings of scripture across the ages with attention to concerns in political theology is one way of engaging the lacuna noted above. How have theologians read scripture for political purposes? In what ways have theologians understood the Bible to possess political material? What sort of approaches to reading scripture informed Christian theologians' judgments about civil power or its relationship to the church in general? In what way did these theologians apply these political readings to their political contexts? What did they understand to be the political character of the Old and New Testament and how were these texts invoked to theorize about, criticize, or support forms of civil power? What were the methodological principles by which theologians interpreted scripture politically? How did they implement such principles in relation to particular texts? Insofar as scripture is the "soul of sacred theology," it seems fitting that Christian political theology attend more fully to how readings of the sacred page function in theologians' reflections on the relation between the city of God and the city of man. It seems learning the lost art of how to theologially interpret the sacred page in the spirit of the theologians of the church and with attention to oppression and injustice constitutes significant political action.

33. See John Yoder's argument against this idea in his 1972 classic, *The Politics of Jesus*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994).

34. Kirwan, "The Political Word of God," 162.

35. *Ibid.*, 163.

Yet, this volume is not an attempt to return to the past unaware of the missteps of Christendom.³⁶ While we believe premodern theologians must be brought into discussion with contemporary political theology, we also want to avoid any notion that we dismiss the significance of modern theologians' readings of scripture. Therefore, the essays analyze the political character of premodern *and* modern theologians' readings of scripture with attention to how their readings relate to or address political challenges in their particular social and historical settings. In addition to treating how particular themes in the Bible, such as lament and friendship, suggest distinctive political practices, the essays in this volume attempt to highlight how scripture shaped the theopolitical imagination of Augustine, Basil of Caesarea, Bonaventure, Thomas Aquinas, Bartolomé de las Casas, John Wesley, Karl Barth, Henri de Lubac, John Howard Yoder, and others.

Collectively, these essays represent a contemporary attempt at the retrieval or *ressourcement* of the readings of scripture with attention to theopolitical issues, such as war and peace, sexual violence, capital punishment, fascism, empire, and sovereignty. The essays cover writings from ancient, medieval, early modern, and modern periods, and the contributors come from diverse ecumenical backgrounds (Roman Catholic, Episcopal, Mennonite, Methodist, Evangelical Covenant, among others), and each essay was written specifically with the aim of this volume in mind.

Rebekah Eklund's essay, "Empires and Enemies: Re-Reading Lament as Politics," challenges us to read the laments of scripture today in our own political settings, thereby participating in a practice that possesses an inherently political character. Lament, Eklund argues, functions symbolically and practically as a form of resistance

36. David Bentley Hart, "No Enduring City," *First Things* (August 2013): 45-51 (47).

and renarration, drawing us into a community of suffering and shared burden, and most importantly a community of witness.

Peter Dula's essay, "The Politics of Friendship in the Gospel of John," argues for the centrality of conflict in the Apostle John's account of friendship, theology, and *how* theology is done. Dula draws upon John's theological vision of the role of conflict in community, which is grounded in the Johannine experience of God in Christ.

In "Before the Eyes of Their Own God: Susanna, Rape Law, and Testimony in *City of God* 1.19," Melanie Webb explores the function of the figure of Susanna in Augustine's "habits of thought" as he critiques Roman and Christian traditions of virtue that present suicide as assurance that a woman did not desire or consent to rape. The story of Susanna provides an alternative exemplum, one grounded in the testimony of conscience and drawn from scripture. Webb argues that Susanna's story motivates and shapes Augustine's engagement with the narrative of the rape of Lucretia.

Mark DelCogliano demonstrates the political character of the ascetic practice of fasting in "The Politics of Fasting in Basil of Caesarea." Grounded in a scriptural view of fasting, Basil constructed an ascetic practice that does not simply restore the order of the fallen world, but in fact is able to achieve a peaceful domestic, civic, and social order that recaptures the paradisaical state.

Extending the theme of ascetic practice, Daniel Wade McClain argues in "Reading Genesis 1 as a Political Act," that for early Christian preachers, such as Origen, Basil, and Ambrose, Genesis 1 was significant as a resource for public formation. These preachers read Genesis 1 as a robust source for understanding the relationship of humanity to God, the world, and itself. In this manner, commentaries and sermons on Genesis 1 were crafted with education, formation, and human excellence in mind.

Travis E. Ables, in “The Apocalyptic Figure of Francis’s Stigmatized Body: The Politics of Scripture in Bonaventure’s Meditative Treatises,” argues that a popular theological politics is receiving support, structure, and guidance in Bonaventure’s mystical treatises. The treatises are Bonaventure’s attempt to codify a Franciscan reading of scripture that idealizes Francis and offers a kind of *imitatio francisci*, but does so for the purpose of maintaining the popular appeal and accessibility of Francis’s performance of the life of Christ.

Matthew A. Tapie’s “‘For He is Our Peace’: Thomas Aquinas on Christ as Cause of Peace in the City of Saints,” shows that scholars have overlooked an ecclesial concept of peace in Aquinas’s biblical commentaries. He argues that Aquinas’s approach to the sacred page allowed him to creatively nuance the theological concept of peace he inherited from Augustine and in ways that have important consequences for cultivating virtues that preserve peace.

David M. Lantigua responds to Yoder’s critique of Constantinianism in “War and the Ethics of Evangelization: The Great Commission in Sixteenth-Century Political Thought.” Employing Oliver O’Donovan’s focus on the missionary orientation of the Church in Christendom, Lantigua identifies a Christendom legacy and tradition of social ethics that was committed to announcing the Gospel’s transformative and liberating power for all peoples made in God’s image against Satan’s violent oppression through idolatry and the overreaching worldly assertions of church and empire.

Anthony D. Baker reads early-Anglican politics through the Bard in “The Unexceptional King: Political Theology in Shakespeare’s *Richard II*.” Richard’s monologue at the end of the play, Baker argues, evinces “a new “unexceptional” political theology,” one that seeks to attain power for the sake of penance, and vice versa. Someone once

said that if you want to understand Anglican theology, read the poets. Anthony Baker shows us that if you want to understand theological politics, read the Bard.

Kevin L. Hughes discusses “*Ressourcement* and Resistance: *La nouvelle théologie*, the Bible, and the Fathers, against Fascism.” In particular, Hughes argues that the witness of Henri de Lubac’s thought before the war and after suggests a continuous argument, in both word and deed, that addresses the political and cultural ills and crises of his society. For de Lubac, the recovery of spiritual exegesis was a spiritual re-arming for an underground battle, beneath the political and military maneuvers, for the soul of the church and the heart of the world. Against the rising storm of fascism, de Lubac argued that the renewal of scriptural interpretation was the necessary theological foundation for Christian resistance.

D. Stephen Long’s essay, “Inhabiting Scripture: Wesley’s Theopolitical Reading of the Bible,” argues that reading scripture for Wesley entails a lived practice, wherein the scriptural reader encounters not only the sense of scripture, but are invited into a relationship and way of life. Wesley’s General Rules and his reading of the Beatitudes show that scripture for Wesley has deep practical significance, and not just for the individual, but for the community as well. The Beatitudes, Long argues, “produce a Catholic Spirit. . . . Their purpose ultimately is to bear the fruit of the love of God and neighbor.”

In “The Scriptural Logic of Barmen and the Jewish Question,” Susannah Ticciati interrogates the absence of the *Judenfrage* in the Barmen Declaration. Ticciati argues that, as a political reading of scripture, the Barmen Declaration is laudable, although today it stands in need of repair, even if the means by which it is repaired are provided by the Declaration itself. In so doing, the Declaration and Christianity’s relationship to Judaism are reframed by recent

theological critiques of anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism in such a way that strengthen the “universal particularism” by which Barmen responds to the local particularism of National Socialism.

John C. Nugent tackles the liberal attempt to abolish capital punishment in “The End of Sacrifice: John Howard Yoder’s Critique of Capital Punishment.” Nugent shows that it is Yoder’s theological reading of scripture, coupled with a penetrating cultural analysis, enables him to mount a substantial theological critique of the practice of capital punishment. Yoder agrees with sociological and anthropological analyses that show that taking life is a cultic and atoning ritual act. However, liberal Christian efforts to abolish capital punishment have failed because they align not with the Gospel, but rather modern, liberal political logic. As Nugent argues, for Yoder, capital punishment can never be rejected entirely by those who have turned away from the Gospel.

In the final essay, “A Broken Body Reads Mark,” Craig Hovey engages Fernando Belo’s Marxist reading of Mark, and in turn proposes a new theological—indeed, eucharistic—reading of the politics of Mark. For Belo, sacramental reading necessarily reinforces that bourgeois, capitalistic rejection of material existence. Hovey challenges Belo’s understanding of the sacraments, showing that a sacramental reading is the most materialist reading possible. In fact, Hovey argues, understanding Mark, a text riddled with complexity and veiled elements, requires that one read eucharistically because reading Mark entails becoming part of a community of broken bodies.

We hope the essays in this volume provoke further study of how premodern and modern theologians’ readings of the sacred page shapes their understanding of politics. It is also our hope that the efforts undertaken here might assist those concerned with shaping a political theology that can articulate the liberating power of the

gospel in the light of the tradition and with attention to the problems of violence and injustice.