BEYOND DEMOCRACY? TOWARDS A POST-DEMOCRATIC VISION OF GOVERNANCE

¿MÁS ALLÁ DE LA DEMOCRACIA? HACIA UNA VISIÓN POSDEMOCRÁTICA DE LA GOBERNANZA

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ABSTRACT

This essay explores elements of a solution to the crisis of the current degrading of contemporary democracies through populism. It does this through arguing that the political transition from kingship to democracy has neglected important resources that are once again required for governance in the contemporary era. In recovering these resources of a vocational mandate, a teleological orientation and an exemplary witness, I conclude that together with developing new approaches to the cultivation of leaders, through critically adapting the ancient insights of Plato's formation of political leaders, we can open up currently unrealised potential for moving beyond the blockages of secular democracies as exemplified by the rise of charismatic demagogues. Employing the model of the Deuteronomic King, I illustrate how a religiously informed institution of governance can preserve the positives of the secular modern democratic experiments and move beyond them in a post-democratic model of governance. This vision is motivated by a kenotic teleology of love that is anchored in both the person and the institution of the exemplary model of the leader.

Keywords: (Post)-Democracy, Kingship, Governance, Deuteronomy, Populism.

RESUMEN

Este trabajo de investigación histórica sobre la espiritualidad bajomedieval y del Este ensayo explora elementos para una solución a la crisis de la degradación actual de las democracias contemporáneas a través del populismo. Lo hace argumentando que la transición política de la realeza a la democracia ha descuidado importantes recursos que vuelven a ser necesarios para la gobernanza en la era contemporánea. Al recuperar estos recursos de un mandato vocacional, una orientación teleológica y un testimonio ejemplar, llego a la conclusión de que junto con el desarrollo de nuevos enfoques para el cultivo de líderes, mediante la adaptación crítica de las antiguas ideas de Platón sobre la formación de líderes políticos, podemos abrir un potencial actualmente no realizado para ir más allá de los bloqueos de las democracias seculares, como ejemplifica el auge de los demagogos carismáticos. Empleando el modelo del Rey Deuteronómico, ilustro cómo una institución de gobierno religiosamente informada puede preservar los aspectos positivos de los experimentos democráticos modernos seculares e ir más allá de ellos en un modelo postdemocrático de gobierno. Esta visión está motivada por una teleología kenótica del amor que está anclada tanto en la persona como en la institución del modelo ejemplar del líder.

Palabras clave: (Post)-democracia, realeza, gobernanza, Deuteronomio, populismo.

I. ELEMENTS OF THE TRANSITION FROM KINGSHIP TO DEMOCRACY

The question of whether democracy is in a terminal crisis has become. a pressing one in our time.[1] This sense of global crisis has been recently intensified by the fact that, as the Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk commented in an interview with several European journalists on 28 March 2024, Europe is now in a "pre-war era" due to the invasion of Ukraine by Russia in February 2022. For political scientists and legal theorists, this question of democratic crisis has become one of what form of democracy is adequate for today's challenges and whether the appropriate legal procedures have been followed in decision making and in enacting law. For theologians and biblical scholars these questions are situated within a much bigger canvas than in secular political, legal and constitutional arrangements. The broader canvas of the kingdom of God orients the framework for these disciplines: God's rule on earth

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1   Martin Wolf, *The Crisis of Democratic Capitalism* (London: Penguin, 2024).

as in heaven.[2] In other words, political issues, of how people are ruled, are judged by the criterion of how God rules. Historically, for the vast majority of human history, this form of rule has evolved in terms of kingship.[3] The king, as God's representative on earth, rules in God's name, and so on God's behalf. The king is thus the intermediary between heaven and earth and this is why the king is also a sacred as well as a political figure. In the case of the chequered history of kingship in ancient Israel and Judah, which I shall consider later, the rule by kings marks a key period. It demarcates the transition point between the charismatic rule of the judges and the end of the period of united kingship under Saul, David and Salomon, with the division of the kingdom, following King Solomon's death in c.922 BCE, into the kingdoms of Israel and Judah. This division leads to the dissolving of Solomon's empire during the time that Rehoboam was proclaimed king in Shechem.[4]

For the ancient and medieval worlds, kingship was the institution through which one thought about rulership, and so in attempting to think beyond democratic governance it is a natural place to revisit in order to unearth important dimensions of governance that may have been lost in the transition to modern secular democratic modes of governance. This is not to say that in attempting to move beyond democracy the advances of democracy should be left behind. The convictions that all people are equal, that each person has rights to self-determination and respect and that popular support of leaders are positive principles is clearly without question. Nevertheless, it does mean that more than these issues need to be brought into consideration if we are to be able to face our current challenges arising through the degeneration of democracy into populism.

II. BEYOND SECULAR DEMOCRACY

In the transition from kingship to democracy something of the sacred dimension of rule and political leadership has been lost and as such that loss has circumscribed the teleological orientation of governance to a circumference which seems no longer able to meet the expansive challenges of our populist age. If we are to move to the next stage of political governance it will be necessary to draw on the insights of the long tradition of ancient and medieval

2   Oliver O'Donovan, *The Desire of the Nations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).
3   Francis Oakley, *Kingship. The Politics of Enchantment* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 1–9.
4   J. Maxwell Miller & John H. Hayes, *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah* (London: SCM Press, 2006), 186–264.

kingship and the positive experiences of the various modern experiments with democracy. This is necessary if we wish to find solutions to our current political crises and some would even say current societal degeneration into decadence. Drawing attention to the fact that kingship has been the predominant model of governance in human history is perhaps a first stage of thinking outside of the overly limited conception of governance with which we are currently faced. Recalling the fact that kingship predominated until relatively recently cultivates the imagination to open up a fresh perspective that has been unduly neglected in political and social theories. This is all the more important because relative to the span of human history and in all civilisations and continents this has been unarguably the case, and to have simply left it behind without preserving what was of good in this is short-sighted and no doubt borne of the effervescent excesses of the 1789 French Revolution.[5] The advent of modern secularisation has unseated this long tradition of sacral kingship and unpicked the interwoven fabric of the divine in nature and society.[6] Democracy, in its current form, is thus fundamentally the replacement of God's representatives by the modern state's, in political terms.[7] Presidents and prime ministers representing the nation states thus now replace kings, emperors and popes who effectively represented God on earth. Secular society, the nation states and the democratic polis consequently replace the church, the Holy Roman Empire and the papacy.[8] That these transformations are by now several centuries old and in many eyes represent a unilateral stadial advance on what had gone before it can be the cause of both a certain amnesia and a circumscribing of the theo-political imagination to the realm of simply matters of church governance.[9] It is thus now generally assumed that democracy is a natural state of affairs in human evolution rather than a specific human artefact which has its own benefits and drawbacks as in any political system of governance. If the theo-political is mentioned at all, then the Taliban, *Al Kaida*, the Iranian Republic and Islamic State become immediate placeholders in any conversation about the theo-political imagination! *Demos*— the people, *Cracy*—rule *directly* through small-scale community groups or *indirectly* through large-scale models of representation are thus now seen as the

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5   See Francis Oakley, *Kingship. The Politics of Enchantment* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2006).

6   Louis Dupré, *Passage to Modernity: An Essay in the Hermeneutics of Nature and Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993).

7   Reinhard Bendix, *Kings of People: Power and the Mandate to Rule* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978).

8   Peter H. Wilson, *The Holy Roman Empire: A Thousand Years of European History* (London: Penguin, 2017).

9   William T. Cavanaugh, *Migrations of the Holy. God, State and the Political Meaning of the Church* (Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2011), 1.

natural and *only* possible and legitimately desirable ways that society should govern itself in an *enlightened* context. Democracy is thus the new name for how political power is to be exercised in society: the secular nation-state has replaced God and God's intermediaries the kings, emperors and popes in matters of rule in the modern transition from theocracy to democracy.

The Roman Catholic Church took a long time to accept democracy because it saw the implications for its own loss of power and social control. In fact, the lingering 'sacral-kingship' model of the papacy continues to present significant challenges for the adaptation of the Roman Catholic Church to the contemporary world.[10] It was only really at the Second Vatican Council in 1965 that democratic governance was accepted in what some have argued was an internal secularisation of the Catholic Church.[11] The Anglican Church has arguably never accepted a purely secular notion of democracy given the constitutional significance of the dual roles of head of state and head of the church transmitted through the legacy of the Anglican erastian paradigm in the ecclesiology of the Church of England, which incorporates both the civil and ecclesial in its political horizon.[12] The Orthodox history of Caesaropapism is resurfacing in the Russian Orthodox Church today and the tendency of the Orthodox Church to ally itself with the nation state has reproduced itself continuously in various forms of Eastern nationalisms. The Presbyterian and Non-Conformist Churches have often adopted democratic styles of governance in their own church structures as ways of distancing themselves from the 'sacral-kingship' model of governance in the Roman Catholic Church. For them, democracy is the channel of God through the Holy Spirit living in the congregation, not its replacement by secular structures.

These Christian traditions have all had to face, either positively or negatively, the emergence of modern democratic societies and have come to an accommodation with them each in their own ways given their particular ecclesial, social and historical-political contexts. However, given the present crisis in democracy, the theo-political question arises anew in many different forms and raises the issue as to whether these past accommodations have now run their course. If theo-political kingship was once replaced by secular democracy, might in its turn, secular democracy now be being replaced with

10   Anthony J. Carroll and Marthe Kerkwijk et al., eds, *Towards a Kenotic Vision of Authority in the Catholic Church* (Washington: Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2015).

11   François-Andre Isambert, «La sécularisation interne du christianisme», *Revue Française de Sociologie*, nº. 17 (1976): 573–89.

12   Paul Avis, *Church, State and Establishment* (London: SPCK, 2001).

other models of governance that are as yet undertheorized and which incorporate kingly, democratic and other novel dimensions? Their lack of theorization is perhaps part of the reason why as soon as one considers the question of what comes after democracy, various forms of demagoguery seem to be the only answers that appear to be available. Clearly if we are to fix the current problems radical solutions will be required as the rot in the system seems so profound that simply *tinkering around the edges* is probably little more than a displacement activity that the world can ill afford in these challenging times.

Consequently, the deeply disturbing answer to the question of what comes after democracy at the moment seems to be that demagogy or populism is currently the only available option. Democracy might well, of course, fight back and win the day. The future is clearly open, but given the insecurity of our political system it is only prudent that we should now think of alternatives, if we are not to presume that democracy is the ultimate end point of political history. As a result of the paucity of theorization of real alternatives to degenerate forms of democracy and their closely associated vested interests in capitalist multi-nationals, it seems as if populism is on the rise and threatening to replace democracies, if it has not already done so, as in the recent 2024 Russian election. All around the world, in Russia, Hungary, Turkey (though with some recent democratic kickback in the 2024 local Turkish elections), the USA, China, India, even perhaps in Italy and the UK it is populism which seems to be taking over as the model of rule in contemporary societies.[13]

The concept of 'Populism' should here be understood as the vanguard of a new liberation movement. This movement is portrayed by its proponents as defending the perceived nationalist interests of its excluded populations, often over against the corrupt forces of the internal political elites who profit from exploitative forms of manipulation and capitalism. The forces of mass migration, international governmental structures and the 'deep state' of the global liberal elites are portrayed as threats which undermine the integrity, security and traditions of the native population. Such portrayals draw on the insecurities of national populations in the face of real challenges that the twenty-first century is presenting to secure and stable governance.

The key question here, of course is, how has this come about? History is of help in approaching this question from a perspective of the evolution and sometimes revolution in the political formations of society. From Alcibiades in

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13　Armin Schäfer and Michael Zürn, *The Democratic Regression. The Political Causes of Authoritarian Populism* (Oxford: Polity Press, 2024).

Ancient Athens through to Adolf Hitler in twentieth-century Germany and Donald Trump in contemporary American history there are common factors which repeat themselves although in different historical contexts. Social and economic inequalities, real challenges of governance, national or civic pride, and charismatic leadership all come together to encourage the creation of a scapegoat as the source of all problems. Whether this scapegoat be the conquest of Sicily during the Peloponnesian War between Athens with Sparta, the blaming of the Jews as the source of German economic hardship during the depression, or the rise of an American populism epitomized in slogans such as 'America First', Alcibiades, Hitler and Trump represent typical examples of demagoguery. It only takes a charismatic leader to galvanise these forces against a common enemy, whether that be the Spartan-Athenian internecine conflicts, the Jews, migrants, the European Union or other forms of political elites, and a process of initiating the collapse of democracy into demagoguery begins.

It was the collapse of democracy into demagogy which convinced Plato, following the murder of his teacher Socrates, that the *demos* were too fickle to see the bigger picture and to rule in the best interests of the members of society. The *Republic* argues this and proposes rule by the philosopher-kings as the way out of the instabilities of democracy. However, in our time it seems as if due to a combination of politico-historical amnesia and a secular circumscription of the imagination, thinking beyond democracy sounds almost like a fantasy. When there is no God, only the *demos* or the demagogue can rule. It seems as if secularisation has left only two choices on the table and at the moment it is looking like that the demagogues have it. Even in a so-called religious country, like the USA, because the country was born as a secular democracy it has been taken for granted that religion and politics should be separated, leaving religion to play a significant but more inchoate role in public affairs.[14] As such an informed role for the place of religion in politics is left to the university seminar rooms if indeed it takes place at all. The result of this religious illiteracy is that the populist use of religious language and slogans becomes the only real way in which any theological discourse about governance enters into the political consciousness of the general population.

Clearly, following the French and American Revolutions, throne and altar have been relegated to the medieval world of the past. Religion, if it occupies any public space at all, is placed firmly into the intermediate space of civil society, occupying that place between the state and the individual in which

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14   Jon Butler, Grant Wacker & Randall Balmer, *Religion in American Life: A Short History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 409–426.

special interest groups operate, or then again it might simply be placed in the private sphere of the individual conscience. The political realm is no longer a place for religion to occupy. In this situation, president and prime minister replace king, emperor and pope in the public square. Even in the UK with its constitutional monarchy, the king can only follow a royal precedent as was made clear during Queen Elizabeth II's reign, following the debacle over the suspension of parliament on 28 August 2019.[15]

As a result of this situation in our global context with clear signs of the rise of demagogues on the international stage, the question of the future of democracy is one which theological and biblical scholars should address, because, as history teaches us, when democracies collapse into demagogies wars often follow. Conflicts follow, because when the interests of the particular group or nation are seen as opposed to those of others then conflict inevitably arises in the fight for survival, dominance and global expansion. The particular problem today, of course, is that war today is different from in the past. It now means total annihilation of the planet if it becomes one which involves the so-called 'super-powers'.

The consciousness of this zero-sum game of contemporary war led to the post-Second World internationalism that has emerged out of a realisation that this is actually the case and this has led to the formation of the European Union, the United Nations and NATO. Communist countries equally forged their own internationalism through economic alliances and military accords. The collapse of communism in 1989 led to a brief period in which it seemed possible that a truly global internationalism might now arise. Francis Fukuyama's 1992 *The End of History and the Last Man* gave an early expression to this aspiration, though it was short lived.[16] Following 11 September 2001, it seemed as if a new enemy had arisen to replace the old one. Islamic terrorism, equally masquerading as a new internationalism, emerged.[17] However, this politico-religious expression of governance arose in the same oppositional paradigm that had been mirrored in medieval Christendom in which believers and pagans/other religions opposed each other in conflicts.[18]

15   Nick Harvey, Paul Tyler, *Can Parliament Take Back Control? Britain's Elective Dictatorship in the Johnson Aftermath* (London: The Real Press, 2023).

16   Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992).

17   Patrick Sookhdeo, *The Future in the Face of Militant Islam* (Lancaster, PA: Isaac Publishing, 2007).

18   Ernst H. Kantorowiccz, *The King's Two Bodies. A Study in Medieval Political Theology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 233-272.

By the 1980s Postmodernism had already given voice to the discontent towards a pseudo-internationalism that western capitalism had generated following the post-Second World War consensus.[19] It saw the repetition of the modern logic of purification that had annihilated the Jews in the form of a levelling of social diversity into a one-dimensional rationality of consumerism and conformism.[20] However, lacking any positive programme, postmodernism merely acted as an intellectual protest movement which could never clearly formulate or indeed effectively foster a new political agenda or movement.[21] Liberation, though necessary is never a sufficient end in itself for populations. It needs to be situated in a broader context which has some clarity about what this liberation is for as well as what it is against. Negative and positive freedoms were never effectively coupled in postmodernism because there was no common goal that all could agree to or aim towards. Pluralism and liberalism became almost synonymous with the privatisation of teleologies.[22] John Rawl's political philosophy of non-teleological overlapping consensus was as far as the West was able to imagine for the future of a tolerant liberal democracy.[23]

Religions made some progress in opening out their own worldviews to others outside of their respective traditions. Interreligious dialogue has built bridges between traditions which has opened up interesting new spaces of encounter. However, under the conditions of modern secularisation these spaces were never more than civil society interjections into the political sphere, good and indeed important as these have been. Moreover, it is not only religious groups who have provided a buffer to the most corrosive aspects of the current political sphere. Environmentalists, LBGTQ+ and anti-globalisation groups have all emerged within civil society as pressure groups on the political, economic, and social spheres. But these all tend to be coalitions of protest groups around disparate single issues of resistance against the common sense of the status quo. They do not share a common teleology at the political level.

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19   Linda Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism*, second edition (London: Routledge, 2002).

20   Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2002).

21   Jürgen Haberman, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, trans. Frederick Lawrence (Oxford: Polity Press, 1985), 83–105.

22   Michael Rosen, *The Shadow of God. Kant, Hegel, and the Passage from Heaven to History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2022), 188.

23   John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).

III. TOWARDS A SECOND AXIAL AGE?

In this context, it is worth raising the question of what a religiously-informed-post-democratic society might look like. Neither the privatisation of religion model, as in secular liberal democracy, nor the colonisation of the public sphere as in the Islamic State approach will do in this new situation. Might it be the case that a new form of the theo-political in which transcendence is re-coupled with immanence in a second Axial Age could point the way forwards? Already in 1964, during a lecture at the University of Chicago, Robert Bellah hinted at this in what would become a seminal article on the evolution of religion in modernity,[24] and which he would later develop, in conversation with the 'Axial Age' and 'multiple modernities' concepts of Shmuel Eisenstadt, into his magisterial *Religion in Human Evolution: From the Paleolithic to the Axial Age*.[25] If a second 'Axial Age' is emerging with a new multi-dimensional topography of transcendence and immanence might this provide a new target to aim for? If so, then what could a trajectory towards this goal look like?[26]

Clearly, several obvious difficulties face anyone attempting to think about such a trajectory, and so it is necessary to begin by identifying these challenges to the emergence of this new age. First, the concepts of 'God' and 'heaven' clearly need to be re-thought today. It is becoming increasingly clear that neither of the inherited forms of these traditional concepts are adequate to speak to our current political situation or to our scientifically literate culture. This rethinking involves both a recovery of former forgotten ideas, and at the same time, the formation of innovative new approaches. In terms of recovery, it involves a retrieval of thinking about God using the traditionally Jewish and Pauline kenotic language. In terms of innovation, it involves the development of a theologically informed spatial topography and conception of time that is able to *analogically* reconceptualise the divine and transcendent, or heavenly dimension, as outlined in contemporary understandings of spatio-temporal terms. A new theological conception of space and time needs to be developed according to the present *analogical* opportunities now currently available through non-standard geometries and post-relativistic theoretical models of time.[27] This is important

24   Robert Bellah, «Religious Evolution», *American Sociological Review*, nº. 29 (1964): 358-74.
25   Robert Bellah, *Religion in Human Evolution. From the Paleolithic to the Axial Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011).
26   Yves Lambert, «Religion in Modernity as a New Axial Age: Secularization or New Religious Forms?», *Sociology of Religion*, vol. 60, nº. 3. (1999): 303–333.
27   Michael Henle, *Modern Geometries: Non-Euclidean Projective and Discrete Geometry* (London: Pearson, 2001); «A Matter of Time», *Special Collector's Edition Scientific American*, vol. 27, nº. 2 (2018).

because a significant, though clearly not the only, reason for the rise of non-religion in Western democracies is due to inadequate and out-dated conceptions of God and the transcendent dimension which seem to be frozen in the nineteenth century Feuerbachian-Nietzschean inspired theology/anti-theologies.[28]

Second, a new version of the kenotic framework for thinking of God is important today because any triumphalism in this so-fundamental of governing concepts repeats a politics of sovereignty that has already impregnated the West, firstly in its imperial phase and secondly in its secular phase.[29] Neither of these approaches to sovereignty will currently be adequate to move things forward towards a viable and legitimate contemporary teleology and hence conceptions of God and the transcendent dimension. Recovering a sense of God, of transcendence in this kenotic language, liberates politics from an inevitable self-serving model. When there is only *us* to serve, we should not be surprised when universalism transforms into coalitions of self-interest groups and inverts itself into multiple forms of Neo-Puritanism.[30] Even when these have noble ends, such as in the current rise of environmentalism, these movements lack a *what for* teleological dimension which transcendence gives. However, recovery of transcendence cannot be according to the former model of the pseudo-universalism of the old religious paradigms, which ultimately led to a colonization by religious indoctrination. Kenotic understandings of God provide an alternative to this approach which takes seriously the freedom of the individual and cultures. Such an understanding of God would inform a renewed conception of the human person as portrayed in the *imago Dei* even when this society is officially non-religious. A kenotic conception of God consequently thus reproduces an anthropological vision in which human beings are decentred in a new understanding of power and sovereignty as self-emptying love. Such a model was first instantiated in the Judeo-Christian tradition in the Deuteronomic-King and codified in the so-called 'King Law'.[31] It is to explore some of the insights of this ancient model that I discuss the Deuteronomic King below. This preliminary exploration provides an illustration of the Deuteronomic exemplarity that calls on all the nations to follow and which

28   D.T. Everhart, «Transcendent Temporality: A Trans-Dimensional Model of God's Free Relationship to Space-Time», *Theologica*, vol. 5, nº. 1 (2021), 28–54.

29   Anthony J. Carrol and Marthe Kerkwijk et al., eds, *Towards a Kenotic Vision of Authority in the Catholic Church* (Washington: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2015), 15–52.

30   Noah Rothman, *The Rise of the New Puritans. Fighting Back Against Progressives' War on Fun* (Northampton, MA: Broadside Books, 2022).

31   Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomic School* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972).

recovers real political legitimacy in an ancient model of religiously-informed kenotic governance? In elucidating this model of kingship, I am not suggesting that adopting this approach today without a critical appropriation of it is either possible or even desirable. I am claiming, however, that given the importance of kingship in the history of global civilisations it would be foolish not to reconsider what positive dimensions of this mode of governance have been lost and should be recovered in the search for a post-democratic model of governance and leadership.

Those who have rejected religion, the so-called 'nones', in the modern era may be of particular help to point the way forwards here. Becoming clearer about the 'god-idol' of modernity, embodied in the 'atheism-theism' conflict of modernity, that has been squarely rejected may help to form part of a contemporary negative theology which supports a kenotically-positive theology of transcendence.[32] This new theology will be necessary if we are to reimagine power, sovereignty and the political in a religiously-informed-post-democratic context.[33] Any new form of the theo-political will have to be based on a kenotic understanding of God in whom power is transformed into love as exemplary service of all. This aspiration carries a legitimacy which one instinctively grasps because being made in the image and likeness of *this* God, human beings recognise from whence we have originated. Knowing where one comes from helps to guide us in the trajectory of reaching our goal. This theological articulation is a necessary propaedeutic for moving in the appropriate teleological direction as it permits the imagination to think beyond its current limited secular horizons. It may indeed be a condition of the possibility of moving in *any* direction as the world teeters on the brink of self-destruction due to the corrosive effects of populism, which in many ways mirrors the modern atheistic-theistic conception of God so magisterially deconstructed by modern theologians like Eberhard Jüngel.

Recovering a new kenotic notion of transcendence allows us to rethink the question of a teleological direction to life that sadly for many seems in principle currently unanswerable. It picks up the classical question of the good life which has splintered into a thousand fragments in the current democratic age. Without this, it is difficult to see how the malaise of our current democratic situation will move beyond its recent demagogic turn. The logic of society is tragically

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32   Eberhard Jüngel, *God as the Mystery of the World. On the Foundation of the Theology of the Crucified One in the Dispute Between Atheism and Theism* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1983).
33   Anthony J. Carroll, *Il giardiniere invisibile. Credere, non credere, cercare* (Bologna: Edizione Dehoniae Bologna, 2019).

heading in this direction through its inability to even consider how it might tackle the question of the goal of life. Only when the goal of life is beyond life, in a kenotic sense that self-empties into love, can we hope to aim for a goal that is desirable and indeed reachable.[34] When it becomes possible to hope for this again as societies, we will have recovered a viable conception of transcendence as a new goal for society to aim towards?

In order to explore the possibility of recovering a kenotic-teleological vision of transcendence, I will draw on the Jewish model of the exemplarity of the Deuteronomic King. [35] I shall discuss this political-theology as it is illustrated in the Book of Deuteronomy in the next section. This will act a counter-example to the charismatic attractions of the current demagogues which are currently informing multiple understandings of our post-democratic context. The biblical theme of the conflict between the Christ and the Anti-Christ appears to be finding a realised eschatological form in the current malaise of the planet which is veering towards post-democratic populism and possible self-destruction. This classical biblical theme represents a never-ending historical battle of truth over falsity, of goodness over evil and of beauty over horror which was first systematically portrayed by St Augustine in the interpenetration of the two kingdoms in his magisterial the *City of God*.[36] It may perhaps be, as Hegel noted for modernity, that the moment when the Spirit of the church passes into the state has now arrived, but now the state is no longer the modern nation state, but the global cosmopolitan interconnected network of all nations.[37] Could it be that on the model of the Deuteronomic King and the King Law such a new religious conception of governance can now come to pass at this moment of history?

Secular thinkers, like Slavoj Žižek, seem to think we are living in such eschatological times. [38] He notes the exhaustion of utopian energies and intimates that only religion can unlock new sources of energy required to face our current challenges. He may be right in this assessment, but one only needs to look at the parlous state of religious traditions around the world to realise that

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34   Charles Taylor «'A Catholic Modernity?', and 'Concluding Reflections'», in *A Catholic Modernity? Charles Taylor's Marianist Award Lecture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 13–37 y 105–125.

35   Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God. Unlocking the Bible's grand narrative* (Nottingham: Intervarsity Press, 2006), 454–500.

36   St Augustine, *The City of God Against the Pagans* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

37   Harry W. Adams, «Hegel, Rawls, and the Separation of Church and State», *Journal of Philosophy and Ethics*, nº. 2 (2020): 32–42.

38   Slavoj ŽiŽek, *Living in the End Times* (London: Verso Books, 2010).

some death in these religious traditions must occur for new life and energy to return to them. For example, there is a current crisis of global legitimacy in both the Roman Catholic Church and many Protestant denominations over the now decades-long series of financial and sexual abuse crises. These have undermined the moral authority of these organizations on the global stage, and the recent turn of Orthodoxy to backing the Russian dictatorship has tragically sealed the fate of this tradition as a global force for good for the foreseeable future. It is clearly only in a repentant spirit of radical honesty, openness and humility that any possible recovery of global legitimacy will return to Christianity in its various denominational forms and so one should be quite rightly cautious of presuming that organized religions are in any fit state to play a role in the reconstruction of global governance. Time will tell.

In such a tragic and indeed dangerous context—tragic because it undermines the good done by these institutions, and dangerous because it empowers the forces of evil to pursue their own destructive goals—the kenotic model of religion provides perhaps the only possibility of recovery for these institutions. Such a model depicts the necessary death and resurrection theme out of which new life emerges. The current death of Christianity, in its traditional institutional forms at least, may be a necessary moment in its resurrection and the recovery of a new form of kenotic Christianity.[39] Telling and re-telling the story of the Deuteronomic King may be part of the re-assembling of all the nations around the one, true God. It is this that all nations are addressed by in the call to recognise the exemplarity of the leadership of the Deuteronomic King.

IV. THE MODEL OF THE EXEMPLARY KING IN THE BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY

As I have suggested above, consideration of new forms of political leadership can benefit from the perspective on these issues afforded by the Book of Deuteronomy and the key point of this section is to sketch in brief outline just how the Book of Deuteronomy grounds a kenotic understanding of political leadership which can act as an inspiration towards rethinking a religiously-informed post-democratic institutional form of governance. Such a Jewish vision brings the Pentateuch's (Torah) normative social vision, within which

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39   Patrick D. Miller, *Deuteronomy. Interpretation. A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 216–229.

Israel's leadership finds its religious meaning and purpose, to fulfilment and offers a social teleology to ancient Israel. This contrasts sharply with the other ancient Near East models of autocratic and despotic kingship, that are relevantly analogous to what we today call 'populism', which predominated at the time. Deuteronomy's rejection of this despotic model is grounded in the embrace of a radically alternative understanding of governance that is based on the separation of powers among central office holders.[40] It therefore represents a proto-democratisation of power between the four central, and in Deuteronomy's understanding, complementary office holders (judge, king, priest and prophet). It does this, however, within the understanding of the mandate of the divine vocation of the king to rule in the name of the Lord.[41]

This normative social vision enacts a collaborative leadership which is exemplary because the other nations look on it with envy. In time, the Deuteronomic author(s) consider that these other nations will come to see its just operation. Consequently, they will come to imitate it, and so thereby transform their own despotic models of kingship. Deuteronomy reserves a special role of leadership for the king in its constitutional, and indeed kenotic vision of the king of Israel. In Deuteronomy, the king no longer monopolizes the exercise of the functions of power, but chooses not to exercise them in order to facilitate the collaborative model of leadership set down in the Mosaic Torah, which he is to diligently study.[42] In so acting, the king becomes a model for the whole of the nation of Israel, of how to live under the Torah. This prompts an international transformation of the other nations as they come to imitate and follow the model of Israel.[43] Consequently, the king is mandated to be the humble exemplar embodying the leadership of the people that is willed by God. He is to be the guardian of the vocation of Israel to model a collaborative exercise of leadership for the sake of God's mission of bringing all nations to humbly serve and love one another and the Lord. This is only possible when the king inspires a nation to embody the ethical action that he displays in his own personal exercise of kingship. This fulfills the special mission bequeathed to Israel through its particular election by God to act as a sign to other nations of how a just community under the one true God is meant to live.[44] So, when the

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40   Bernard M. Levinson, «The Reconceptualization of Kingship in Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomic History's Transformation of Torah», *Vetus Testamentum*, vol. 51, nº. 4 (2001): 511-534.

41   C. J. H. Wright, *Deuteronomy* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1996).

42   Deuteronomy 1. 5; 4. 8, 44; 28. 58.

43   Bernard M. Levinson, *Deuteronomy and the Hermeneutics of Legal Innovation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 90-97.

44   Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomic School* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972).

Jews of the First Temple period sang the refrain '*Yhwh mālak*' (Yhweh is king) in their liturgical celebrations, they were communicating the divine authority bequeathed to the people through the king to act politically. It is this divinely ordained political action which fulfills the human vocation in the created order to use our freedom to live together in harmony as one people under God. This is the call and destiny of being God's 'Israel'.[45]

> Keep them, put them into practice, and other peoples will admire your wisdom and prudence. Once they know what these laws are, they will exclaim, 'No other people is as wise and as prudent as this great nation!' And indeed, what great nation has its gods as near as Yahweh our God is to us whenever we call to him? And what great nation has laws and customs as upright as the entirety of this law which I am laying down for you today.[46]

Moreover, as Richard B. Hays argues, the figure of the Deuteronomic king is echoed in the example of the servant king of Jesus in the Gospels.[47] Consequently, the kingly language associated with Jesus, and by implication with the Christian tradition which is to follow him, should embody this model of kingship in its communal structures.[48] This conception of kingly rule outlined in the Book of Deuteronomy represents a new constitutional model of governance in Israel, which now forms Israel as a polity constituted by divine election.[49] In fact, the literary genre of the Deuteronomic text itself is what biblical scholars call an example of an early Near Eastern Constitutional Treaty Text (as found in the vassal treaties from the Hittite and Assyrian empires of the first and second millennia respectively), and so it manifests in its very structure the particular purpose of its composition. Deuteronomy's constitutional proposal thus re-imagines the role of the king in a kenotic mode that is meant to embody a new institutional arrangement for Israelite governance. This is why it separates the four traditional functions of power (judge, king, priest, prophet) who are *all* to be subject to the Torah, into distinct offices for this new model of governance. It thus represents a future vision of the institutions of a new kind of society in Israel, which is the culmination of the narrative of the Pentateuch (Torah), and so sets the agenda for the rest of the Hebrew Scriptures—*Prophets*

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45   Oliver O'Donovan, *The Desire of the Nations. Rediscovering the Roots of Political Theology*, 32.
46   Deuteronomy 4. 6–8.
47   Richard B. Hays, *Reading Backwards* (London: SPCK 2015); Richard B. Hayes, *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels* (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2017).
48   David Lloyd Dusenbury, *The Innocence of Pontius Pilate. How the Roman Trial of Jesus Shaped History* (London: Hurst and Company, 2021), 15-23.
49   Jason A. Staples, *The Idea of Israel in Second Temple Judaism. A New Theory of People, Exile, and Israelite Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 270–271.

(Nebi'im) and the *Writings* (Ketuvim)[50]—to correct, inspire and to orientate the people in fidelity to the Lord.

In this biblical narrative of the account of the king, the Book of Deuteronomy plays a key part. It sets the Torah's depiction of kingly leadership within the narrative of national redemption and the mission of Israel to the other nations. For this missional reason, the Deuteronomic 'King Law' (DKL) Dt. 17: 14-20) includes a threefold prohibition that forbids accumulation of all the symbols of power (horses, wives, silver and gold). This is to ensure that the charismatic leadership of the king bears witness to the kind of kenotic leadership which God has called him to for the sake of witnessing to the other nations what it means to be an authentic political leader. As part of his formation for this role, the king is therefore instructed to read the Torah every day from the personal copy that he has made, so that his actions will truly embody the law that is inscribed on his heart through such repeated diligent prayer and study. The Deuteronomic King thus acts as a charismatic source of power through his witness of ethical living which enables the whole nation to live the Torah as they see him living it and putting it into practice in his own personal life. The humility of the king thus mediates to the whole nation of Israel Yhwh's missional strategy of attracting other nations to transform their own polities accordingly. It is a missional witness that is orientated to its universal internationalization.

A historical-critical reading of Deuteronomy also indicates that the exile of the Israelites results from the failure of Israel to put the Deuteronomic constitutional model and its kingship into practice. Therefore, only by living in this moral way, does the king actually succeed in writing himself into the formational story of Yhwh's proposed future for his people. Such a formational narrative reveals that it is Yhwh who is revealed as the true leader of Israel and all kings write themselves into the story of the true author of Israel by living the Torah as his true mandated representatives. Yhwh is the 'Great King' of Deuteronomy who is meant to be followed in the example of his earthly kings who are called to manifest for the people what governance under God is meant to look like.

This account of the Deuteronomic King resonates with the kingship manifested by Jesus in the New Testament.[51] The Gospel writers allude to these Old Testament texts (primarily in the Septuagint versions). For example, Patrick

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50   Oliver O'Donovan, *The Desire of the Nations. Rediscovering the roots of political theology*, 30–81.
51   Oliver O'Donovan, *The Desire of the Nations. Rediscovering the Roots of Political Theology*, 143–155.

D. Miller interprets the 'King Law' of Deuteronomy as prefiguring and illuminating the figure of Jesus in the Gospels.[52] This means that Jesus brings to fulfillment the normative vision of Israel's foundational scriptures as exemplified in the Torah. If Christianity is to contribute to the reconstruction of contemporary political governance it may well be that it has to recover this dimension of the 'Israelhood' nature of the vocation of the church.[53] A vocation which it would seem that the current world needs the church to fulfil for it more than ever.

V. TOWARDS A POST-DEMOCRATIC VISION

In reviewing the issues facing contemporary democracies in the light of the model of governance proposed by the Deuteronomic kingly tradition it is clear that a teleological orientation is required if kenotic models of governance are to be developed. The role of the Deuteronomic King is to rule according to the King Law as given by Yhwh. This divine mandate orients the function and essence of kingship in the leadership of the community towards the universalization of the Torah through its internationalization. All nations are to live in this way as it is the manner that God commands. The purpose of the king in this narrative is thus to act as a charismatic figure who authoritatively inspires kenotic behaviour in others. First in his own nation and then through this witness to all nations. Only when this behaviour is manifested in the king himself is the ethical behaviour required for the internationalization of the Torah authoritatively transmitted to the people of Israel. It is simply not possible to have a corrupt leadership and an ethical community. The two need to go together so that the universalization of the law can happen in a missiological sense. The counter-example of this virtuous kingly behaviour is also the case. Corrupt leaders transmit their vices to the people which leads to the consequences that Israel will experience through its exiles and subjugation under foreign kings. Perhaps this is the ancient expression of the truth that democracies get the political leaders that they deserve! When democracies fall into populism it is therefore unsurprising when their leaders are decadent.

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52   Patrick D. Miller, *Deuteronomy. Interpretation. A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*.

53   George Lindbeck, *The Church in a Postliberal Age* (London: SCM Press, 2002), 244-252; Shaun C. Brown, *George Lindbeck and The Israel of God. Scripture, Ecclesiology, and Ecumenism* (Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 37–66.

VI. THE EXAMPLE OF THE DEUTERONOMIC KING AS A MODEL FOR A POST-DEMOCRATIC LEADER

The question which the example of this ethical-political transformation of ancient Israel raises for us today is, how is this to come about in the contemporary period? For this to be the case a number of things need to happen. The first is that the current models of political and religious leadership clearly need to be overhauled in the light of the election of the Deuteronomic King. One might consider the Dali Lama or Pope Francis as possible Deuteronomic exemplars of leadership in a post-democratic model of governance However, in the case of the pope, the Roman Catholic Church is mired in daily scandals and although Pope Francis is clearly making attempts to reform the curia and papal office, it is difficult to see how a general support for the Roman Catholic Church will emerge until the legacy of the sexual and financial abuse scandals of recent decades are adequately dealt with. In the case of the Dali Lama, there can be little doubt that he enjoys a high degree of popularity which illustrates the form of exemplarity required in a post-democratic model of governance. However, Buddhism as a religion has not entered into the dialectics of modernization which are part and parcel of western history. Despite these limitations, both Pope Francis and the Dali Lama provide necessary and suggestive elements of the required exemplars at the charismatic level for how such a leader of an institution might arise and be a witness to the universalization of the Deuteronomic tradition which is the 'Israelhood vocation of the church'. Where Buddhism to enter more effectively into the political discourse of modernity it might be better able to contribute to the forging of a new post-democratic politics. This may indeed already be occurring through its transmission of the values and practices of mindfulness to various sectors of society today, such as the health systems of various democratic nations.[54]

However, as well as a consideration of these specifically religious models, it is worth asking the question of whether there is a third option? Here one might consider that new forms of religio-political institutions might emerge in the light of the current crises of both religions and political institutions. What might such institutions look like? It is worth returning to Plato to consider this question in the light of the history of philosophical discussion on these matters. Clearly, the formation of leaders would need to involve a preparation equivalent to a spiritual training that is typically associated with religious orders. This would obviously

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54   Ruth A. Baer ed., *Mindfulness Based Treatment Approaches: Clinician's Guide to Evidence Base and Applications* (Cambridge, MA: Academic Press, 2014).

need to be coupled with a political formation in models of effective governance in a global era. Whilst it might appear fanciful to some to consider a spiritual formation for contemporary models of political leadership, the current state of what one might reasonably call 'decadence' in political life would seem to require just such a fundamental overhaul. In fact, this option only really appears fanciful, when one presupposes that politics functions independent of a particular spirituality. This is clearly not the biblical conception of politics as manifested by the Deuteronomic King. Furthermore, the witness of the ancient and modern traditions of political thought reveals that rigorous analysis, reasoned argument and spiritual formation are all essential for the formation of exemplary political leaders.[55] The notion that such formation is part and parcel of testing authentic political and ethical philosophies has been made popular by the work of Pierre Hadot in his groundbreaking, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*.

In drawing on the example of kingship as envisaged in the Book of Deuteronomy, I have indicated that this tradition of the formation of exemplary political leadership is to be equally found in ancient Jewish thought. Consequently, this provides a third dialogue partner to Christianity and ancient philosophy. In fact, one only needs to take a cursory glance at the formation of political leaders in Chinese and Indian thought, to realize that there is a universal preoccupation with these issues that stretches back over two millennia and so one should naturally include Chinese and Indian traditions of political formation in this dialogue as well.[56] Moreover, despite a certain recent demagogic turn in Islamic models of political leadership, the history of Islamic political thought

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55   Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life., Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1995); John M. Cooper, *Pursuits of Wisdom. Six Ways of Life in Ancient Philosophy from Socrates to Plotinus* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).

56   Stephen C. Angle, *Sagehood: The Contemporary Significance of Neo-Confucian Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Loubna El Amine, *Classical Confucian Political Thought: A New Interpretation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015); Donald J. Munro, *The Concept of Man in Early China*. Stanford (Stanford University Press, 1969); Sungmoon Kim, *Theorizing Confucian Virtue Politics: The Political Philosophy of Mencius and Xunzi* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020); Edward Slingerland, *Effortless Action: Wu-Wei as Conceptual Metaphor and Spiritual Ideal in Early China* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Benjamin I. Schwartz, *The World of Thought in Ancient China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985); Wendy Doninger, *The Hindus: An Alternative History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Joerg Tuske, *Indian Epistemology and Metaphysics* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017); Charles Goodman, *Consequences of Compassion: An Interpretation and Defense of Buddhist Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Heinrich Zimmer, *Philosophies of India* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1951); D. Mackenzie Brown, *The White Umbrella: Indian Political Thought from Manu to Gandhi* (Berkeley: University of Californian Press, 1953).

reveals that analogous approaches to the Deuteronomic King are not unknown in Islam either.[57]

In the Western tradition it was Plato who understood the need for this in-depth formation of political leaders. His model of formation, as outlined in the *Republic*, is one which still has much to teach us today about the need to take political formation seriously. In a time of crisis in forms of democratic governance, the next steps towards envisaging just how we might move beyond the modern institutions of today's democratic governance will require that we reconsider the Platonic critique of democracy and the place that a serious formation of its political leaders should have in any civilized society. At what may be the end of the experiment of the secular model of democratic governance in Western history, a return to reflecting on the part played by the spiritual foundations of political philosophies may point the way towards post-democratic models of governance that draw on ancient and modern, secular and religious, and local, national and international traditions of governance as exemplified by the model of the Deuteronomic King.[58]

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57 Antony Black, *The History of Islamic Political Thought* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011); Gerhard Bowering, *Islamic Political Thought: An Introduction* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015); Albert Hourani, *Arabic Political Thought in the Liberal Age 1798-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Hamid Enayat, *Modern Islamic Political Thought* (London: Bloomsbury, 2005).

58 Anthony J. Carroll and Katia Lenehan, eds., *Spiritual Foundations and Chinese Culture: A Philosophical Approach* (Washington: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2016).

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