

CARL SCHMITT ON LIBERALISM, DEMOCRACY AND CATHOLICISM*

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Most of Schmitt's critics have interpreted his intellectual work during the Weimar Republic as aimed at one target: the philosophical demolition of liberalism. Richard Thoma advances this thesis in his 1925 review of Schmitt's *Parlamentarismus*, which he reads in light of Schmitt's early radical critique of liberal institutions. Schmitt writes, at the conclusion of that work, that the irrational myths, espoused by anarchists like Sorel, may bring about an authority 'based on a new feeling for order, discipline and hierarchy'.¹ This prompts a puzzled Thoma to retort:

I would hazard to guess, but not to assert, that behind these ultimately sinister observations there stands the unexpressed personal conviction of the author that an alliance between a nationalistic dictator and the Catholic Church could be the real solution and achieve a definitive restoration of order, discipline and hierarchy.²

He writes this in spite of Schmitt's explicit claim that his intention was the reform of parliamentary rule, that his book neither called for the dismantling of liberal institutions, nor contained a principled attack on liberalism. This shows how much Thoma is influenced by his reading of Schmitt's earlier writings. But who can blame him for suspecting the sincerity of Schmitt's call for the reform of parliaments? After all, Schmitt had earlier extolled the extreme views of De Maistre, Bonald and Donoso Cortés; he had, moreover, explored an interpretation of the *Reichspräsident* as the holder of dictatorial powers, and had berated German romantics for their incapacity for decisive action. Who could object to Leo Strauss, when in 1932 he passed a similar judgment? In his review of *The Concept of the Political* he claimed that Schmitt's affirmation of the political

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¹ Richard Thoma, 'On the Ideology of Parliamentarism (1925)', in Carl Schmitt, *The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy*, trans. Ellen Kennedy (Cambridge, Mass., 1985), p. 82.

² *Ibid.*

was a thesis ‘altogether determined by his fight against liberalism’.³ Again Georg Dahm, writing in 1935, appeared to confirm this view: ‘[Schmitt’s works] are, from the start, directed at one specific aim: the unmasking and destruction of the liberal *Rechtsstaat* and the superseding of the legislative state’.⁴

The discussion of the 1920s and 30s revived in the 1980s with the publication of the translation of three of Schmitt’s works — *Political Romanticism*, *Political Theology* and *The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy* (or *Parlamentarismus* for short). In her introduction to *Parlamentarismus*, Ellen Kennedy, in agreement with George Schwab, notes that Schmitt wrote this book as a way to test the inner consistency of the Weimar constitution. According to Kennedy, Schmitt held that ‘the Weimar constitution contained two principles, one liberal and the other democratic. During these years Schmitt began to identify these two principles with the *Reichstag* and the *Reichspräsident*, respectively.’⁵ This provides the context for the distinction Schmitt drew between liberalism and democracy. In order to offset the liberal ingredients of the constitution, Schmitt began to stress its democratic aspects. Kennedy observes that Schmitt explored the possibility of enhancing direct democratic mechanisms, such as plebiscites and referenda. But more than that, ‘Schmitt asserted that the essence of the Weimar constitution was the democratic principle expressed in article 1, not its liberal principles’.⁶ It is as a defender of the democratic nature of the constitution that the *Reichspräsident* was to be allowed ‘to act as a commissarial dictator’.⁷ Because critics, like Thoma, ‘read [Schmitt’s *Parlamentarismus*] together with’ his earlier works, they interpret it as an attack on democracy. Kennedy, however, maintains that Schmitt was not interested in attacking democracy but liberalism. Accordingly, she identifies Kelsen’s legal positivism as ‘the ultimate target of his political thought’.⁸

In a review of Kennedy’s work, Habermas acknowledges the philosophical height to which Schmitt lifted the discussion concerning parliamentarism. Schmitt made it his aim to study the essence of political phenomena by means

³ Leo Strauss, ‘Comments on Carl Schmitt’s *Der Begriff des Politischen*’, in Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, trans. George Schwab (New Brunswick, 1976), p. 82.

⁴ Georg Dahm, Review of Schmitt’s *Über die drei Arten des rechtswissenschaftliche Denkens*, in *Zeitschrift für die gesamte Rechtswissenschaft*, 95 (1935), p. 181.

⁵ Ellen Kennedy, ‘Introduction: Carl Schmitt’s *Parlamentarismus* in its Historical Context’, in Schmitt, *The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy*, p. xx.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. xxxiv.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. xxxv.

of traditional philosophical categories. But this endeavour proved in the end to make ‘a mockery of parliamentary institutions’.⁹ Habermas has a warning for left-wing intellectuals who try ‘to fill the gap left by non-existent Marxist theory of democracy with Schmitt’s fascist discussion of democracy’.¹⁰ In his view, Schmitt ridiculed the ‘medium of discussion that is public and guided by argument’.¹¹ Openness and public discussion, which he restricted to liberal theory and practice, must be equally seen as democratic assumptions. According to Habermas, just as a democratic constitution cannot be detached from ‘the process of public discussion’, so too liberalism presupposes a ‘conception of a general formation of opinion and popular will’.¹² Schmitt’s attempt to separate democracy and liberalism clouded and disfigured a true understanding of democracy. Habermas believes that Schmitt’s intentions were transparent. By detaching democracy from the more abstract humanism espoused by liberalism, it became subservient to the attainment of a national identity under the guidance of an acclaimed dictator. Schmitt could thus draw the fundamental outline of a *Führerdemokratie*.

Kennedy and Habermas coincide in attributing capital importance to the distinction Schmitt drew between liberalism and democracy. They again implicitly agree that Schmitt’s motivation in drawing that distinction was his desire to reject liberalism, pre-eminently embodied in the parliamentary institution, and retrieve some form of classical, pre-liberal democracy. But while Kennedy is content with stressing Schmitt’s call for a plebiscitary democracy, Habermas is, I believe, justified in casting a shadow on the democratic quality of that plea. He notes that democracy was enlisted by Schmitt to prop up an authoritarian cause. What Habermas fails to explain, however, is the fact that Schmitt did not propose the abolition, but merely the reform, of parliamentary politics, and that the distinction he drew between liberalism and democracy was functional to that proposal. It seems to me that Habermas suspects Schmitt’s sincerity. Given that in his early work Schmitt vehemently criticizes liberalism, why would he now be satisfied with a mere reform of parliament and not its complete overhaul? Why not ascribe to him a plea for the democratic dictatorship of a *Führer*?

The explanation for the distinction drawn by Schmitt between liberalism and democracy lies, it seems to me, in his sincere commitment to a reform of parliamentarism. What is most sinister about him may have been after all this

⁹ Jürgen Habermas, ‘Sovereignty and the *Führerdemokratie*’, *The Times Literary Supplement*, 26 September 1986, p. 1054.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

sincerity. Critics of Schmitt have generally read his work in light of his early critique of liberalism. In that light it appears inconceivable that he would at any point disown that criticism and succeed in the accommodation of liberalism within his system of ideas. But this is what I am prepared to argue for. The publication of his *Parlamentarismus* in 1923 reveals Schmitt to be taking liberalism seriously. What he now finds worthy of serious consideration is the steadfast anti-political stance assumed by liberalism. This prompts his effort to distinguish it, not only from democracy, but from any political form as such. Schmitt maintains deep reservations with respect to liberalism, but these relate only to its *political* applications. Those reservations he never abandons and they can be said to mark the continuity of his intellectual enterprise. Liberalism, as he sees it, is unable to secure the political unity of the state. In fact, the individualist and pluralist tendencies that it gives rise to promote antipolitical attitudes which, if allowed full expression, would necessarily weaken state authority. Moreover, the anti-political tendencies generated by it erase any possibility for implementing policies that could counter, or at least neutralize, the democratic tide.

Contrary to what most of his critics maintain, democracy and not liberalism is, in my view, the main target of Schmitt's intellectual work during the Weimar period. My interpretation of his *Parlamentarismus* is aimed at proving this point. What he attempts to do here is to prevent the emergence of purely democratic politics. This he does in spite of his overt recommendation that the Weimar constitution be interpreted along the lines of a direct, plebiscitary democracy. It seems to me that this recommendation proposes the concentration of political power in the hands of an authoritarian figure — the *Reichspräsident*. Schmitt, like many of his generation, found himself grappling with the extinction of monarchical legitimacy in Germany. He was quick to acknowledge that only democracy remained as a principle of legitimacy and that this opened the way for all kinds of radical experiments. The distinction between liberalism and democracy introduced in *Parlamentarismus* was meant to moderate the democratic onslaught. Liberalism is neither a political form nor a state form. In its antipolitical stance it remains indifferent to democracy, aristocracy or monarchy. Liberalism recommends a balance of political powers and forms to moderate and neutralize the political sphere. Democratic procedures are left in place as a way to entrust elected officials with representative roles.

Before drawing the distinction between liberalism and democracy in his *Parlamentarismus*, Schmitt had attacked liberalism because it seemed inextricably bound to democracy. He charged liberalism for its inability to withstand the democratic avalanche. But as a universe of ideas distinct from democracy, and interpreted as an a-political, neutral posture, attentive only to the protection of individuals, liberalism appeared to Schmitt in 1923 as the best way to neutralize democracy. Liberalism is objectionable only when it assumes a

political stance. If the pluralism that is congruent with liberalism were allowed political expression, the unity of the state would be put in jeopardy.¹³ Schmitt's paramount concern was the attainment and safeguarding of the unity of the state. Once he realized that liberalism was, at its core, *not* a political form, his reservations subsided. It is still true that nineteenth-century liberalism tried to fashion a state to its image and likeness, and aimed at exporting pluralism to the political sphere. But if kept at a clear distance from any political form, liberalism ceased to be a threat. Schmitt was now able to aim his attack on the democratic populace which he would attempt to disarm by means of a democratically elected sheriff.

The distinction between liberalism and democracy, which Schmitt introduced in 1923, marked the beginning of his *rapprochement* with liberalism. This accommodation allowed him to identify what he feared most: the increased pace of the democratic revolution. Schmittian scholarship has assumed the unity and continuity of his Weimar production. Thus, what he wrote in *Parlamentarismus* is read in line with what he wrote earlier. The antiliberal stand of this early production is then projected onto his later Weimar production. In *Parlamentarismus*, however, he was able to extricate liberalism from democracy, and could henceforth aim all his efforts at taming democratic absolutism.

This *rapprochement* with liberalism was mediated by his reading of Hegel's political philosophy.¹⁴ In Hegel's 'relative rationalism' he found the conceptual

¹³ In his article 'Der Begriff des Politischen' (published in *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik*, 58 (1927), pp. 1–33), Schmitt opposes the pluralist theory of Harold Laski for negating 'the sovereign unity of the state, i.e. political unity' (p. 12). His plea for political monism is one of the features that remains constant in his Weimar theory of the state (compare with his article 'Staatsethik und pluralistischer Staat', *Kant Studien*, 35 (1930), pp. 30–3).

¹⁴ Jean-François Kervégan characterizes Schmitt's self-defined theoretical project an effort to continue and at the same time supersede Hegel's legal and political philosophy (Jean-François Kervégan, *Hegel, Carl Schmitt. La politique entre spéculation et positivité* (Paris, 1992), p. 143). Kervégan notes that Schmitt, while acknowledging his debt to Hegel, is also critical of his two-facedness. While assuming a political standpoint which affirms the authority of the state as the *imperium rationis*, Hegel, at the same time, defends the autonomy of civil society, as the domain in which individuals are free to pursue their self-defined aims. The co-existence of these orientations, Kervégan notes, 'prive, aux yeux de Schmitt, la construction spéculative de l'Etat hégélien de la transparente univocité qu'il croit pouvoir admirer chez Hobbes. Il en résulterait un certain nombre d'équivoques et d'incertitudes qui révèlent l'absence chez Hegel d'une décision théorique radicale; cette absence, l'art trouble de la dialectique parvient seulement à la masquer' (p. 144). It is true that in his article 'Der Begriff der Politischen', Schmitt ranks Hegel, together with Machiavelli, Hobbes, Bossuet, de Maistre and Donoso Cortés, as a genuine political theorist. He is also quick to observe that Hegel exhibits a two-facedness when compared to the others (p. 23). This qualification is prompted by the marriage of liberal and conservative themes in Hegel's political philosophy. The other authors mentioned by Schmitt, with the possible exception of Hobbes, could not be said to accommodate their conservative

framework that allowed an accommodation between a liberal civil society and a conservative political state. Pluralism, when allowed a free hand within civil society, does not endanger the unity of a state if secured by a strong *Reichspräsident* — Schmitt's version of the Hegelian prince. Hegel successfully deployed the monarchical principle to offset the rising democratic challenge and to secure the unimpeded activity of civil society. Schmitt recognized that in post-revolutionary Germany the monarchical principle had succumbed. But he cleverly embraced the triumphant democratic principle as a substitute for the monarchical principle. At the apex of the state should now stand a President conceived as a commissarial dictator, that is, as a democratic agent whose mandate was the preservation of the unity of the state.

In what follows I will examine the evolution of Schmitt's thought during the Weimar period. First I will consider some of his pre-1923 works to reveal Schmitt's conservative revolutionary outlook.¹⁵ In this regard, I will argue that at this stage of his intellectual development his rejection of liberalism is the paramount idea. Secondly, I will examine his *Parlamentarismus* in which he reconciles himself with liberalism and conceives of a political form which will not threaten the unity of the state. In my conclusion, I will set out the view that it is a new conception of Catholic universalism which ultimately mediates his accommodation with liberalism.

I

The intellectual task attempted by Schmitt, prior to 1923, was guided by the need to restore the validity of notions such as sovereignty, authority and

political convictions to liberal demands. Kervégan believes that Schmitt, more than merely offering a description of Hegel's views, intends to pass judgment on his lack of theoretical decision and conceptual clarity. It is not clear to me, however, that this is what Schmitt intends. The two basic constitutional ingredients, liberal principles and political forms, distinguished in his *Verfassungslehre*, are supposed to exist in combination within Weimar's parliamentary make-up. Schmitt maintains this view after 1923. It is true that he denounces the preponderance of the democratic political form, but he does so because he feels that unchecked democracy militates against liberal principles by wielding totalitarian powers. Since Hegel's political philosophy also distinguished between liberal principles and political forms, the use of the term 'two-facedness' must lack critical intent. Otherwise Schmitt would undermine his own position.

¹⁵ Stefan Breuer argues convincingly that the so-called 'conservative revolutionary movement' is a polyphonic choir that, in Germany, does not constitute a unified political current. He acknowledges, however, that all conservative revolutionary thinkers reject the 'spirit or principle of liberalism', and the institutions it sustains, namely 'the parliamentary system, legislative rule, party pluralism, the world of contracts and suffrage' (Stefan Breuer, 'Die "Konservative Revolution" — Kritik eines Mythos', *Politische Vierteljahresschrift*, 31 (1990), p. 586). My own use of the term 'conservative revolution' does not require that it refer to a unified political movement.

dictatorship. These notions were needed to sustain the state as a separate entity and keep it from drowning in the ever-fluctuating waters of civil society. The rise of liberalism had in effect depoliticized public discourse so as to obscure the real nature of the state. Schmitt took the view that it was futile simply to repress political life and attempt to cover it up with the language of abstract legality. Hence, to read the Weimar constitution as a purely formal juridical document missed its true meaning. Schmitt treated the constitution as a distinguished patient invited to lie on his couch and confess to its repressed political intentions. Then its impeccable liberal façade would crumble and the real proportions of its article 48 would come to light. This is what he achieved in the last pages of his *Die Diktatur* (1921).¹⁶

According to Schmitt, the latitude of article 48 was open to interpretation, for there was the possibility of reading into it either a commissarial or an absolute dictatorial role for the *Reichspräsident*. Section 2 of that article bestowed the *Reichspräsident* with unlimited powers in cases when the security and order of the German State were at risk. It granted him an unlimited commission, by means of which he could then proceed to suspend all individual rights for an indefinite time. Herr Schiffer, the Minister of Justice, actually admitted in the *Reichstag* session of 3 March 1920, that the *Reichspräsident*, in virtue of that unlimited delegation of power, could decide to spray German cities and towns with poison gas.¹⁷ But the same minister shrunk away from the conclusion that the unlimited empowerment of the *Reichspräsident* included the capacity to legislate and administer justice, and not just the faculty to dictate *de facto* measures. An unlimited entitlement to legislate and administer justice would configure the absolute or revolutionary, and not merely commissarial, dictatorship of the *Reichspräsident*.¹⁸ Schiffer's restrained interpretation of what that unlimited commission implied aimed at salvaging the liberal inten-

¹⁶ Carl Schmitt, *Die Diktatur. Von den Anfängen des modernen Souveränitätsgedankens bis zum proletarischen Klassenkampf* (Munich and Leipzig, 1928).

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 201.

¹⁸ An account of the distinction between sovereign or revolutionary dictatorship and commissarial dictatorship appears at the end of Chapter III of *Die Diktatur*. Here Schmitt explains why Rousseau did not envisage the notion of sovereign dictatorship, but isolated the elements whose mixture would be tried during the Revolution. Those elements were the figures of the legislator and the dictator studied in the *Social Contract*. The legislator was described as an extra-constitutional figure, while the dictator's role, the suspension of constitutional rule, was contained within constitutional bounds (p. 127). Thus, according to Schmitt, 'the content of the activity of the legislator is law, but lacking legal power, it is powerless law (*machtloses Recht*); dictatorship is omnipotence without law, that is, lawless power (*rechtlose Macht*)' (p. 128). He also added: 'The legislator stands outside the state, but within the law; the dictator outside the law, but within the state . . . As soon as the legislator is given dictatorial powers, and thus becomes a dictatorial legislator and a dictator who grants constitutions, a commissarial dictator has become sovereign' (pp. 128–9).

tions of the framers of the Constitution. But, as Schmitt is quick to notice, one could also understand the *Reichstag*, and even the *Reichspräsident*, as ‘bearers of a *pouvoir constituant*.’¹⁹ This would mean that an absolute dictatorship could be fitted within the constitutional bounds. But then the constitution itself would become a ‘precarious provisional arrangement’.²⁰ According to Schmitt, this and other contradictions in Weimar’s constitutional design were not at all unexpected. They were part of an attempt to accommodate a ‘combination of a sovereign and a commissarial dictatorship’.²¹

Schmitt explained this uneasy accommodation as the result of the confluence of two distinct elements. On the one hand, a liberal, apolitical element stressed the protection of individuals. Individuals were assured a protected domain, a sanctuary for their immunities and privileges. From this perspective the state ought to be seen as an intruder whose actions required close supervision. On the other hand, a political form, resting on the *pouvoir constituant* of the people, demanded an interventionist political state. A democratic *volonté generale*, Schmitt recognized, could override and render superfluous the inalienable human rights.²² Hence the need to distinguish between liberalism and democracy. The existence of the state that responded to those unlimited democratic demands contradicted the spirit of liberalism which sees in those demands a permanent threat to the freedom of individuals. The tensions and contradictions within the Weimar constitution were powerful arguments that Schmitt directed against liberalism. The mere existence of a state proved that the attempt to dispense with notions such as sovereignty, dictatorship and politics were futile.

Historically, the state as an autonomous and unified entity resulted from the triumphant assertion of absolute monarchical sovereignty over feudal seignorial claims. The transition from monarchical absolutism to liberal constitutionalism and the rule of law assumed that the challenge to the unity of the State posed by the aristocratic Frondes had been met. If henceforth an individual or a group of individuals conspired to alter the public order, this was

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 202. Joseph W. Bendersky believes that Schmitt displays his fidelity to the Weimar constitution when he restricts the role of the *Reichspräsident* during situations of emergency to a commissarial dictatorship (Joseph W. Bendersky, *Carl Schmitt. Theorist for the Reich* (Princeton, 1983), pp. 34–5). But Bendersky does not take into account that, in the passage in question, Schmitt is criticizing the contradictory nature of the constitution. It is contradictory for the Weimar constitutional design simultaneously to combine inconsistent ingredients: absolute and commissarial dictatorial powers. Cf. José A. Estévez Araujo, ‘Schmitt contra Weimar’, *Teorías de la Democracia*, ed. J. M. González y F. Quesada (Barcelona, 1988), pp. 204–7.

²⁰ Schmitt, *Die Diktatur*, p. 202.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 203.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 140.

to be seen as a perfectly normal event, calculated and regulated in advance.²³ The unity of the state could not thereby be placed in jeopardy. Classical liberalism acknowledged that the juridical value of absolutism lay in having definitely secured the unity of the state, menaced by the Frondes. Once that unity was attained, it became necessary to limit what liberals now interpreted as royalist excesses and arbitrary rule. The notion of sovereignty could be safely dissolved, or even better, transferred from the monarch to each individual citizen. Liberalism presupposed the elimination of all social groupings, all intermediate associations, and the isolation of individuals. Condorcet was able to justify, according to Schmitt, switching his allegiance from monarchy to republicanism, in the following terms:

the time is past when there existed within the state powerful groups and classes. The *associations puissantes* have vanished. While they existed, *un despotisme armé* was required to contain them. Now individuals confront a unified totality. Thus, *il faut bien peu de force pour forcer les individus à l'obéissance*.²⁴

Europe in 1848, Russia in 1917 and Germany in 1918 proved Condorcet to be wrong. Within the state there arose new powerful associations whose 'antagonist force' created altogether new and exceptional situations. These required the development of totally new frameworks of reference. In particular, the Marxist notion of a dictatorship of the proletariat went beyond the notion of commissarial dictatorship, which could still be placed within traditional parameters. It represented an absolute dictatorship grounded on a revolutionary *pouvoir constituant*, very much the same power that was claimed by the National Convention in 1793, and which Schmitt presented as an example of absolute dictatorship. Schmitt concluded his *Die Diktatur* with the thought that, just as Marx and Engels described their own situation in their address to the

²³ According to Schmitt, the notion of state of siege was introduced in the nineteenth century to impose legal regulation on the management of states of emergency.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 204. Compare with the section in *ibid.* pp. 102–12, where Schmitt distinguishes between Montesquieu's defence of the role of intermediary associations, a pluralist position for which Schmitt shows no sympathy, and Voltaire's plea for centralization. The background of this section, and the one which discusses Condorcet, lies in the dispute between two eighteenth-century French schools of historical thought. The debate pitted Germanists against Romanists; that is, those who saw the French political tradition as stemming from feudal institutions against those who saw it determined by the absolute rule of Roman emperors (compare with Albert Mathiez, 'La place de Montesquieu dans l'histoire des doctrines politiques du XVIIIe siècle', *Annales historiques de la révolution française* (1930), pp. 99–100). The actual intention of the Germanists, represented by Fénelon and Boulainvilliers (*thèse nobiliaire*), was to shore up the autonomy of the nobility and their feudal *puissances particulières* in an age characterized by a strong, centralized monarchy. By contrast, Dubos, representative of the Romanist school, defended an absolute monarchical regime (*thèse royaliste*).

Communist League in 1850, so too the Weimar republic had retrogressed to the state of affairs of France in 1793 and was thus compelled to employ the same measures.²⁵

The self-imposed task assumed by Schmitt was to bring to light what lay beneath Weimar's liberal façade. One thing was to recognize the sovereign rights of individuals and quite another thing was the attribution of broad unlimited powers to the executive authority, powers that could even configure an absolute dictatorship. For if conceived as an outlet for the *pouvoir constituant*, the *Reichspräsident* would then be empowered to go beyond the limits set by the constitution itself. Schmitt sought to bring out this repressed aspect of the constitution, its revolutionary stance, in order to graft onto it his own counter-revolutionary programme. This is precisely what he thought de Maistre, Bonald and Donoso Cortés to have done. Novalis' observation that Burke wrote a revolutionary book against the revolution, could be extended to the work of these thinkers, and to Schmitt. Indeed it is by revolutionary means that Schmitt intended to contest the revolutionary claims of the proletariat. The dictatorship envisaged by Marx was an extension of the enlightened rationalist dictatorship. The conservative reaction contested the expulsion of the will from the constitutional empire of reason. For the Enlightenment there could only be an administration of things which left no room for ultimate decisions. The enlightened despot was a rational edifying dictator, who centralized control and administered the state according to plan. To Burke, de Maistre and Bonald this appeared to be repugnant. Schmitt notes their aversion 'to "artifice" in political affairs, artificial constitutions based on the calculations of a clever individual, and the fabricators of constitutions and political geometricians'.²⁶ Only a decisionist, nonconstructivist way of thinking such as theirs could fully restore and bring to life the political stature of the *Reichspräsident*. He alone would then decide on the living exception.

Schmitt associated the antipolitical stand assumed by liberalism, and its distaste for the notion of sovereignty, with the spirit of romanticism. 'Where political activity begins, political romanticism ends.'²⁷ The typical response of the romantics when confronted by a political event, was to take refuge within the confines of their absolute selves. From that isolation they could passively

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 205. In their *Address to the Central Committee of the Communist League*, Marx and Engels wrote: 'As in France in 1793 so today in Germany it is the task of the really revolutionary party to carry through the strictest centralization' (*The Marx and Engels Reader*, ed. Robert Tucker (New York, 1978), pp. 509–10). Schmitt admits that Catholic political thinkers, like Bonald and Donoso Cortés, coincide here with Marx and Engels. The revolutionary centralization of power proposed by the latter must be countered by an extreme centralization of reactionary power (compare with Schmitt, *Die Diktatur*, p. 147).

²⁶ Carl Schmitt, *Political Romanticism*, trans. Guy Oakes (Cambridge, Mass., 1986), p. 95.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 160.

contemplate how events unfolded without being drawn into them. Always eager to discuss political affairs, their discussions invariably turned into endless idle chatter. Not at all comparable with the deliberation that precedes action, romantic discussion was only a substitute for decisive action. ‘Romantic activity is a contradiction in terms.’²⁸ Their apoliticism had an obvious political derivation — it facilitated the passive acceptance of the circumstances at hand. ‘Romanticism not only lacks the specific connection with the restoration . . . ; it also has no necessary relationship to revolution either. The isolated and absolute ego is elevated above both’.²⁹ Schmitt warns against attempts to assimilate Catholicism to romantic attitudes. It is true that romantics like Novalis, Schlegel and Adam Müller converted to Catholicism which was at their time attuned to their own conservatism and the restoration policies which they espoused. But romantic enthusiasm for the Church had nothing to do with the Church itself.

[I]t is a mistake to call him (Müller) a romantic on the grounds that he was a Catholic. This popular conception is to be explained only as a consequence of that dilettante’s conflation of romanticism with the romanticized object. Catholicism is not something that is romantic . . .³⁰

Romantic apoliticism avoided the forks in the road. It could not suffer to burden the autonomous self with decisions that might lead to objective commitments and entanglements. Only aesthetically conservative, the romantic affirmation of the superiority of the subject could flourish within the private spaces available in liberal society.

Catholic conservatives like de Maistre, Bonald and Donoso Cortés, and not the romantics, were, in Schmitt’s view, the true adversaries of liberalism. What separated these Catholic traditionalists from the romantics was their ability to decide, to confront the *either-or* head on.

In the romantic, the ‘organic’ conception of the state rests on this inability to make a normative evaluation. This conception repudiates the ‘juridical’ as narrow and mechanical and it searches for the state that is above right and wrong . . . The root of romantic sublimity is the inability to decide, the ‘higher third’ factor they are always talking about, which is not a higher factor but a different third factor . . . a way out of the *either-or*.³¹

By contrast,

all the founders of the counterrevolutionary theory . . . Burke, de Maistre, and Bonald, were active politicians, each with his own responsibility. For years they maintained a tenacious and energetic opposition against their

²⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 117.

governments. They were always filled with the sense that they were not elevated above the political struggle, but were instead obligated to decide in favour of what they regarded as right.³²

By thrusting the notion of decision to the fore these thinkers were able to assume a political standpoint. Only with political concepts in hand was there any possibility of a clear understanding of what the notion of state, and a host of other political notions, really meant.

In his *Political Theology*, Schmitt explores the notion of sovereignty, so maligned by liberal thinkers and rescued from oblivion by the Catholic conservatives.

De Maistre spoke with particular fondness of sovereignty, which essentially meant decision. To him the relevance of the state rested on the fact that it provided a decision, the relevance of the Church on its rendering of the last decision that could not be appealed. Infallibility was for him the essence of the decision that cannot be appealed.³³

For Schmitt this means that the foundations of a legal order rested on a transcendent source: a subject who had the will to decide politically. The capacity and willingness to make political decisions define sovereignty. Sovereignty in turn secures the unity of the state, and the state is henceforth in the position to generate a system of law. Liberal constitutional theories, like the one developed by Kelsen, reversed this order of generation. A supreme undervived basic norm, Kelsen's *Grundnorm*, grounded a legal order whose central point was the sovereign state. There was no transcendent subject of *pouvoir constituant*, no *natura naturans*, no eminent legislator to which the state's highest authority could be traced. 'The basis for the validity of a norm is only a norm.'³⁴ According to Schmitt, 'Kelsen solved the problem of sovereignty by negating it . . . This [was] in fact the old liberal negation of the state'.³⁵ Kelsen, thereby, eliminated authority merely at the level of definitions. It was easy for Schmitt to prove that this was simply a cover-up. Authority, put to sleep by liberal enchantments, would of necessity wake up at the slightest invocation.

Schmitt recalls the year 1848, when the notion of authority was invoked by Donoso Cortés, 'one of the foremost representatives of decisionist thinking and a Catholic philosopher of the state',³⁶ to justify his call for a 'dictatorship of the

³² *Ibid.*, p. 116.

³³ Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology. Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty* (Cambridge, Mass., 1985), p. 55.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

sword' to offset the 'dictatorship of the dagger'.³⁷ Donoso realized that by then the monarchical principle had perished, that the absolutist forces, after defeating the revolt of the feudal Frondes, were incapable of resisting the challenge of an adversary who made similar absolutist demands. The *pouvoir constituant* that the kings received from God, was being successfully reclaimed by democrats. According to Schmitt's political theology, they were atheists who paid their respects to a secular demiurge, the people. Royalists and democrats had fought over matters of sovereignty. At the moment of victory, democrats unfurled a banner inscribed with the sovereignty of the people. In 1848, Donoso observed how liberalism had tried to intervene, as a third party, in this battle between political theists and political atheists. 'According to Donoso Cortés, it is characteristic of bourgeois liberalism not to decide in this battle but instead to begin a discussion. He straightforwardly defines the bourgeoisie as a "discussing class", "*una clase discutidora*"'.³⁸ It evaded a decision and fixed its attention on endless parliamentary discussions and debates in the press. The liberal bourgeoisie wanted 'neither the sovereignty of the king nor that of the people'.³⁹ Or perhaps they wanted a synthesis of both, a merging of opposites, a dialectical *complexio oppositorum*. Even worse, they may have thought it was 'possible to answer the question "Christ or Barabbas?" with a proposal to adjourn or appoint a commission of inquiry'.⁴⁰

In view that authority, in the traditional sense, no longer seemed effective, Donoso proposed dictatorship as an alternative. 'Dictatorship is the opposite of discussion.'⁴¹ If one agrees that the role of government is to decide, it follows that there ought to be a dictatorial moment lodged somewhere in every government. The power to decide is 'inherent in the mere existence of a governmental authority'.⁴² Schmitt too thinks that it was a matter of indifference how political decisions were arrived at and what their content might be. What really mattered was that decisions were made without delay and without appeal. To evade decisions was to miss the essence of the political. But by remaining indifferent towards content, Schmitt turned his back on the question of legitimacy. This is what marked the revolutionary nature of his conservatism, a conservatism with intimations of existentialism. Like de Maistre and Donoso he reduced 'the state to the moment of decision, to a pure decision not based on reason and discussion and not justifying itself, that is, to an absolute decision created out of

³⁷ Juan Donoso Cortés, 'Discurso sobre la dictadura', *Obras Completas*, Vol. II, ed. Carlos Valverde (Madrid, 1970), p. 323.

³⁸ Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology*, p. 59.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 55.

nothingness'.⁴³ This 'hard' decisionism, a trait of his revolutionary conservatism, would later yield to a softer view, which would manifest his accommodation to liberalism.⁴⁴

If Schmitt's critique of liberalism puts him within the conservative camp, the existentialist tone of this hard decisionism is more akin to a conservative revolutionary outlook. Other conservative revolutionaries, like Spengler, also gave up any claim to legitimacy, monarchical or democratic. They saw that the preservation of traditional ways of life and past institutions was illusory. Their pessimism led them to think that their present was beyond redemption, that history had passed its verdict: Western culture was exhausted, its soul had perished. Traditional conservatives think that the past retains its vivifying force; revolutionary conservatives, on the contrary, stoically give up any efforts to revitalize tradition. When the cultural soul of a nation dies nothing can revive it. National integrity, in the absence of spiritual forces to sustain it, must be affirmed by the decisive will of one single individual.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

⁴⁴ Jean-François Kervégan fails to observe that Schmitt's early Weimar period was marked by a hard version of decisionism. He thinks that during the whole Weimar period Schmitt espoused soft decisionism. Soft decisionism, according to Kervégan, maintains that the exceptional conditions underlying the validity of a system of norms should be understood as purely circumstantial and impermanent. He believes that Schmitt's position did not harden until 1934. In that year Schmitt realized, according to Kervégan, the 'permanence' of the exception, so that only a 'revolutionary situation' could be interpreted along the lines of this hard decisionism (Jean-François Kervégan, *Hegel, Carl Schmitt. La politique entre spéculation et positivité*, pp. 45–6). As evidence, Kervégan quotes the following passage: 'the sovereign decision is an absolute beginning . . . [It] arises from a normative void and a concrete disorder' (Schmitt, *Über die drei Arten des rechtswissenschaftlichen Denkens* (Hamburg, 1934), p. 28). I agree with Kervégan that this hard decisionism cannot refer to Schmitt's late Weimar position. But it is surely strange to suggest that Schmitt's conception of decisionism would harden only after he had abandoned it in favour of institutionalism. It seems obvious to me that in the above-quoted text Schmitt is referring to the revolutionary position he held during his early Weimar period. After the revolutionary events of 1933, Schmitt perceived the futility, and possibly also the danger, of maintaining a hard decisionist posture. His decision to distance himself from this radical posture is confirmed by the republication, in 1933, of his *Political Theology*. In the Preface he added to the new edition he explicitly distanced himself from the clearly hard decisionist position defended in that book. Had Kervégan incorporated into his account of Schmitt's thought a more thorough examination of the historical circumstances determining its evolution, he would have realized that in his mature Weimar production Schmitt's foremost concern was not, as he maintains, 'the refutation of liberalism in all its forms' (Kervégan, *Hegel, Carl Schmitt*, p. 109), but an attempt to come to terms with its classical version, prior to its radicalization by democratic and pluralist positions (*ibid.*, pp. 110, 112).

II

In 1923 Schmitt published his *Parlamentarismus*, in which he showed that contemporary parliamentarism had strayed away from its ideals as defined by nineteenth-century liberals such as Bentham, Guizot, Tocqueville and John Stuart Mill. As practised in the Weimar Republic since 1919, parliamentarism had, according to Schmitt, ‘lost its moral and intellectual foundation and only remains standing through sheer mechanical perseverance as an empty apparatus’.⁴⁵ The catalogue of ills that Schmitt collected from everyday experience included familiar themes — ‘the dominance of parties, their unprofessional politics of personalities, “the government of amateurs”, continual governmental crises, the purposelessness and banality of parliamentary debate, the declining standard of parliamentary customs, the destructive method of parliamentary obstruction, the misuse of parliamentary immunities and privileges by a radical opposition which is contemptuous of parliamentarism itself, the undignified daily order of business, the poor attendance in the House’.⁴⁶ What is surprising is that he could join the chorus of those who sought the reform of parliamentary practice, rather than the one calling for its demise. The latter was that most loudly and clearly audible in Germany at that point. One may guess that those familiar with his *Political Theology* may have expected an attack on parliamentarism as a system of government. An urgent call for dictatorship and an end to fruitless discussion summarized Schmitt’s revolutionary conservative programme. What one found in the Preface to *Parlamentarismus* was something quite different though. Schmitt now appeared to promote a reform of parliamentary life and for this he proposed an enquiry into the philosophical principles, the *ultimum sapientiae* of parliamentarism. This must have sounded suspicious to a critic of Schmitt like Thoma. How could anyone believe this to be a liberal appeal to reform coming as it did from one who had engaged until recently in an enquiry into the *ultimum sapientiae* of dictatorship and counter-revolutionary politics?

Schmitt’s reform proposal recognized that contemporary parliamentarism was facing a crisis due to a betrayal of its original ideals. The institution devised by classical liberals has been defiled by the admixture of democratic ideals. What was mandatory now was the isolation of parliament’s liberal component. Parliament, as a genuinely liberal institution, ought to shed its democratic accretions. By opening the door to democracy, the Weimar constitution had introduced an ambiguity which now eroded parliamentary practices. Firstly, the *Reichstag*, along with other parliaments, had ceased to be a place of rational discussion. Individual deputies were no longer the representatives of the people, as article 21 of the constitution stipulated in accordance with liberal

⁴⁵ Schmitt, *The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy*, p. 21.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

demands. Deputies were in fact acting as agents and commissaries of the people, in accordance with well-established democratic demands. Secondly, the *Reichstag* had ceased to be, if it ever was, open to public investigation and scrutiny. Article 29 of the constitution required its deliberations to be public. But its discussions were surrounded by secrecy and only the results yielded by voting were publicly announced. Furthermore, the parliamentary commissions had become a place for secret party deals whose content the public ignored. The *arcana imperii* of absolutist times were fully revived.⁴⁷

Schmitt's aim was to separate the parliamentary institution from its democratic ties. Parliaments, if allowed to function in a genuinely representative manner, should not have to yield to democratic pressures. On the contrary, very much like the Catholic Church, parliamentarism is not of itself a specific political form or a specific State form. In its indifference to the political as such it remains nevertheless open to different political forms.⁴⁸ The historical development of parliamentarism has successfully incorporated monarchical, aristocratic and democratic elements, without identifying itself with any of them. Precisely because it is not a specific political form, it can function as an open system that uses and mixes diverse political forms. According to Schmitt, parliamentarism owed its current problems to the ascendancy of democracy. By displacing the competing monarchical and aristocratic elements, democracy acquired a disproportionate influence, disrupting the delicate balance presupposed by the parliamentary system. In his early work Schmitt thoroughly identified liberal parliamentarism and democratic legitimacy. Since 1848, democratic legitimacy had supplanted the monarchical principle, which until then had secured the unity of the state. He interpreted the nineteenth-century liberal democratic rapprochement as an irreversible pluralist trend which inevitably led to the demise of the state. Only a counter-revolutionary dictatorship could strengthen political unity and sustain the dual onslaught of pluralist liberalism and atheist democracy.

Schmitt's critics have not regarded his *Parlamentarismus* as expressing a different view from the one he defended in his earlier Weimar works. What makes *Parlamentarismus* a turning-point in the development of his thought is that here Schmitt came to realize the genuinely apolitical nature of liberalism. He also now understood that its pluralist demands need not be conjoined with the democratic ideals. Liberalism is not a *political* imperative and so its pluralist demands may be restricted to the *social* sphere. This allows for the configuration of a liberal civil society which shuns political activity, and at the same time the formation of a state that monopolizes it and bears its different forms. In his *Parlamentarismus*, parliaments appeared to Schmitt as the vehicle

⁴⁷ cf. Carl Schmitt, *Verfassungslehre* (Berlin, 1965), pp. 318–19.

⁴⁸ Carl Schmitt, *Verfassungslehre* (Berlin, 1965), p. 305.

that could sustain a balanced combination of the three political forms he distinguished. He saw here an opportunity to bolster the receding monarchical and aristocratic elements, and balance them against the rising democratic element.

When Schmitt adopted his early radical stance, his immediate concern was the need to counter the challenge of revolutionary Marxism. Europe faced 1848 all over again. Against a dictatorship of the dagger he espoused a dictatorship of the sword. Since the monarchical legitimacy that supported the German Reich had ceased to exist, and Schmitt did not yet come to terms with democratic legitimacy, there was only room for an authoritarian dictatorship. Schmitt's paramount concern was always the preservation of the unity of the state, which was most clearly upheld by the monarchical principle. The monarchomachists, in attacking that principle, were the remote antecedents of liberalism, the rule of law and parliamentarism. The very existence of the state had been compromised by this Fronde-like attack on its unity. Since the monarchical principle could not be revived, dictatorship was, according to Schmitt, the only solution.

Parlamentarismus should be seen as Schmitt's coming to terms with democratic legitimacy. From now on his efforts would be aimed at minimizing its impact on modern political life. The democratic pressures on parliamentarism were to blame for its current problems. What was needed were ways to save the original idea of parliamentarism. Its original form contained what was required for the preservation of the unity of the state. Discussion is the heart of parliamentarism. It rests on two fundamental principles: openness and balance of powers. Schmitt's adherence to these principles seemed to be sincere. If parliamentary openness appeared endangered, democratic demands and not liberalism itself were to be blamed. Liberalism needed to disassociate itself from those democratic demands which, in Schmitt's view, tended to bring back the spirit of absolutism.

Schmitt appeared to be equally willing to consider a balance of powers within the state. His discussion of the 'relative rationalism' of classical liberal proposals was consistent with his demand for the preservation and enhancement of the unity of the state. There are two indications that this was so. First, he saw that the 'relative rationalism' of the balance theory opened channels for the manifestation of the irrational, for the possibility of decisive action. Thus, the legislative power could carry out its business in accordance with liberal normativism and the rule of law, but the executive power, an embodiment of 'relative rationalism', could at any time adopt a decisionist style of action and assume the task of deciding what needed to be done at the spur of the moment. Secondly, the tradition of liberalism in Germany had devised an organic solution to this marriage of convenience, by wrapping 'relative rationalism' with historical thought. Schmitt thus pointed in Hegel's direction. With a few exceptions, Schmittian scholars have yet fully to consider the impact of Hegel's

political thought on Schmitt. The Hegelian system incorporated a form of parliamentarism which did not at all weaken the unity of the state. The apex of Hegel's state was occupied by a prince who retained a fully representative role. By virtue of that role he was able to secure the unity of the state, without encroaching on civil society and endangering its pluralist demands. I have argued elsewhere in favour of interpreting Hegel as a conservative liberal thinker.⁴⁹ Here I argue that Schmitt advocated a conservative revolutionary outlook in his early works, but then in 1923 accommodated his conservative posture, which remained essentially unchanged, to the liberal strictures of the Weimar constitution.

III

How did Schmitt manage to liberalize a conservative posture that in many respects remained substantially unaltered? What facilitated his new, more pliant understanding of liberalism? It seems to me that the answer to these questions lies in his transformed view of Catholicism. Schmitt realized, at one point, that the universalism that the Church inherited from Roman imperialism allowed it to accommodate its solemn course through history in the face of continually changing circumstances. While retaining its constitution unaltered, it adapted to various social and political forms. In his 1923 essay, *Römischer Katholizismus und politische Form*, the rigidity and uncompromising attitude of the counter-revolutionary Catholics gives way to a more nuanced position. Schmitt is no longer concerned with the Church's infallibility or its authoritarian inflexibility. On the contrary, he deflects the charge made by those who accuse the Church of 'unlimited opportunism' and celebrates its 'marvelous elasticity'.⁵⁰ Adopting a quasi-romantic attitude, he praises a millennial institution allied to the most diverse governments, absolutist as well as anti-monarchist. The Church supported, and in turn denounced, liberals and democrats, republicans and legitimists, and even socialists. Tocqueville, a liberal who showed a sympathy for democracy, and Donoso Cortés, a 'rigorous philosopher of authoritarian dictatorship',⁵¹ were both devout Catholics. 'With every change in the political situation, all principles would seem to change, except one, that of the power of Catholicism.'⁵² All political forms are mere forms which the power of Catholicism could turn to its own purposes and

⁴⁹ Compare with Renato Cristi, 'Hegel and Roman Liberalism', *History of Political Thought*, 5 (1984), pp. 281–94; and Renato Cristi, 'Hegel's Conservative Liberalism', *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, 22 (1989), pp. 717–38.

⁵⁰ Carl Schmitt, *Römischer Katholizismus und politische Form* (Munich, 1925), p. 6.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 7.

advantages. The Church has inherited Rome's 'political universalism'.⁵³ This all-embracing attitude responds to the requirements of an imperial stance. 'Every imperialism that is something more than mere chauvinism, embraces contradictions: conservatism and liberalism, tradition and progress, and even militarism and pacifism.'⁵⁴ This is not an accommodation demanded by an inner weakness. The Church's universalism has offended many national sensibilities. An Irishman, his patriotism bitterly hurt, complained: Ireland is but 'a pinch of snuff in the Roman snuffbox'. Or preferably, as Schmitt is quick to add, 'a chicken the prelate would drop into the cauldron which he was boiling for the cosmopolitan restaurant'.⁵⁵

This prompts Schmitt to assert that the Church ought to be defined as a *complexio oppositorum*. The Church boasts that it 'comprises every form of state and government'.⁵⁶ Its theology is not restrictively *either/or* in nature; rather it exhibits a dialectical nature.⁵⁷ Breaking decisively with Donoso's political theology, which espouses the absolute corruption of human nature, Schmitt now admits that the Council of Trent speaks only of 'a wounding, a weakening or clouding of human nature, and thus admits a practical application which allows for some qualification and accommodation'.⁵⁸ The Church's

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* In Schmitt's article 'Der Begriff des Politischen' one finds a confirmation of his attempt to present liberalism in a new light by distinguishing it from the radical stand assumed by anarchism. In a passage which discusses the anthropology underlying the different conceptions of the state, Schmitt associates anarchism's radical negation of the state with its affirmation of the natural goodness of human beings. For liberalism, however, which also affirms the goodness of human nature, this is 'nothing more than an argument by means of which the state is made to serve society' (p. 22). Schmitt's realization that liberalism does not 'radically negate the state', and that even when it does, this only has 'a determinate political sense and is addressed to a determinate state' (p. 23), allows him to accommodate liberalism within his constitutional proposals. In agreement with *Parlamentarismus*, in this article he also concedes that liberalism has 'neither instituted a positive theory of the state nor its own form of state (*Staatsform*)' (p. 23). At one point, Schmitt distinguishes between '19th century liberalism' and the 'pure notion of individualist liberalism' (p. 27). While the former adopted a political stance and tied itself to the 'illiberal, because essentially political forces of democracy', from the latter one cannot gain a 'specific political idea' (p. 27). In his *Verfassungslehre*, published the following year, Schmitt proceeds in accordance with this accommodation to liberalism. After distinguishing monarchy, aristocracy and democracy as three forms of state (*Staatsformen*), he writes: 'The principles of liberal freedom are able to accommodate any form of state, so long as the limits imposed by the rule of law on governmental power are observed and the state is

complexio oppositorum thus incorporates a boundless adaptability and ‘a most precise dogmatism and a will to decide, as the doctrine of pontifical infallibility clearly demonstrated’.⁵⁹ The Church is thus a model of balance and moderation. It allows the widest and most varied expression of ideas and forms, because it is assured of an absolute unity at its apex. Precisely because it conservatively maintains the political unity of a state, it can tolerate a plurality of forms of government.

Before he reconciled himself with liberalism in his *Parlamentarismus*, Schmitt first gently steered Catholicism in the same direction. In doing so he disclosed his political motivations. Being a juridically-minded intellectual, he was always more predisposed to think in polemical rather than dogmatic terms. This manner of thinking determines his train of thought in this case. At the conclusion of *Römischer Katholizismus* Schmitt identifies the main object of his polemic. Western civilization has endured, since the nineteenth century, the menace of two barbaric forces — the Marxist proletariat and the Russian people. It could be said that there is more of Christianity ‘in the Russian hate for Western-European culture than in liberalism or in German Marxism’.⁶⁰ One might argue that ‘great Catholics saw liberalism as a far worse enemy’.⁶¹ One could even maintain that the Church, as a *complexio oppositorum* is not required to decide this question, that ‘she will be the *complexio* of all that survives’.⁶² Still, Schmitt urges the Church to make a decision. He urges her to take a stand in favour of Western-European culture. Just as it sided with the counter-revolution in the nineteenth century and ‘was more akin to Mazzini than to the atheistic socialism of Bakunin’,⁶³ it should now support liberalism in the name of West European civilization. Just as the all-encompassing universalism of Catholicism is embodied in concrete historical allegiances, so too the abstract humanitarianism of liberalism may be held as the emblem of a particular tradition. Schmitt’s accommodation with liberalism is thus brokered by his perception of the Church’s flexible conservatism.

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not conceived as absolute’ (Schmitt, *Verfassungslehre*, p. 200). By essentially separating it from democracy, Schmitt assumes a notion of liberalism that does not negate the state as such, but only an absolute state.

⁵⁹ Schmitt, *Römischer Katholizismus*, p. 12.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 53.