In early 1936 the young Berlin rabbi and scholar Alexander Altmann entered a Jewish bookstore, which carried not only works of Jewish interest but all books that were by governmental decree not to be sold in „Aryan“ bookstores because of their Jewish authorship. While browsing through the display of newly received titles, Altmann came across Hans Jonas’s *Gnosis und spätantiker*.

Originally written as a doctoral dissertation under the supervision of Martin Heidegger, Jonas deployed his teacher’s existential categories to describe the emotional and spiritual situation that produced the much vilified „heresy“ of Gnosticism. Picking up Jonas’s book from the display counter, Altmann began to read it, enthralled by its description of a distant world that yet somehow seemed uncannily familiar. As depicted by Jonas, the Gnostics perceived the human condition as *Abgeschittensein*, the experience of being cut-off, utterly isolated, dislocated. Jonas introduced this haunting image in an extended discussion of the Gnostic perception of humanity as „being thrown or cast“ (*Geworfensein*) into a world of affliction, into a world in which human beings feel themselves „alien“:

The alien (*das Fremde*) stems from elsewhere and does not belong here.
But to those who do belong here, the alien is strange, unfamiliar and incomprehensible (*Unheimliche*): the alien is not at home here. ... For the alien, however, it is those who belong here in this world who are strange, unfamiliar, threatening. The alien thus suffers the lot of the stranger with

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1 Göttingen: Vabdenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1934
4 Jonas, *Gnosis und spätantik Geist*, 119. Jonas employs this image relatively infrequently, but it is the one that most struck Altmann.
all that is attendant to this situation – loneliness, peril, defenselessness, [condemned] to be uncomprehended and uncomprehending.⁵

Such passages in Jonas’s evocation of the Gnostic experience could not but resonate with Altmann’s own and with Jewry’s experience in Nazi Germany.

Leaving the bookstore at Berlin’s Jewish Gemeindehaus, community center, Altmann resolved to re-evaluate the already well-established Gnostic influences on rabbinic and kabbalistic literature. In an essay on „Gnostic Motifs in Rabbinic Literature“ (Gnostische Motive im rabbinischen Schrifttum),⁶ written just weeks before he fled Nazi Germany in August 1938, he endeavored to show that while the rabbis shared the Gnostics’ existential and cosmic dread, they resolutely resisted their nihilistic conclusions – and by implication, he sought to tell his fellow Jews that Judaism has the spiritual resources to withstand despair in a world seemingly abandoned by God.

Gnostic anxieties, however, gripped German Jewry before the National Socialists seized the reins of government and unleashed an assault on Jewish civil and human rights. In the wake of World War One and Imperial Germany’s ignominious defeat, a „neo-gnostic spirit“⁷ swept through the intellectual landscape of the flengling Weimar Republic, threatening to undermine its commitment to liberal democracy. Jews were in particular alarmed by what they perceived to be the political implications of the burgeoning fascination with Gnosticism.

For Franz Rosenzweig this ominous development was signaled by the publication in 1921 of Adolf von Harnack’s magisterial study of Marcion, the second century Christian heretic: Marcion: Das Evangelium von dem fremdem Gott.

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⁵ Jonas, Gnosis und spätantiker, 96.
⁶ This essay was to be published in volume 8 (1939) of the Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums. Although bound but not yet distributed when the Gestapo confiscated and destroyed it. The essay now appears in English translation in Altmann, The Meaning of Jewish Existence, 117-132.
Rosenzweig read Harnack's monograph not simply as a scholarly treatise but as indicative of a profound crisis in Christianity. Although Rosenzweig shared Harnack's and other liberal Protestants' disaffection with the worldly optimism of nineteenth century moral theology, he was wary of Harnack's endorsement of Marcion's rejection of the Hebrew Bible and the God of Creation. While Harnack held that it would have been mistaken for the early Church, to follow Marcion, he concluded that the "conservation of the Old Testament as a canonical book in modern Protestantism is a result of a paralysis of religion and the Church." But Rosenzweig feared that Harnack's call for the Church to jettison the Old Testament and its delusory belief in Creation and earthly life as a divine gift would encourage, intended or otherwise, a hatred of the people who had propagated this message. In a letter of July 1925 to Martin Buber with whom he was then working on their translation of the Hebrew Scriptures into German, Rosenzweig wrote:

It should be quite clear to you that the situation for which the neo-Marcionites [e.g. Harnack] have striven to achieve on the theoretical plane in actuality has already has been obtained [in practice]. ...When the Christian speaks of the Bible, he means only the New Testament, perhaps together with the Psalms, which then he mostly believe already belongs to the New Testament. Thus in our new translation of the Hebrew Bible we are becoming missionaries.

The Buber-Rosenzweig translation of the Hebrew Bible – which Christian supercessionists call the Old Testament – was not simply another translation, but rather an attempt to capture in German its primordial voice as refracted through the cadences, inflections, and texture of the Hebrew and thus quicken anew for both Jew and Gentile the power of the Word spoken by God to Israel. Accordingly,

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through this what Buber called a „colometric“ translation, the perduring Voice of God – and His ever renewed relation with the world of His creation – is addressed to all humankind. For Buber and Rosenzweig, the God of the Hebrew Bible is not merely the God of Israel – as Marcion and the likes of Harnack contended. He is indeed the God of Creation, and thus marks the shared destiny of all the world. In retaining the „Old Testament“ despite Marcion’s gnostic exhortations, Rosenzweig and Buber observed, Christianity in effect acknowledged that salvation as a universal promise must be grounded in Creation.

Rosenzweig’s affirmation of God of Creation was that of an erstwhile Hegelian. In his university days, he was a devoted student of the dialectic of history. But gradually he lost his faith in history, conceived by Hegel, as the incremental refinement of human rationality and the dialectical crystalization of the irenic unity of the human family. But he was eventually to lose confidence in Hegel’s eschatology. Shortly before he completed his doctoral dissertation on Hegel’s concept of the nation-state,¹⁰ he concluded as he reported in letter of September 1910 to a colleague, that Hegel errered in ascribing an ontological status to history. History is not the unfolding of Being. Taking shape in the phenomenal world of time and space, history cannot serve as a vessel in which divinity may dwell. „Every human act becomes sinful as it enters history“ – although the actors intend otherwise, the morality of an act is nullfied by the material world of necessity.¹¹

Four years after having penned these gnostically tinge reflections, Rosenzweig would affirm an Offenbarungsglaube – a faith grounded in the historical reality of divine revelation – restoring to history and the material world an ontological dignity. History, he now held, is not merely a struggle between man’s faith and reason, but is an interminable struggle between God and man. Divine revelation breaks into the world and transforms creation, which is the Alpha of history, into redemption, which

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¹⁰ Rosenzweig, Hegel und der Staat (München/Berlin, 1920)
¹¹ Rosenzweig to Franz Frank, undated letter, Briefe, ed. Edith Rosenzweig (Berlin: Schocken Verlag, 1935), 55.
is its Omega. Revelation, as Rosenzweig wrote a bit later, is an "historical-cum-metahistorical" event that is addressed to the denizens of God's created order, and thereby gives man's journey in the material world direction towards the horizon of Redemption. This conception of revelation was to be elaborated in an epistolary debate with Eugen Rosenstock, a Jewish convert to Christianity. In that debate, Rosenstock defined revelation as orientation. "After revelation there exists a real Above and Below in the world, and a real Before and Hereafter in time. In the 'natural' world and in 'natural' time the point where I happen to be is the center of the universe; in the space-time world of revelation the center is fixed, and my movements and changes do not alter it." This formulation appealed to Rosenzweig. Revelation endows history with meaning. For him, the "pagan," the individual who seeks to grasp reality on the basis of natural understanding alone, is confronted by a confounding multiplicity of cognitive possibilities, innumerable contingencies, goals and systems of value. For the Jew and the Christian, reality is anchored "in the exemplary fact" of revelation, "which establishes an Above and Below, a Europe and Asia, an earlier and a later, past and future. ... [Through revelation] the world is ordered. It is no longer everywhere and nowhere, but it has a calculus; one knows the goal." The Word of God resounds through time and His Name penetrates "the chaos of the unnamed world," thereby setting "the stage and content of world history." Rosenzweig’s affirmation of revelation as the ontological ground of history and thus divinely created order served as the animating premise of his critique of the regnant thrust of Western philosophy from the pre-Socratics to the votaries of German Idealism. Formulated in his magnum opus – The Star of Redemption (1920) – his indictment of the philosophical tradition from "Ionia to Jena," as Peter Gordon felicitously notes, thus gives "priority" to "finitude over against the nihilistic

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13 Rosenzweig, "Atheistische Theologie," in Rosenzweig, Kleinere Schriften (Berlin: Schocken Verlag, 1937), 281.
longing for release." Gordon duly cites Rosenzweig that humanity perforce
„remains (bleibt) within the bounds of creatureliness [innerhalb der Grenzen der
Geschöpflichkeit].”¹⁶

In this respect, Rosenzweig argued, Christianity overcame an initial „gnostic
naivete,“ thanks to the sapient tutelage of St. Augustine of Hippo who taught that
without the concept of Creation the universality of the promise of salvation and thus
its power over history:

Paul’s theory concerning the relation of the Gospels to the Law could have
remained a “personal opinion“; the Hellenizing „spiritual“ Church [of John’s
Gospel] of the first century, in the marvelous naivete of her „spiritual
believers,“ had scarcely worried about it. Then came gnosticism, which had its
finger on Paul and sought to weed out the personal element from his theory
and develop ist objective aspects in distinction from the personal in it. (Paul
said: „The Jews are spurned, but Christ came from them.“ Marcion said:
„Therefore the Jews belong to the devil, Christ to God.“) Then the Church,
which hitherto had been quite naive in its own gnosticism... [S]uddenly seeing
this, [the Church] pushed the spirit to one side in favor of tradition, and
through a great ritornor al seno fixed this tradition by returning to a cardinal
point, to its founder Paul, that is, she deliberately established a dogma what
previously had been considered Paul’s personal opinion. The Church had
established the identity of the Creator (and the God revealed at Sinai) with the
Father of Jesus Christ on the one hand, and the perfect manhood of Christ on
the other hand, as a definite Shibboleth against all heresy –and therby the
Church established herself as a power in human history. ...¹⁷

Companion to Modern Jewish Philosophy, eds., Michael L. Morgan and Peter Eli Gordon (Cambridge/New
York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 129.
¹⁷ Judaism Despite Christianity, 109f.
In the *Star of Redemption* — the first drafts of which he wrote in the trenches as an noncommisioned officer in the Kaiser’s Army — Rosenzweig underscored the utmost importance for the Church to resist the call of the neo-Marcionites to renounce the Old Testament and the God of Creation. Rosenzweig was doubly distressed by the fact that a neo-Marcionism theology was sponsored by both liberals such as Harnack, who regarded the Hebrew Bible as an encumbrance to the Protestant Church’s continued spiritual and ethical refinement, and the *Deutschen Christen*, who emerged most forcefully from the embers of the First World War seeking to free Christianity from „alien. Semitic“ sensibilities and to render the Christian *kerygma* compatible with the German, „Aryan“ soul.

The Buber-Rosenzweig translation of the Hebrew Scriptures was thus conceived to be at the forefront of the struggle against anti-Semitism and „the neo-Marcion aspiration to drive the Bible from German culture.“ In a letter to a friend, Rosenzweig acknowledged the enormity of the task to secure the place of the Old Testament in German culture and spiritual sensibilities. He took solece in the prospect that „quite possibly after seventy years a new return [Old Testament] will follow golus bovel [the Babylonian exile, which last seventy years].“ „In any case,“ he soberly concluded, „it is only the beginning of the task and not the final outcome that is in our province.“ Alas, the project that Rosenzweig and Buber sought to initiate did not have seventy years to realize its objective of checking the spread of neo-Marcionism and its anti-Semetic animus. As Buber later noted, „Three years after the death of Harnack in 1930, „his idea, the idea of Marcion, was put into action; not however by spiritual means but by means of the violence and terror.\" 21

The Nazi program to purge German society and culture of non-Aryans, Buber further observed, „placed before the Church one of two alternatives to exclude Judaism and the spirit of Israel entirely from its midst ... or to be overthrown

19 Rosenzweig to Eugen Meyer, December 30, 1925. Cited in ibid., 1182.
20 Ibid.
together with Judaism. The gift of Marcion had passed from Hadrian into other hands."22

Buber endorsed Rosenzweig’s understanding of their Bible translation as a „mission“ to German Christians. „Although I am radical opponent of all missionary work;“ he wrote, „I allowe myself to accept the mission, for it appertains neither to Judaism per se nor to Christiainty per se, but rather to their shared primal truth (Urwahrheit), on whose rehabilitation the future of both depends.“23 The neo-Marcion attempt to discredit the Old Testament and the God of Creaton, Buber averred, strikes at the very core of Western civilization and its humanistic foundations, namely the fundamental assumption that history and morality are intrisically interrelated. The nullification of this belief breaks open the floodgates of cynicism and nihilism, attitudes that gain frightful expression in the gnostic and Marcion disdain for the mundane order celebrated in the Hebrew Scripture as Creation. Indeed, Buber maintained, the Western humanistic tradition is ultimately rooted not in Greek sophia but in the biblical concept of Creation.24 Hence the struggle against neo-Marcionism is eminently more than a question of securing the dignity and honor of the Hebrew Bible; it is rather a struggle on behalf of Western civilization and its resolve to establish a just and compassionate human order. Grounded in the concept of Creation, this tradition may be justly called Biblical Humanism.25 As he explained in an address of 1934 to an audience of German Jews still smarting from the wounds of the initial assault on their humanity, Biblical Humanism beckons one to affirm that „the world is Creation, not a reflection, not semblance, not play. The world is not somethng which must be overcome. It is a [divinely] created reality.“26 It is a reality, however, whose full realization requires human partnership in God’s work. It is a reality, Buber underscored, that is „created to be hallowed. Everything created has need to be hallowed. ... Hallowing enables

22 Ibid.
23 Buber, “Die Schrift und ihre Verdeutchung.” 1182.
25 Ibid., 181.
26 Ibid.
the [word] to fulfill the meaning for which it was created. The meaning with which Creation informed man, informed the world, is fulfilled through hallowing.\footnote{Ibid.} In contrast to gnosticism and Pauline Christianity – which Buber viewed as a dialectical adumbration of Marcionism and its „gnostic“ desanctification of the world as divine Creation – Judaism seeks neither to transform the world into something „wholly spiritual“ nor to „overcome“ it by spirit. „The spirit does not embrace a old world, rejoicing in its holiness, nor does it float above an unholy world, clutching all holiness to itself; it rather produces holiness, and the world is made holy.\footnote{Ibid.}

Buber and Rosenzweig were not alone in their mission to fend off the threat of neo-Marcionism. In the waning years of the Weimar Republic, Buber founded a journal duly entitled Die Kreatur. An inter-religious biannual, which Buber co-edited together with Viktor von Weizsäcker (a Protestant) and Joseph Wittig (a Catholic), the idea of such a periodical was first broached by Florens Christian Rang (1864-1924). A repentant German nationalist, he became, whose close friend Walter Benjamin hailed him as „the most profound critic of Deutschtum since Nietzsche.“\footnote{Benjamin., Gesammelte Briefe (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1996), vol. 2: 368.}

Deeply committed to acknowledging German war crimes, and, as a former pastor, and \textit{pari passu} acutely attentive to the theological issues attendant to what he perceived to be the tattered legacy of the Enlightenment, he deemed it exigent to overcome the barriers between religions. Accordingly, he suggested calling the journal “Greetings from the Lands of Exile”\footnote{Viktor von Weizsäcker, „Begegnungen und Entscheidungen,“ in Gesammelte Schriften, eds. P. Achilles et al. (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1986), vol. 1:213.} -- each of the monotheistic faiths are locked in doctrinal and devotional exile from one another, an exile from which they will be “liberated” only with the \textit{eschaton}, at the end of time when all the contradictions that blight earthly existence will be resolved. Until that blessed hour, however, they could only extend to one another fraternal greetings. But Buber and

\footnote{Vorwort. Die Kreatur, 1/1 (1926). Though composed by Buber, the editorial preface was signed also by Wittig and Weizsächer.}
Rosenzweig felt it would be amiss to emphasize historical and theological divisions; rather they preferred to highlight the existing bonds between the monotheistic religions. “What is permissible,” as noted in Die Kreatur’s inaugural Preface (written by Buber), “and at this point in history mandatory, is dialogue (Gespräch): the greeting called in both directions, the opening or emerging of one’s self out of the severity and clarity of one’s self-enclosedness, a conversation (Unterredung) on matters of common concern for created being (Kreatur).”

Although edited symbolically by representatives of different faith commitments, the journal accordingly eschewed confessional testimonies and theological debate. Die Kretatur, which counted among its contributors likes of Walter Benjamin and the Russian existentialist philosopher Lev Shestov, thus focused exclusively on educational, social and interpersonal issues that exercise men and women dedicated to securing the dignity and promise of creaturely existence.

While editing the journal, of which he was its principal editor, Buber was developing a concept of theo-politics in pointed contradiction to the political theology advocated by the Carl Schmitt. The iconoclastic jurist crafted his notion of political theology as a Catholic critique of Protestant dialectical theology and its retreat from politics, a critique to which he gave terse formulation: „The Marcionite either-or is answered [by the Catholic] with as-well-as.” One can be true to God and His transcendent glory and yet affirm the world. The affirmation of the world, Schmitt maintained, is to engage in it politically. Buber would agree that a religious affirmation of the world requires the assumption of political responsibility for humanity’s quotidian affairs. But he would differ fundamentally with Schmitt regarding the theological and ontological ground of politics as a religious responsibility. By retreating to the sequestered realm of supernal of pure spirit, post-war Protestant theologians have, in effect, abandoned the world to the devil and the forces of evil. Catholics, however, Schmitt contended, are commanded to defend

31 Ibid.
themselves from the devil’s evil designs to dominate and conquer their respective societies. This defense is to be determined by a decisive and unequivocal identification of a society’s adversaries and to mount an uncompromising resistance to them as sartanic, incorrigible enemies who must be utterly defeated.

Buber’s most sustained critique of Schmitt was tucked almost between the lines in an essay of 1936 on Kierkegaard’s concept of „the Single One,“ undoubtedly with hope of beclouding the scrutiny of the Nazi censors. The detailed discussion of Kierkegaard lays the ground of his critique of Schmitt’s understanding of politics. To be sure, Buber’s decision to preface an analysis of political theology with a discussion of Kierkegaard was not arbitrary, and thus not purely a tactical strategy to avoid censorship. For it was widely held that the philosophical roots of dialectical theology and its gnostic inflectons are to be traced back to the early nineteenth-century Danish philosopher.

Buber faults Kierkegaard for introducing into modern religious and political discourse an implicitly gnostic „either-or“ dualism, which moves along vertical trajectory of Heaven and Earth, between God and the „crowd.“ To challenge Kierkegaard and his neo-Marcion heirs, Schmitt merely transposed dualism to a horizontal trajectory between friend and foe. Both the vertical and horizontal dualistic paradigms, if not expressly gnostic, lend themselves to a de-sacralization of the world as creation, in which one’s relation to divine attains fulness.

Accordingly, although politics is invariably compromised and tainted by the imperious realities of the mundane order, Buber insists, it is not to be disdained or rejected. Kierkegaard is thus to be criticized precisely because in order to achieve spiritual purity and to be alone with God, he was determined to minimize dealing with the quotidian demands of life with others. Buber cites Kierkegaard, “‘The Single One’ – [the solitary individual before God] -- is the category of the spirit, of
spiritual awakening and revival, and is sharply opposed to politics as much as possible.  

Buber protests: “‘The Single One,’ is not the individual who has to do with God essentially, and only unessentially with others, who is unconditionally concerned with God and conditionally with the body politic. The Single One must … take his world, what of the world that is extended and entrusted to him in his life, without any reduction into his life of devotion. … He must put his arms round the vexatious world, whose true name is creation (Shöpfung).”

Nor is politics to be consigned to the cynical realism recommended by Schmitt, who with Hitler’s siezure of power joined the Nazi party. According to Schmitt who had come be perceived as the Kronjurist of the Third Reich, politics is not accountable to any principle or authority other than its own immanent logic. In a seminal essay of 1927, „The Concept of the Political,“ to which Buber obliquely refers, Schmitt identified politics as a specific domain of interest – comparable to other distinct spheres of activity, aesthetics, religion, economics or ethics – that is guided by its own autonomous criteria. Whereas aesthetic judgment is determined by beauty versus ugliness, ethics good and evil, religion sacred and profane, Schmitt averred, politics is to distinguish between friend and foe. All other considerations are not only alien but also actually inimical to politics. As Buber points out, Schmitt’s dichotomy allows only the defeat, if not utter elimination of one’s foes. (Written in 1936, the unintended prescience of this obervation is unheimlich.) “There is no reconciliation, no mediation, no adequate expiation. … Every classic duel is a ‘masked judgment of God.’” For Schmitt politics is ultimately a Manichean, apocalyptic struggle against one’s foe. Buber reproaches Schmitt on methodological grounds. The Nazi jurist, Buber contends derives his foe-friend formula from rare, extreme situations of conflict, situations in which

34 Ibid., 65; Der Frage an den Einzelnen, in: Buber, Das dialogische Prinzip (Heidelberg: Verlag Lambert Schneider, 1979), 241.
36 Inid., 73f.
there is an imminent threat from outside or from alien forces within one’s society, whereas political life is generally far more fluid. Further, by setting the binary opposition of friend-foe alongside the distinction between, in Schmitt’s words, “good and evil in the moral sphere, and beautiful and ugly in the aesthetic Schmitt is confounding normative categories with attitudinal perceptions engendered by extraordinary, extreme situations.

Schmitt found, Buber observes, an improbable ally in the Lutheran theologian Friedrich Gogarten, the author of a volume entitled *Politische Ethik* of 1932. Examining political life from the perspective of dialectical theology, which posits the absolute distinction and, therefore, an unbridgeable distance between God and humans, Gogarten argues that ethical problems are, in essence, political and thus emphatically worldly. Hence, Buber observes, Gogarten perforce severed politics from religion. “If ethical problems receive their relevance from the political realm, they cannot also receive them from the religious, even if the political has a religious basis.” At bottom, what Schmitt and Gogarten share is a dismal view of human nature: humanity is incorrigibly evil. The theologian and the legal scholar meet on the plane of a Hobbesian view of the state. As Gogarten concludes, it is the ethical task of the state to ward off “the evil to which men haven fallen prey by its sovereign power and by its right over the life and the property of its subjects.” Citing this proposition, Buber bitingly remarks, “this is a theological version of the old police state idea.” The political order, so Gogarten, can at most control human sinfulness; redemption comes from God alone, as an act of unearned grace.

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37 Buber forcefully objected to Schmitt’s facile conflation of outside and inner foes. Cf. “The [outside] foe has no interest in the preservation of the [political] formation, but the rebel [that is, the inner foe] has – he wants to ‘change’ it: it is precisely if he wants to change. Only the former is radical enough to establish the import of [Schmitt’s] formula.” Buber, “The Question of the Single One,” 74. This is clearly an oblique defense of the post-war revolutionaries, often cast as a Jewish cohort, whom Schmitt and his ilk condemned as Germany’s foes, a fifth-column.
34 Ibid.
39 Gogarten, *Politische Ethik* xxx
40 “The Question of the Single One,” 76.
41 Ibid., 77.
Buber’s response to Gogarten and Schmitt is pointedly brief: “Man is not ‘radically’ this or that.” Humans have the potential for both good and evil. “Man is not good, man is not evil; he is, in a pre-eminent sense, good and evil together.”

The state is not an abstract, ontological given, but a labile historical formation, whose political character depends on how individuals realize their moral potential. If political power is understood as an ethical responsibility, that is taken “theologically and biblically seriously,” it is becomes an expression of profound religious faith. Indeed, one cannot fully and “legitimately” establish a relation with God “without a relation to the body politic.” Buber explains that this relation is fully in accord with the testimony of the Hebrew Scriptures:

The Old Testament records, in the history of the kings of Israel and the history of the foreign rulers, the degeneration of legitimacy into illegitimacy and of full power [that is, fully authorized power] into antagonistic power. As no philosophical concept of the state, so likewise no theological concept of the state leads beyond the reality of the human person in the situation of faith. None leads beyond his responsibility – be he servant or emperor – for the body politic as man in the sight of God.

This is the gist of Buber’s theo-politics: Our responsibility before God is realized in the here-and-now of the body politic in which individuals and societies find themselves: „The human person belongs, whether he wants to acknowledge it and take it seriously or not to the community in which he is born or which he happens to get into.“ Redemption is thus not to be sought beyond the given historical hour and its political and ethical imperatives; it cannot realized in a flash, in one frenzied
dash to the eschaton. Buber elaborated this thesis with scholarly detail in his work on 1932 *Kingship of God*, which is an extended critique of both the concept of political theology and ideologies that enjoin apocalyptic leaps into an imagined future beyond regnant political realities. To Buber’s mind, both Schmitt’s Manichean political doctrine and the apocalyptic ideologies were manifestations of the gnostic despair that plagued the Weimar Republic. Both abandon the world to the diabolic; both bespeak of a flight from a genuinely responsible politics, which cannot take place apart from the world as it is given; even when political actions are by force majeure limited to simple acts of human decency. As he noted in his admonishment of Kiekegaard for sequestering himself far the “crowd,” the Single One „must put his arms round the vexatious world, whose true name is creation.‘

This message was encapsulated in an obiter dictum of Buber’s wife Paula, which he cited as the epigraph introducing his essay on the „Single One“:

„Responsibility is the umbicial cord of creation.“ – *Verantwortung ist der Nebelsrang der Schöpfung.*

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48 Buber, *Königtum Gottes*. (Berlin: Schocken Verlag, 1932). The seeds of Buber’s conception of Messiahism as theo-politics may be discerned in a letter of 1917 to the philosopher Hugo. Bergmann: “Now, I grant it is apparent that in the primitive Christian community the psychological process that took place was – in its ‘projection’ – regarded as the eventuated redemption in the world, in fact even as the eventuated redemption of God... But the persistent experience with the undredeemed world, the – as you say – continuing history of mankind, which goes its way with all its confusions, forced the believers to divined Christ into he who had come and he would come, and to wait for the Paraclete as the real completer of the redemption, the one who would make redemption visible. This meant the splitting of the temporal aspect of existence into something within and something without. Such a splitting is at odds with the Jewish faith in the Messiah, which regards the messianic function of man to be, in addition to absolute fulfillment, an indissoluble blending of within and without, ‘rising the sparks’ and raising of humanity...” Buber to S.H. Bergmann, December 4, 1917, *The Letters of Martin Buber*, eds, Nahum N. Glazter and P. Mendes-Flohr (New York: Schocken Books, 1991), 224f.

49 The reference in in *Königtum Gottes* to Schmitt is but indirect. Although excoriates in the politics of friend-foe, he does not mention Schmitt by name.