

Lana Zdravković

Peace Institute, Metelkova ul. 6, SI-1000 Ljubljana
lana.zdravkovic@mirovni-institut.si

Eschatology of St. Paul in the Emancipatory Political-Philosophical Thought as an Attempt to Re-Invent Hope in the End Times

Abstract

The paper addresses the particular modality of the end, which is manifested in a pervasive sense of constant, immediate, and real threat from the total destruction of the planet, global conflicts, and the extinction of the human species (viruses and pandemics, natural disasters, the nuclear threat, and the threat of artificial intelligence). The theme of the end is introduced by presenting the most important and current eschatological theories of radical political-philosophical thought, especially those of the left-wing, post-Marxist province. These include the work of W. Benjamin, J. Taubes, G. Agamben, S. Žižek and A. Badiou, who derive their political theology from St. Paul. The aim of this paper is to demonstrate how the most radical political thinkers, in a context where the emancipatory potential of concepts that could provide a framework for political continuity in times of crisis has been exhausted, turn to an ephemeral, otherworldly realm where political hope is constructed on theological concepts. In the concluding section, the paper puts forth the argument that the avoidance of the end is contingent upon the postulation of the political emancipatory potential in theological terms. This entails the imbuing of the aforementioned potential with theological concepts such as renunciation, self-control, and self-sacrifice.

Keywords

the end, political theology, political eschatology, emancipatory politics, messianism, universal singularity

Introductory

In the book *The End*, was published only a few months before the outbreak of the corona virus pandemic in 2019, Slovenian philosopher A. Zupančič defines present time as the time determined by a specific and general “feeling of the end” (Zupančič, 2019: 7) which oscillates between the feeling of “end as such”, “the end of the end”, and “impotence and ambiguity of the end” (Zupančič, 2019: 7). Zupančič’s conclusion is that we are no longer faced with the end itself, but with its mutation. This mutation of the end manifests itself as a perpetual crisis: political, economic, social, climatic, health, moral. The multiplication of crises has become a feature of our lives, generating an existential feeling of the acceleration of catastrophe. It has become normal for us to live with an immediate and real threat of the total destruction of the planet, global conflict and the extinction of the human race (viruses, pandemics, natural disasters, nuclear threat, AI threat).¹ This novel, distinctive modality

1

For a detailed analysis of the phenomenon of *post-humanity*, which implies the interconnection of the human brain and the machine (the so-called neuro-connection), and how

such a digitalisation of life can lead to the end of humanity (and the world) as we know it, cf. (Žižek, 2019).

of the end reveals that the apocalypse is not imminent, but has already commenced, and we are currently experiencing it. It is not a future event, but is already influencing the social, economic and environmental situation of the world. This situation gives rise to a global sense of impotence, melancholy and lethargy.

Zupančič's argument draws upon the tradition of eschatological theorisation within radical political philosophy, as exemplified by prominent left-post-Marxist philosophers such as W. Benjamin, J. Taubes, G. Agamben, S. Žižek and A. Badiou. These thinkers contemplate the world through eschatological lenses, and despite the presence of both overt and covert ideological divergences and deviations, they are unified in their understanding and explanation of the contemporary apocalypse as the culminating phase of global capitalism. This apocalyptic conceptualisation of the world leads them to advocate for a radical and revolutionary transformation of contemporary civilisation, which is dominated by the liberal West and its concepts of democracy, rule of law and parliamentarism. This must be achieved within the framework of the capitalist production mode. It is particularly pertinent given that the West imposes these postulates on the global stage, presenting them as the optimal and, indeed, the sole viable approach to societal development. This is achieved through the exploitation of cultural hegemony, economic coercion and, last but not least, perpetual warfare.

It is possible to discern the influence of C. Schmitt on the aforementioned authors, in particular his renowned thesis from *Political Theology* that all the most significant concepts of modern state doctrine are, in fact, secularised theological concepts (cf. Schmitt, 2005).² The central figure of contemporary political theology and philosophy of history of above-mentioned authors, on the other hand, is often St. Paul, especially his concept of *messianic time*, the enigmatic notion of *katéchon*, and the idea of *egalitarian universality* beyond law.³ It seems that, in circumstances where the emancipatory potential of the concepts that could facilitate some form of political advancement during the “end times” has been exhausted, some of the most radical political thinkers have shifted their focus to the ephemeral domain beyond the realm of politics, where political aspirations are based on theological concepts. This essay presents a survey of the most significant and pertinent eschatological theorisations within radical political-philosophical thought, with particular reference to St. Paul. It also delineates the potential political dynamics, implications and consequences of these theorisations.

Apocalypse Now

One of the reasons for resorting to St. Paul is undoubtedly the fact that his epistles are eschatological. As a member of the early Christian community, Paul expected the end of time to come soon and then proceeded to develop the concept in a way that was characterised by what Agamben (2005: 20) refers to as *eschatological indifference*. It is also noteworthy that St. Paul was a convert and a prominent figure who challenged the established norms of the early Christian community. He advocated for a radical transformation, preaching revolutionary, subversive, and antidogmatic methods for transitioning from the path of flesh to the path of spirit, from the kingdom of earth to the kingdom of heaven, and from the obedience of worldly laws to the annihilation of all laws in faith. Consequently, in the field of contemporary political

philosophy, St. Paul has become a paradigm of the rebellious subject, giving rise to calls for weak messianic power (Benjamin), the creation of counter-power in the messianic (Agamben, Taubes), the concepts of egalitarian universalism (Badiou) and revolutionary emancipatory politics (Žižek).

In *Living in the End Times*, Žižek refers to St. Paul's *Epistle to the Ephesians* to illustrate the paradigm of resistance in contemporary time:

“For our struggle is not against blood and flesh but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.” (Ephesians 6:12)

Or, translated into today's language:

“Our struggle is not against actual corrupt individuals, but against those in power in general, against their authority, against the global order and the ideological mystification which sustains it.” (Žižek, 2010: xv)

One of his recent books is entitled *Like a Thief in Broad Daylight* (cf. Žižek, 2018) in direct reference to Paul's *First Epistle to Thessalonians*:

“Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers and sisters, you do not need to have anything written to you. For you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.” (1 Thessalonians 5:1–2)

The quote is used as a metaphor for contemplating the end of capitalism as we know it.⁴

a) Messianic Time (Agamben, Taubes, Benjamin)

In *The Time that Remains. A Commentary on the Letters to the Romans*, Agamben concentrates on Paul's *Letters to the Romans* which he sees as key to establishing new politics. He analyses all the meanings of the first ten words of the Letters – “Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures” (Romans 1:1–2) – with the purpose “to restore Paul's Letters to the status of the fundamental messianic text for the Western tradition” (Agamben, 2005: 1).⁵ Using Paul's *First Epistle to the Corinthians* –

2

Schmitt's concept of the political, his theory of the state of emergency and conflict, and his dialectical image of politics (based on the friend-or-foe relation) have been paradoxically re-actualised by the radical Left during the 1960s.

3

For an excellent comparative study of how three modern political philosophers (Taubes, Badiou and Agamben) shaped their eschatological ideas and formulated the relation of the subject towards the event, the universal and history, see Gignac (2002). In this study, the three philosophers are shown to have referred to St. Paul in developing their ideas.

4

In the whole text I use the *New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition* translation of

the Bible, available at: www.biblegateway.com.

5

The book is structured as *ad litteram* commentary of Paul's first ten words in the *Letter to the Romans*. Since this was a six-day series of lectures, the words are divided into six thematic units: *Paulos doulos christou Iesou*; *Kletos*; *Aphorismenos*; *Aposlotolos*; *Eis euaggelion theou*; and (*Eis euaggelion theou*). Agamben proposes the bold hypothesis that every word of the opening speech is an *incipit*, a summary of the whole text, and that if we understand the incipit, we will understand the whole text, since compendium is actually the fundamental concept of the messianic vocabulary.

“I mean, brothers and sisters, the appointed time has grown short; from now on, let even those who have wives be as though they had none, and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no possessions, and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. For the present form of this world is passing away.” (1 Corinthians 7:29–31)

– Agamben conceptualizes Paul’s messianic time, “the time of the now” (*ho nyn kairós*) as a paradigm of the historical time, that is, the present time of the end (Agamben, 2005: 2). He argues that messianic time is neither chronological time (*chrónos*) nor apocalyptic time (*eschaton*), that is, the end of time when time slips into eternity, but the time between those two times – the time that remains between time and its end – in which radical abbreviation, contraction, and the acceleration of time occurs. Since Paul is an apostle and not a prophet, he is not focused on the future but on the present, on the “messianic now” (Agamben, 2005: 57) which gives rise to Agamben’s “messianic concept of the remnant” (Agamben, 2005: 57).

“What interests the Apostle is not the last day, it is not the instant in which the time ends, but the time that contracts and begins to end (*ho kairós synestalménos estín*: 1 Corinthians 7:29), or, if you prefer, the time that remains between time and its end” (Agamben, 2005: 62).

As an operational time, messianic time, the time that remains which for Paul is the only real time, is the “time that time takes to end” (Agamben, 2005: 67). From there, Agamben derives the concept of “the time that remains” in which we can operate. Since for Agamben, we ourselves are the messianic time – “the time of messianic inversion” (Agamben, 2005: 97) – our activity can result only from the understanding of messianic vocation (*klésis*) – “Let each of you remain in the condition in which you were called.” (1 Corinthians 7:20), which dissolves every kind of identity (Agamben, 2005: 26). The messianic separates the proper name from its bearer (Agamben, 2005: 10), and defines every identity as if it were not specific identity but any other identity. “As if not” (*hos mé*), asserts Agamben, “shows itself as a technical term essential to Pauline vocabulary” (Agamben, 2005: 23).

“Messianic life means living in the mode ‘as if not’, abolishing every identity, every legal and social status. Agamben is interested in the strategies of social subversion without utopia, which would oblige us to operate ‘as if not’. Living ‘the messianic’ is not a resentment of the world, but freedom from the world.” (Kocijančič, 2008: 255)

According to Agamben, political action can be constructed only with the awareness that we live in the messianic time that is running out, and with determination to act now. A subject who endeavours to avoid biopolitics should destroy the system without substituting it; it is Agamben’s “weak revolutionary politics” (Kocijančič, 2008: 255).⁶

In developing his concept of the messianic time as “the time that remains”, Agamben was inspired by Jacob Taubes to whom he dedicated his book.⁷ He finds it especially important that Taubes regarded Paul as the true representative of messianism from which the Christian tradition attempted to separate him. Pauls’ apocalyptic-eschatological declaration of faith shows that “faith is by no means only Greek but *is the centre of a messianic logic*” (Taubes, 2003: 7). Moreover, as a historian of religion, using the *Moses – Paul* parallel Taubes puts forward the thesis “that Christianity has its origin not properly in Jesus but in Paul” (Taubes, 2003: 40). Taubes is another eschatological philosopher.

“I can imagine as an apocalyptic: let it [the world] go down. *I have no spiritual investment in the world as it is.*” (Taubes, 2003: 103)

Being mostly interested in the political potential hidden in religious symbolism, he approaches theological writings by St. Paul in a scientific-analytical manner.

“I ask after the political potentials in the theological metaphors just as Schmitt asks after the theological potentials of legal concepts.” (Taubes, 2003: 69)

Taubes’ most important thesis is that the *Letters to the Romans* contains subversive political theology, or that it is “a political declaration of war against Rome” (Taubes, 2003: 16). For him, Paul is a revolutionary universalist, since by proclaiming the Crucified who does away with law (*nómos*), Paul threw the gauntlet to the dominant Jewish-Roman-Hellenistic theology of the ruling class. Paul’s universalism – Taubes emphasizes that one of the crucial words in Paul’s epistles is “all” (*pás, pánta*) – subversively does away with the legitimacy of every order – imperial (Roman), theocratic (Judaistic) and philosophical (Greek), and bases the redemption on mercy rather than on law. Paul’s political genius, says Taubes, is revealed by the fact that he sent the Epistle to the centre of the Roman Empire, which united religion and power.

6

Agamben understands biopolitics as a mutation of modern politics, as a new form of power that does not decide over life and death, but takes control under biological life itself, outside of any law. He conceptualises it as a radicalisation of M. Foucault’s understanding of biopolitics, whose work Agamben was both inspired by and critical of. Agamben goes back to Aristotle – from whom Foucault also drew from – in order to suggest that the apparent distinction between “bare life” (*zoē*) and “political life” (*bios*) is more complicated than either how Foucault or Aristotle acknowledge it. Taking the notion “the state of exception” from C. Schmitt, in order to explain the hidden crossing between *zoē* and *bios* i.e. between juridical or institutional and biopolitics model of power, he introduces the concept of *homo sacer*, which he puts as a crystalizing point of new nature of a sovereign power. Agamben emphasizes that the development and victory of capitalism would not be possible without the disciplinary control exercised by biopower, which takes the bare lives into its political calculations. The entry of *zoē* into the sphere of the *polis*, i.e. the politicization of “bare life” as such, represents for Agamben a defining event of modernity, marking a radical transformation of the political-philosophical categories of classical thought. Therefore, for Agamben, *homo sacer* does not represent a simple exclusion, but rather a hierarchical inclusion or inclusion through exclusion. As modern life is characterized by the inseparability of life and politics, the structure of ex-ception is essential to the core concept of sovereignty. The politics of

the West, as Agamben points out, is thus constituted mainly through the simultaneously inclusion and exclusion of “bare life”. Therefore, for Agamben, the politicization of “bare life” is the metaphysical task *par excellence*, in which a person decides on the humanity of a living being. Following W. Benjamin’s lead, he explains that our task should be not about revolutionizing the system but about revolutionizing the consciousness of individuals within the system, and that’s how the Agamben thought is also messianic.

7

The son of a rabbi and a rabbi himself, a sociologist of religion and a philosopher, a lecturer at the Freie Universität Berlin, in 1987, shortly before he died of cancer, Taubes delivered a series of lectures on “Paul’s Political Theology” at the Protestant Institute for Interdisciplinary Research in Heidelberg. The book with the same name is based on the transcripts of the four-day seminar. In his introduction, Taubes says: “When I accepted this invitation, I did not have the idea of being so pressed for time. I was thinking more of apocalyptic time pressure but did not know that time was pressing so personally, that is, because of an incurable illness.” (Taubes, 2003: 1). Taubes’ philosophical thought was heavily influenced by his professor G. Sholem, an Israeli philosopher and historian who focused on Jewish mysticism, and (in his own admission), by C. Schmitt whom he called “the apocalyptic of the counter-revolution” (Taubes, 2003: 69) and who he met personally in 1978.

As such, it was not only a gesture of rebellion but also an attempt to establish an efficient counter-power.

The starting point of Taubes' "negative political theology" (Kocjančič, 2008: 239) is "Marxoid messianic nihilism" (Taubes, 2003) which bets on the revolutionary social activism and primarily relies on W. Benjamin. As Agamben pointed out (2005: 140), Taubes was the only one who emphasized Paul's influence on Benjamin and his special and original "dialectic theology" (Taubes, 2003: 74). Although a Marxist, his political thought is suffused with theological motives. As G. Scholem, Taubes' teacher and Benjamin's lifelong friend, pointed out in his letter, throughout his life Benjamin was suspended between the sacred and the profane, the metaphysical and the material, the messianic and the dialectic. Moreover, Benjamin's most important ideas stemmed from his interest in theological issues, while his unique materialism only confused them.⁸

Benjamin's messianic conceptualization of history comes to light in the first sentence of his *Theological-Political Fragment*:

"Only the Messiah himself consummates all history, in the sense that he alone redeems, completes, creates its relation to the Messianic. For this reason, nothing historical can relate itself on its own account to anything Messianic." (Benjamin, 2006: 305)

It is here that one can already observe the profoundly apocalyptic perception of world politics, which he understands as nihilism. Also, both Taubes and Agamben point out that Benjamin's "weak messianic power" from the *Theses on the Philosophy of History* (Benjamin, 1968: 254) was inspired by St. Paul's *Second Epistle to the Corinthians* which ends:

"Therefore I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities for the sake of Christ, for whenever I am weak, then I am strong." (2 Corinthians 12:8–10)

Only with this pre-knowledge is it possible to understand fully his famous ninth thesis from the *Theses on the Philosophy of History*:

"A Klee painting named 'Angelus Novus' shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress." (Benjamin, 1968: 258)

In that late work, which is a "testamentary compendium of his messianic conception of history" (Agamben, 2005: 141), Benjamin, as one of the first Marxist philosophers, challenges the materialistic idea of progress, or rather associates the idea of progress with the concept of the end of history. The *Theses* is the last dramatic confrontation of Benjamin's theological metaphysics and his historical materialism, implying that what materialism can learn from theology is that the idea of historical progress is an illusion. Benjamin's messianic understanding of time, inspired by St. Paul manifests itself as a critique of historical progress in the name of vague apocalyptic messianism. The concluding part of the *Theses*, therefore, does not leave space for doubt that materialism should step back, with "monastic discipline" (Benjamin, 1968: 258) from its faith in progressive historical continuum, "historicism's bordello" (Benjamin, 1968: 262), and substitute it with the conception of history

that is closer to the concept of traditional Judaism which preserves a “weak messianic hope” (Benjamin, 1968: 262).

“For every second of time was the strait gate through which the Messiah might enter.” (Benjamin, 1968: 264)

Scholem later observed that this hermetic text contained nothing of historical materialism apart from the expression itself.

b) *Katéchon* (Schmitt, Agamben)

The famous and enigmatic concept of *katéchon* appears in the *Second Epistle to the Thessalonians*:

“As to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him, we beg you, brothers and sisters, not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as though from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord is already here. Let no one deceive you in any way, for that day will not come unless the rebellion comes first and the lawless one is revealed, the one destined for destruction. He opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, declaring himself to be God. Do you not remember that I told you these things when I was still with you? And you know *what is now restraining him*, so that he may be revealed when his time comes. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work, but only until *the one who now restrains it* is removed. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will destroy with the breath of his mouth, annihilating him by the manifestation of his coming. The coming of the lawless one is apparent in the working of Satan, who uses all power, signs, lying wonders, and every kind of wicked deception for those who are perishing because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion, leading them to believe what is false, so that all who have not believed the truth but took pleasure in unrighteousness will be condemned.” (Thessalonians 2:1–12)

As *something* that restrains, or *someone* who restrains the arrival of the Lawless (ánomos, also the Godless or Antichrist), that is, postpones the apocalypse and the end of history (éschaton) but also the arrival of Christ, the cryptic notion of *katéchon* is the subject of a wider philosophical-theological discussion. The first to mention this notion was C. Schmitt in *The Nomos of the Earth* (cf. 2006). Schmitt understood *katéchon* as the restraining power that could be the Christian empire, or the Roman Empire, or the state, or any other legitimate worldly government or power which is capable of postponing the end of the world. For Schmitt that power itself is the essence of history. He focuses on how the theological notion of *katéchon* can be transposed to law and state constitutions so that it becomes the power that stops evil. This pushed him into Nazism.⁹

8

Gershom Scholem dedicated his book *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (1938) to Benjamin. “To the memory of Walter Benjamin (1892–1940), the friend of a lifetime whose genius united the insight of the Metaphysician, the interpretative power of the Critic and the erudition of the Scholar.” The first compendium of essays by W. Benjamin in English, *Illuminations. Essays and Reflections* (1968), collected and edited by another Benjamin’s close friend, H. Arendt, was followed in 1994 by *The Correspondence of Walter Benjamin, 1910–1940*, co-edited by G. Scholem and T. W. Adorno. The heavy influence of mysticism

on Benjamin gave rise to a peculiar controversy among orthodox Marxists. According to Benjamin himself, he was equally inspired by C. Schmitt and especially his concept of decisionism. In 1930 Benjamin sent him a letter to which Schmitt, as far as we know, had never replied although Benjamin expressed deep respect toward his work.

9

In my explanation of *katéchon* I rely on (Kurelić 2023), where an extensive and profound analysis of the notion in the context of

→

In his first important discussion of the notion, in the *Time that Remains*, Agamben takes over Schmitt's understanding of *katéchon* as a ruling power, but in the context of Paul's messianic politics which delves beyond law, he focuses on juxtaposing the notions of *katéchon* and *ánomos*.

"The *katéchon* is therefore the force – the Roman Empire as well as every constituted authority – that clashes with and hides *katárgesis*, the state of tendential lawlessness that characterizes the messianic and in this sense delays the unveiling of the 'mystery of lawlessness'. The unveiling of this mystery entails bringing to light the inoperativity of the law and the substantial illegitimacy of each and every power in messianic time. It is therefore possible to conceive of *katéchon* and *anomos* not as two separate figures (unlike John, Paul never mentions an Antichristos), but as one single power, before and after the final unveiling. Profane power – albeit of the Roman Empire or any other power – is the semblance that covers up the substantial lawlessness (*anomia*) of messianic time." (Agamben, 2005: 111)

Combining the thoughts of Benjamin and Schmitt, Agamben concludes that the contemporary state itself has become the central problem, whereby he primarily has in mind the liberal democratic state. The end of the state and the end of history, for Agamben, coincide in the final confrontation. Agamben again introduced the notion in *The Mystery of Evil* (cf. 2017), where he juxtaposes two letters: the resignation letter by Pope Benedict XVI from 2013 and Paul's *Second Epistle to the Thessalonians*. The fundamental thought here is utter corruption of the Church, which Agamben associates interpretatively with the notion of "the mystery of lawlessness" (*mysterium iniquitatis*) from Paul's epistle. He asserts that the resignation of Pope Benedict XVI was a theological gesture of spiritual power, allowing the revelation of the corruption and perversion of the Church, which has completely lost its legitimacy in our time. He then goes on to conclude that genuine political activity should be constructed as ultimately eschatological, as an awareness that the world in which we live is approaching its end. Eschatology, the contemplation of the end, must be combined with ecclesiology, the contemplation of the role of the Church, so that our awareness of the ultimate corruption and possible end of civilisation opens up the horizons of messianic time. It is Agamben's renewed call for the elimination of the dominant political-economic order of the Western world.

The attraction of explaining the notion of *katéchon* lies in the fact that it lends itself to many interpretations, and that it is not necessarily something good. *Katéchon* might itself be an evil that is successfully fending off evil. For those who are willing to believe it, this power which staves off the end of the world could be a kind of government – for example, the Nazi Germany, as Schmitt contemplated it. Or the United States of America, as American right-wingers and conservatives believe. Or Putin's Russia, as more and more European right wingers, as well as (radical) leftists, choose to believe.

c) Universal Singularity (Badiou)

St. Paul is the central figure of Badiou's political theological philosophy.¹⁰ In his book *Saint Paul. The Foundation of Universalism*, he focuses on a part from Paul's *Epistle to the Galatians*:

"There is no longer Jew or Greek; there is no longer slave or free; there is no longer male and female, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus." (Galatians 3:28)

From this statement Badiou derives the philosophical foundation of universal singularity. For him Paul, who investigates “which law is capable of structuring a subject devoid of all identity and suspended to an event whose only ‘proof’ lies precisely in its having been declared by a subject” (Badiou, 2003: 5), is a symbol of the foundation of universalism.

“What is essential for us is that this paradoxical connection between a subject without identity and a law without support provides the foundation for the possibility of a universal teaching within history itself.” (Badiou, 2003:5)

What emerges from Paul’s letter is that what matters is not identity, but fidelity to the procedures of truth based on faith and not on law; a singular event universally interpolates individuals into subjects, regardless of their race, gender, social class or any other identity. Fidelity to the event, as a state of absence of law, is characteristic of the messianic, as Agamben particularly emphasised; it enables action out of grace and resists any authority. Law presupposes a certain difference, whereas grace is trans-legal, it is the opposite of law, and it comes without being obliged (to come).

As an anti-philosopher and apostle, Paul shows us, Badiou says (not without Taubes’s influence, although he does not mention it explicitly), that the subject of the procedures of truth emerges through the rejection of any *nomos*, be it Jewish law or Greek philosophy, and remains faithful to the event.

“Pauls project is to show that a universal logic of salvation cannot be reconciled with any law, be it one that ties thought to the cosmos, or one that fixes the effects of an exceptional election. It is impossible that the starting point be the Whole, but just as impossible that it be an exception to the Whole. Neither totality nor the sign will do. One must proceed from the event as such which is a-cosmic and illegal. But proceeding from the event delivers no law, no form of mastery, be it that of the wise man or the prophet.” (Badiou, 2003: 42)

Both Greek and Jewish discourses are discourses of the Father, so both fix the community in some form of obedience to law (Cosmos, Empire, God). The possibility of the universal that is free from every particularism is given only to that which comes as discourse of the Son. The Christian “diagonal discourse” (Badiou, 2003: 42) needs to be equally distant from Jewish prophecy (prophetic mastery) and from Greek *logos* (philosophical mastery). In this way, it can be accomplished in a kind of downfall of the figure of Master – both the one that draws its legitimacy from cosmos, the Greek master of wisdom, and the one legitimized by the power of exception, the Jewish master of letters and signs. The real political figure is therefore neither prophetic nor philosophical, but anti-philosophical and apostolic, claims Badiou.

“His genuinely revolutionary conviction is that the sign of the One is the ‘for all’, or the ‘without exception’. That there is but a single God must be understood not as a philosophical speculation concerning substance or the supreme being, but on the basis of a structure of address. The One is that which inscribes no difference in the subjects to which it addresses itself. The One is only insofar as it is for all: such is the maxim of universality when it has its root in the event.

the politological analysis of the present (end) time is given.

10

Or, as he wrote elsewhere: “I like the great metaphors hailing from religion: Miracle, Grace, Salvation, Glorious Body, Conversion [...] This has, predictably enough, led to the

conclusion that my philosophy is a disguised Christianity. The book I published on St. Paul in 1997 did not help matters. That said, all in all I would rather be a revolutionary atheist cloaked in a religious vocabulary than a Western ‘democrat’ persecutor of Muslim men and women, disguised as a secular feminist.” (Badiou, 2011: 141)

Monotheism can be understood only by taking into consideration the whole of humanity. Unless addressed to all, the One crumbles and disappears.” (Badiou, 2003: 76)

In Badiou’s view, we can avoid the end only if we accept the possibility of universal interpellation as preached by St. Paul, which became lost in the two dominant regimes of contemporary time: on the one hand, a continual extension of the automatism of capital and abstract homogenization, which is accomplished and presented as the global market where equality of capital and numbers dominates over the equality of people, and on the other, the process of fragmentation into closed identities accompanied with multicultural ideology and relativization. Both capital-parliamentarism and identity and communitarian recognition policies are antipolitical and prevent the realization of people’s potential as “uncountable infinity” (Badiou, 2003: 109). Furthermore, they prevent the creation of truth that for Badiou are conditioned by science, art, love and politics.

“The contemporary world is thus doubly hostile to truth procedures. This hostility betrays itself through nominal occlusions: where the name of a truth procedure should obtain, another, which represses it, holds sway. The name ‘culture’ comes to obliterate that of ‘art’. The word ‘technology’ obliterates the word ‘science’. The word ‘management’ obliterates the word ‘politics’. The word ‘sexuality’ obliterates ‘love’. The ‘culture–technology–management–sexuality system’, which has the immense merit of being homogenous to the market and all of whose terms designate a category of commercial presentation, constitutes the modern nominal occlusion of the ‘art–science–politics–love system’ which identifies truth procedures typologically.” (Badiou, 2003: 13)

Conclusion: Finding a Weak Messianic Power Within Oneself

Despite ideological, political and philosophical differences, some of the most important contemporary political philosophers agree that we live in the specific time of the end and that political activity must be constructed eschatologically, as an awareness of the approaching end of the world in which we live. In the absence of political solutions, philosophers resort to Paul’s eschatology while constructing emancipatory political philosophy as political theology. Since they also agree that “the end” is directly linked to the global domination of capitalism as an aggressive mode of production, which is imposed on us not only as the best possible solution but also as the only possible one, and which is based on the idea of incessant economic growth, which is unsustainable because it ultimately destroys nature, its resources and life itself, they believe that a better world can only emerge from the ashes of capitalism. And because they know that capitalism is inextricably linked to the existence of the contemporary world, they resort to theological metaphors in the absence of emancipatory political concepts. This is why they all imagine the apocalypse as a kind of transformative event that will eliminate capitalism and lead to the invention of a new, more just mode of production.

Žižek calls for a reinvention of the revolutionary potential of the left as a continuation of the Enlightenment project with Jacobin-Bolshevik elements. Badiou argues for the revival of the idea of communism as a reinvention of emancipatory politics based on the principles of radical egalitarian universalism. For Agamben and Taubes, political action can only be constructed with the awareness that we are in a messianic time that is running out, so the system must be demolished in such a way that it is not replaced by the efficient construction of counter-power. With these concepts, they try to imagine a new mode of production that, in contrast to capitalism – which drives the economy

of desire in accordance with incessant growth - promotes the idea that we cannot and must not have everything. It implies a mode of production based on the awareness that natural (and human) resources are limited. And the awareness that it is not necessary to satisfy all our desires, needs and instincts.

Emancipatory politics is about inventing a political community beyond the concepts of consumption/value/production. For the construction of a possible continuation in the end times, it is therefore crucial to find ways out of the economic logic that has deeply penetrated all aspects of life: in which a human being is understood only as a “human resource”, a bearer of values and a generator of productivity. It is important to find ways to create a life beyond the logic of the commodity market, where everything is left to the free personal choice of the individual in an endless series of different possibilities. Where desire is reduced to a need regulated by supply and demand on the market, and pleasure is no longer regulated by prohibition, but by the right of extreme individualisation, which allows the subject to claim, as one of the fundamental human rights, the right to its own particular kind of pleasure. Since capitalism is based on the exploitation of the structure of the desiring subject, presenting every object available on the market as a cause of desire, it would be imperative to wrest true pleasure from this economic cycle. Only the construction of a political community beyond capitalist logic can lead us out of the nihilism of our time.

The post-political state of the end is based on the paradigm of a permissive society with the imperative of individual freedoms, where everything is allowed and the disappearance of all boundaries is understood as politics. The highly developed, globalised capitalist ideology, which perfectly consolidates the identity struggle for the recognition of cultural differences, exists on the preposition that pleasure is the fulfilment of every bizarre, perverse or obscene desire of a selfish, narcissistic, egocentric individual. In such a post-ideological state, transgression itself has become the norm, proclaiming under the motto “nothing is impossible” that we can and must enjoy ourselves to the utmost of our imagination, regardless of the consequences. Such an understanding, however, has not led to the collapse of capitalism but, on the contrary, to the complete trivialisation of life and the application of commodity fetishism to the most intimate areas of life. Fetishistic digital capitalism has experienced a new upsurge, transforming every depraved transgression into a new product that can be bought on the market. This situation produces “solipsistically egoistic” (Žižek, 2008: 33), narcissistic, unfeeling individuals who perpetuate a specific symptom of the universal fear of the Other that produces apathy and an anti-social, anti-collective and therefore anti-political state (cf. Žižek, 2008).

In contrast to the idea of a mass culture of individuality (as a collection or quantity), based on difference, on the idea of the Other, the emancipatory conception of politics, based on the idea that “there is only one world” (Badiou, 2008: 53), which we all co-create, and which is built on the idea of community, collectivity (as a multitude or quality), on the idea of the same, must be re-established. In contrast to the demand for difference on which the anti-political struggle for the personal rights of the pampered individual is based, the political emancipatory potential is that which can be filled with theological notions of renunciation, self-control, self-sacrifice.

Benjamin’s concept of a “weak messianic power” coming from Paul, to which all the above-mentioned authors refer, therefore means that perhaps we do

not need a new Messiah who will lead us to fullness, but that the messianic power is in ourselves. Therefore, according to discussed authors, the apocalypse may be postponed only by ourselves, through our own action, determination and involvement. We ourselves are *katéchon*, the deterrent of the end of the world, which implies our decision to live here and now, and to also accept responsibility for that decision. Emancipatory political action should be theologically structured as a hope for a better world and a decision to do something about it. It depends on us, as Žižek would say, whether the light at the end of the tunnel will be the light of a better world or of the train that is rushing towards us.

Literature

Agamben, Giorgio (2005): *The Time That Remains. A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans*, transl. Patricia Dailey, Stanford University Press, Stanford.

Agamben, Giorgio (2017): *The Mystery of Evil. Benedict XVI and the End of Days*, transl. Adam Kotsko, Stanford University Press, Stanford.

Badiou, Alain (2003): *Saint Paul. The Foundation of Universalism*, transl. Ray Brassier, Stanford University Press, Stanford.

Badiou, Alain (2008): *The Meaning of Sarkozy*, transl. David Fernbach, Verso, New York.

Badiou, Alain (2011): *Second Manifesto for Philosophy*, Polity Press, Cambridge.

Benjamin, Walter (1968): “Theses on the Philosophy of History”, in *Illuminations* (Ed. H. Arendt), transl. Harry Zohn, Schocken Books, New York, pp. 253–264.

Benjamin, Walter (2006): “Theological-Political Fragment” in *Selected Writings Volume 3: 1935-1938* (Ed. H. Eiland and M. W. Jennings), Translated by Edmund Jephcott, Harvard University Press, pp. 305–306

Gignac, Alain (2002): “Taubes, Badiou, Agamben: Reception of Paul by Non-Christian Philosophers Today”, *Seminar papers* 138 (2002) 41, pp. 74–110.

Kocijančič, Gorazd (2008): “O razpotju razlage” [“On the Crossroads of Interpretation”], in: *Čas, ki ostaja. Komentar k Pismu Rimljanom*, Študentska založba, Ljubljana.

Kurelić, Zoran (2023): “Rat protiv liberalnog Antikrista” [“The War on Liberal Antichrist”], in: *Politike polarizacije i kulturni rat u Hrvatskoj* (Ed. Enes Kulenović), Fakultet političkih znanosti Sveučilišta u Zagrebu.

Lacan, Jacques (1999): *On Feminine Sexuality, the Limits of Love and Knowledge. The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XX, Encore*, transl. Bruce Fink, W. W. Norton & Company.

Schmitt, Carl (2005): *Political Theology. Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, transl. George Schwab, University of Chicago Press.

Schmitt, Carl (2006): *The Nomos of the Earth in the International Law of the Jus Publicum Europaeum*, transl. G. L. Ulmen, Telos, New York.

Taubes, Jacob (2003): *The Political Theology of Paul*, transl. Dana Hollander, Stanford University Press, Stanford.

Zupančič, Alenka (2019): *Konec [The End]*, Društvo za teoretsko psihoanalizo, Ljubljana.

Žižek, Slavoj (2008): *Violence. Six Sideways Reflections*, Picador, London.

Žižek, Slavoj (2010): *Living in the End Times*, Verso, London – New York.

Žižek, Slavoj (2018): *Like a Thief in Broad Daylight. Power in the Era of Post-Humanity*, Allen Lane, London.

Žižek, Slavoj (2019): “The Apocalypse of a Wired Brain”, *Critical Inquiry* 46 (2019) 4, pp. 745–763, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1086/709222>.

Lana Zdravković

**Eshatologija sv. Pavla u emancipacijskoj
političko-filozofijskoj misli kao pokušaj ponovnoga
izumljivanja nade u vremenima kraja svijeta**

Sažetak

Članak se bavi posebnim modalitetom kraja koji se očituje u sveprisutnom osjećaju stalne, neposredne i stvarne prijetnje od potpunog uništenja planeta, globalnih sukoba i istrebljenja ljudske vrste (virusi i pandemije, prirodne katastrofe, nuklearna prijetnja i prijetnja umjetne inteligencije). Tema kraja uvodi se iznošenjem najvažnijih i aktualnih eshatoloških teorija radikalne političko-filozofske misli, posebice onih lijeve, postmarksističke provincije. Tu spadaju radovi W. Benjamina, J. Taubesa, G. Agambena, S. Žižeka i A. Badioua, koji svoju političku teologiju vuku od sv. Pavla. Cilj je ovoga članka pokazati kako se najradikalniji politički mislioci, u kontekstu u kojem je iscrpljen emancipatorski potencijal koncepata koji bi mogli pružiti okvir za politički kontinuitet u kriznim vremenima, okreću efemernom, onostranom području gdje se politička nada gradi na teološkim konceptima. U zaključnom dijelu članak iznosi argument da je izbjegavanje kraja uvjetovano postuliranjem političkoga emancipatorskoga potencijala u teološkim terminima. To podrazumijeva prožimanje spomenutog potencijala teološkim konceptima kao što su odricanje, samokontrola i samopožrtvovnost.

Ključne riječi

kraj, politička teologija, politička eshatologija, emancipacijska politika, mesijanizam, univerzalna singularnost

Lana Zdravković

**Eschatologie des heiligen Paulus im emanzipatorischen
politisch-philosophischen Gedanken als Versuch einer
Neuerfindung der Hoffnung in der Endzeit**

Zusammenfassung

Das Paper adressiert eine besondere Modalität des Endes, das sich in einem allgegenwärtigen Gefühl einer fortwährenden, unmittelbaren und realen Bedrohung durch die gänzliche Zerstörung des Planeten, globale Konflikte und das Aussterben der menschlichen Spezies (Viren und Pandemien, Naturkatastrophen, die nukleare Androhung und die Gefährdung durch künstliche Intelligenz) manifestiert. Die Einführung in das Thema des Endes erfolgt durch die Vorstellung der wichtigsten gegenwärtigen eschatologischen Theorien des radikalen politisch-philosophischen Gedankens, namentlich jener der linken, postmarxistischen Provinz. Hierzu zählen die Werke von W. Benjamin, J. Taubes, G. Agamben, S. Žižek und A. Badiou, die ihre politische Theologie vom heiligen Paulus ableiten. Die Intention dieses Aufsatzes besteht darin, darzulegen, wie die radikalsten politischen Denker in einem Kontext, in dem das emanzipatorische Potenzial von Konzepten, die in Krisenzeiten einen Rahmen für politische Kontinuität bieten könnten, aufgezehrt ist, sich ephemeren, jenseitigen Gefilden zuwenden, in denen die politische Hoffnung auf theologischen Konzepten aufbaut. Im abschließenden Abschnitt wird das Argument vorgebracht, die Vermeidung des Endes sei durch die Postulierung des politischen emanzipatorischen Potenzials in theologischen Termini bedingt. Dies impliziert die Durchdringung des oben genannten Potenzials mit theologischen Konzepten wie Verzicht, Selbstbeherrschung und Selbstaufopferung.

Schlüsselwörter

Ende, politische Theologie, politische Eschatologie, emanzipatorische Politik, Messianismus, universelle Singularität

Lana Zdravković

**L'éschatologie de Saint Paul dans la pensée
politico-philosophique émancipatrice comme
tentative de réinventer l'espoir en temps de fin**

Résumé

Cet article aborde la modalité particulière de la fin, qui se manifeste dans un sentiment omniprésent de menace constante, immédiate et réelle, provenant de la destruction totale de la planète, des conflits mondiaux et de l'extinction de l'espèce humaine (virus et pandémies, catastrophes naturelles, menace nucléaire, et menace de l'intelligence artificielle). Le thème de la fin est introduit en présentant les théories eschatologiques les plus importantes et actuelles de la pensée politico-philosophique radicale, en particulier celles de la mouvance post-marxiste de gauche. Cela inclut les travaux de W. Benjamin, J. Taubes, G. Agamben, S. Žižek et A. Badiou, qui tirent leur théologie politique de Saint Paul. Le but de cet article est de démontrer comment les penseurs politiques les plus radicaux, dans un contexte où le potentiel émancipateur des concepts qui pourraient fournir un cadre de continuité politique en période de crise est épuisé, se tournent vers un domaine éphémère et transcendant où l'espoir politique se construit sur des concepts théologiques. Dans la conclusion, l'article avance l'argument selon lequel l'évitement de la fin dépend de la manière dont on postule le potentiel émancipateur politique en termes théologiques. Cela implique de doter ce potentiel des concepts théologiques tels que le renoncement, la maîtrise de soi et le sacrifice de soi.

Mots-clés

fin, théologie politique, eschatologie politique, politique émancipatrice, messianisme, singularité universelle