

THE MYSTERY OF POWER IN THE PHILOSOPHY
OF GIORGIO AGAMBEN

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Abstract. This article examines the so-called post-Foucauldian genealogy of power undertaken by the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben. His basic interest is why and in which ways power assumed the form of economy, which, according to Foucault's genealogical research, means the "government of men". For Foucault, the origin of managerial-administrative power is the paradigm of a pastorate, in which the main objective is to subjugate, control and govern the soul of every human being. For Agamben, the time horizon determined by Foucault is not sufficient. Therefore, he developed a theory of bio-power and bio-politics through the paradigm of economic theology, using a wide range of materials from the early medieval period to the 20th-century theology. Using archaeological and genealogical methods, this investigation aims to show the process of a paradigm shift from political to economic theology within the context of power relations. Moreover, it tries to verify whether Agamben's assumption is correct. By analysing certain concepts such as *divine anarchy* and *collateral effect*, I intend to question whether the Christian economy, as action and administration, is an archetype of the modern form of power or not.

Keywords: ontology, economy, Michel Foucault, Giorgio Agamben, anarchy, power, Erik Peterson

1. INTRODUCTION

*The Kingdom and the Glory: For a Theological Genealogy of Economy and Government*¹ is a complex, fundamental and original works of the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben. The author's main purpose is to analyse the metamorphosis of power in the social and political tradition of the West. Agamben's basic interest is why and in which

ways power assumed the form of economy, which, according to Foucault's genealogical investigations, means the "government of men". Agamben characterizes Foucault's archaeology/genealogy as a methodological tool that casts a shadow that reaches back from the present to the 17th and 18th centuries. For Agamben, this shadow is even longer and goes back to the medieval and ancient intellectual history (Agamben 2011). In his previous work on what he calls *the state of exception*, Agamben delineates the bipolar structure of power; that is, he differentiates between legal power (*potestas*) and authority (*auctoritas*), which is based on the (im)personal virtue of the sovereign. This binary opposition, characteristic of Agamben's *Homo Sacer* project, continues in *The Kingdom and the Glory*. Such oppositional structures are being and praxis, sovereign and minister, economy and ontology.

To understand the structure and essence of modern power, we shall try to efface the classical paradigm of the sovereign in order to represent its transformation based on an economic model. In doing so, we will better understand the central nervous system of Agamben's project. The "empty throne, the hetoimasia tou thronou that appears on the arches and apses of the Paleochristian and Byzantine basilicas", he says, "is, perhaps in this sense, the most significant symbol of power" (Agamben 2011, 12).

Agamben tries to restore and revitalize some forgotten problems and concepts in a modern discourse. He does this, in part, by a kind of Foucaultian problematization of the historical fact but also through a (re)construction of paradigms very similar to Walter Benjamin's methodological approach from his *Arcades Project*:

For the materialist historian, every epoch with which he occupies himself is the only prehistory for the epoch he himself must live in. And so, for him, there can be no appearance of repetition in history, since precisely those moments in the course of history which matter most to him, by virtue of their index as "fore-history," become moments of the present day and change their specific character according to the catastrophic or triumphant nature of that day (Benjamin 2002, 474).

The same can be said about Agamben himself, for whom the early medieval texts and problems are significant insofar as they maintain some link with contemporaneity.

How is it possible, more specifically, that church fathers and, more generally, late ancient and early medieval philosophical-theological thought that it can explain the functioning of modern secular society and disclose the impersonal character of power? To be contemporary is much more distrustfulness and distancing from its time, rather the kind of attitude and benevolence toward it. The *contemporary*, as Agamben calls him, is he who sees and contemplates his own time, its inner consciousness of the past, which, viewed on its own, is more than the mere unity of facts. According to Agamben:

Naturally, this noncoincidence, this “dis-chrony”, does not mean that a contemporary is a person who lives in another time, a nostalgic who feels more at home in the Athens of Pericles or in the Paris of Robespierre and the Marquis de Sade than in the city and the time in which he lives. An intelligent man can despise his time, while knowing that he nevertheless irrevocably belongs to it, that he cannot escape his own time. Contemporariness is, then, far from it. More precisely, it is that relationship with time that adheres to it through a disjunction and an anachronism. Those who coincide too well with the epoch, those who are perfectly tied to it in every respect are not contemporaries, precisely because they do not manage to see it; they are not able to firmly hold their gaze on it (Agamben 2009, 41).

2. AN ARCHAEOLOGY OF *OIKONOMIA*

A strategic feature of Agamben’s thinking is that the centre around which different structural elements are revolving almost always remains unnoticed and only appears when formal-historical research reaches its final point and when the solid ground is prepared for the representation of the main problem. One of Agamben’s main objectives is to demonstrate the interchangeability, antinomy and, at the same time, functional interconnectedness of political and

economic theology. The historical-theoretical ground for both paradigms is Christian theology. The source is the same but the interpretations are different. The theoretical foundation of political theology is ascribed to the German jurist and Catholic Carl Schmitt, whereas the theologian Erik Peterson, who was Schmitt's theoretical opponent, has ventured to apply the idea of a *Trinitarian Economy* to refute the former paradigm².

Political theology founded the profane sovereign power on the idea of transcendent God, while economic theology replaces the notion of transcendence with the concept of immanence. The main differential sign of immanence is not the sovereign intervention or being, which is modelled on the image of the father, but the administration and ordering of the life of humans.

At first glance, in *The Kingdom and the Glory*, Agamben's archaeological research appears to be emptied of any political flavour, a detailed but innocuous analysis of theological-exegetic problems. However, it is oriented toward the critique of the modern form of power; in particular, a critique of administrative-managerial reason. Agamben's approach to theology plays an important instrumental-functional role in his many works. In fact, one could argue that his theologically oriented works are not theological at all and that he actually instigates a new use for theology, as some scholars suggest³.

Agamben uses theological tradition in such a fashion and to such an extent that, through it, he can broaden the problem field and construct new possible paradigms. I submit that, in Agamben's works, theology is the servant of philosophy, and his approach to theology is much like that of Walter Benjamin, who said:

My thinking is related to theology as a blotting pad is related to ink. It is saturated with it. Were one to go by the blotter, however, nothing of what is written would remain (Benjamin 2002, 471).

Agamben's work relies upon many of the archival texts that

investigate one of the most significant concepts of early Christian theology, namely *oikonimia*. Including especially the linguistic-semantic analysis of the term found in the monographs devoted to early church fathers. Agamben describes the work of Josef Moingt, *Theologie trinitaire de Tertulien* as an example of this kind of treatment. In addition, he frequently cites the relatively new research of Gerhard Richter, which represents the fundamental analysis of the meaning of words within the theological tradition. However, as Agamben writes, despite Richter's detailed theological investigation, we still lack an adequate lexical analysis that supplements Wilhelm Gass's useful but outdated work *Das patristische Wort oikonomia* (1874) and Otto Lillge's dissertation *Das patristische Wort 'oikonomia.' Seine Geschichte und seine Bedeutung* (1955) (Agamben 2011, 2).

The work of contemporary French philosopher Marie-Jose Mondzain, *Image, icone, économie: Les sources byzantines de l'imaginaire contemporain*, should be mentioned separately. It had been published several years before Agamben published his own. Mondzain limits the field of her investigation to determining the meaning of the term *oikonomia* and its usage during the period of iconoclasm in Byzantine sources, while Agamben's theoretical and historical horizon is much broader and encompasses texts from the early patristic period to the theological traditions of the 20th century.

Carl Schmitt wrote in his early work on political theology: "All significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularized theological concepts" (Schmitt 1985, 36). If we consider these famous words in the context of Agamben's hypothesis concerning the existence of two paradigms, then, following up on his own assumption, Schmitt's theory is false. For proving this idea, Agamben invokes the works of marginalized theologian Erik Peterson, for whom political theology is theologically impossible. If, for Schmitt, an idea of political theology is based on the analogy of God and King, then, by actualizing the Trinitarian conception of God, we encounter the legitimacy problem of political theology. If we look at the theological Trinitarian dogma through the lenses of

philosophical criticism, it is easy to realize that, in everyday, mundane human experience, there is nothing that can correspond to the Trinitarian principle. For the inhabitants of the profane space, it is paradoxical, even impossible, to conceive of and to imagine, something like *homoousios* or the consubstantiality of the person of Trinity. For this reason, there is no possibility that something, even the King, to be represented as an image of God. In his work on the *state of exception*, Agamben criticizes Carl Schmitt, preferring Benjamin's theory of sovereignty and violence.

Thesis, according to which the economy could be a secularized theological paradigm, acts retroactively on theology itself, since it implies that from the beginning theology conceives divine life and the history of humanity as an *oikonomia*, that is, that theology is itself 'economic' and did not simply become so at a later time through secularization. From this perspective, the fact that the living being who was created in the image of God, in the end, reveals himself to be capable only of economy, not politics, or, in other words, that history is ultimately not a political but an "administrative" and "governmental" problem, is nothing but a logical consequence of economic theology (Agamben 2007, 15).

The general context and its political implications raise questions about the link between theology and economy. The former can be conceived of as the science/theory of God's being/existence, the latter as a discourse on God's action. However, existence and action are functionally interconnected with each other; more exactly, they do not exist one without the other.

2.1. PRE-CHRISTIAN ECONOMICS

In ancient Greece, the term *oikonomia* designated the structure of the household. Aristotle, in his *Politics*, distinguished between the public life in the polis, where one could realize himself and achieve freedom, and the household, which was run by the *despot* (the head of the family) and in which any possibility of freedom was excluded,

even for the head of the family. According to Aristotle, the *despot* cannot be treated as a free man, because his attitude toward the other family members and slaves was hierarchical and asymmetrical. As it is well known, the slave was considered only as an *organon*, an inseparable vital instrument or extension of the hand of the master. For obtaining freedom, he must participate in common deeds of the polis where everyone is equal⁴.

According to Marie-Jose Mondzain, in Christian theological tradition, the term assumed different meanings and, thus, should be translated by considering the specific context in which it is used. Mondzain enumerates those denotations and equivalents that express the meaning of economy: incarnation, plan, design, administration, providence, responsibility, duty, compromise and deceit⁵.

2.2. FOR A THEOLOGICAL MEANING OF *ECONOMY*: THE STRATEGIC REVERSAL

According to the established view of church historians and theologians, the modification of the traditional meaning of the term *economy* and its inclusion in the theological vocabulary is linked to the Epistles of St. Paul. It is often claimed that he was the first who used this term with a theological meaning. However, Agamben's investigations have disclosed that the theological rendering of economics should not be associated with St. Paul but with Tertullian and Hippolytus. For a better understanding of what is at stake in this theorization, we have to examine the Pauline usage of both *economy* and *mystery*. Their interconnection has a particular significance for Agamben. To rebut the hypothesis by Moingt and Gass⁶, he meticulously analyses several fragments of Pauline epistles to show its non-theological usage.

According to Agamben, Paul used the notion of economy in its Aristotelian sense, which originally meant the structure of the

household. The words slave (*doulos*) and servant (*diakonos*) also belong to this sphere, words that Paul used for describing his function and condition within the general practice of the worship. Agamben refers to several cases in which Paul used the word in the above-mentioned sense. According to Agamben, “the mystery of economy is patently a contraction of the phrase used in Colossians” 1:25 (“the *oikonomia* of God, the one that was given to me to make the word of God fully known, the mystery hidden for ages and generations” (Agamben 2011, 23). Even in this context, economy has the meaning of the task, assigned to Paul by God. Correspondingly, speaking about the extension of the meaning of this word and transcending it from the sphere of administration is too early.

The strategic transformation of its meaning is an achievement of Tertullian and Hippolytus. In their texts, economy becomes the technical term through which they try to articulate Trinitarian theology. According to Agamben, one reversal had a fundamental strategic function: the transformation of Paul’s the mystery of economy (*οἰκονομία τοῦ μυστηρίου*) into the economy of the mystery. Hippolytus, in *Contra Noetum*, elucidates the relationship between Father and Son, and thus changes the position and general meaning of the words. “But in whom is God, except in Christ Jesus, the Father’s own *logos* and the mystery of the economy [to *mysterioi tes oikonomias*]?” (Agamben 2011, 38). For Hippolytus, economy designates the general history of salvation, from the beginning until the eschatological end of the world. It should be noted that after Hippolytus, it was Tertullian who put the same meaning into the term. He translated it to Latin as *Dispositio* and *Dispensatio*. The Trinitarian economy is an accomplishment of God’s action in time and space, its embodiment or representation in the spatial-temporal dimension. Particularly, *Logos* and the Holy Spirit are the manifest, visible parts of the invisible substance. Respectively, as Mondzain puts it, we have to speak about the Trinitarian and Christological forms of economy. Mondzain and

Agamben based their judgment on the same source; however, their aims are not identical. For instance, while analysing the Trinitarian economy, both recall the works of Hippolytus, according to whom:

If he desires to learn how it is shown still that there is one God, let him know that his power is One. As far as regards the power, therefore, God is one. But as far as regards the economy, there is a threefold manifestation (Mondzain 2005, 25).

I won't dwell on the Christological meaning of economy here, because my aim is not the reconstruction of the theological tradition of the term. We need genealogical and archaeological research for better understanding Agamben's intention and see the legacy, or somewhat latent and implicit link, between Christian theology and modern bio-politics. Christian economy, as action and administration, is an archetype of modern, intangible, administrative power. However, it is legitimate to ask the question about the legitimacy of this relationship. On the other hand, to what extent would it be just to say that Agamben's post-Foucauldian archaeology is an effort, which ties together unconnected and conceptually remote problems?

3. DIVINE ANARCHY

Economics has no foundation in ontology
and the only way to found it is to hide its
origin.

Blaise Pascal

How the government and anarchy are connected? In this particular context, what does the word *anarchy* mean? We do not have to identify it with political ideology or its modern meanings. Agamben's archaeological research and, as it has been shown, new instrumental use of theology leads to very interesting assumptions. Agamben's text is, despite its polyphonic and complex form,

structurally coherent and consistent. Therefore, his interpretation of economics, Providence, theology or anarchy are densely interconnected with each other and construct one unified theoretical system. The third chapter of *The Kingdom and the Glory, Being and Acting*⁷, is the shortest but most problematic chapter. Agamben tries to reconstruct the paradigm of divine anarchy. This issue is the problematic part of Trinitarian and Christological theories. It directly refers to the relation of substance and praxis, which was a serious puzzle for the early church fathers. For this reason, Agamben quotes the word of Hippolytus, according to whom God is one according to its essence (Hippolytus himself used, for potentiality, the Greek word *dynamis*) and triune according to its economy. In addition, Tertullian, in *Against Praxeas*, expresses the idea that divine substance is not divided but its differentiation happens only on the level of economy and not on the level of ontology⁸.

According to Agamben, distinguishing between God's essence (*being*) and action, ontology and praxis, is one of the fundamental problems of economic doctrine and Christian theology. Classical Greek identification of *Being* and *Language* in Christian theology have been sublated by the thought that *Logos*, as the realization of the divine plan of salvation, as praxis and economy, as a consequence of Arian controversy, was declared anarchical – that is to say, without foundation and beginning. The ancient Greek picture of the world implies indifference and identity of being and action. For example, the Aristotelian unmoved mover moves the heavenly spheres out of necessity, according to the immanent law of its nature, and not because it wants this. He is identical with himself. The Greek world is harmony and unity of being and action.

The doctrine of the *oikonomia* radically revokes this unity. The economy through which God governs the world is, as a matter of fact, entirely different from his being, and cannot be inferred from it. It is possible to analyse the notion of God on the ontological level, listing his attributes or negating one by one--as in apophatic theology--all his predicates to reach the idea of a pure

being whose essence coincides with existence. But this will not rigorously say anything about his relation to the world, or the way in which he has decided to govern the course of human history... For this, God's free decision to govern the world, is now as mysterious as his nature, if not more; the real mystery, which "has been hidden for centuries in God" and which has been revealed to men in Christ, is not that of his being, but that of his salvific praxis (Agamben 2011, 70).

Agamben draws attention to, and meticulously analyses, the debates around the heresy of Arianism, whose historical, political and theological meanings should be investigated further. We have to orient ourselves to the problem of the beginning, upon which Agamben's interpretation sheds new light. As Agamben emphasizes in this debate on *arkhe*, one should not think about the chronological beginning. Arius and his opponents agreed that the Father generated the Son, and this act of generation took place before eternal time (*pro chronon aoinion*).

The beginning could not be temporal because the Son, as Arius insisted, is born out of and without time (*achronos*). The main issue which interests Agamben is the relation between the Son and God. Agamben quotes the letter written by Arius to Alexandre, in which Arius wrote the following: "We acknowledge One God, alone Ingenerate, alone Everlasting, alone *anarchos*" (Agamben 2011, 58).

Correspondingly, Arius is against the anarchical character of Christ, and he founds his existence entirely in the Father. For Arius, qualitatively, the Father is superior to the Son, despite the presupposition that he was generated before all things and outside time. Against Arius, in the first Nicene Creed, the Son was proclaimed as consubstantial with the Father (*homoousios tōi patrī*), who is begotten and not generated by the Father. Another problem is the difference between being begotten and being generated, on the one hand, and the idea, on the other, to what extent the separation of their meanings excludes the possibility of the Son being considered as unfounded (*anarchic*) like his Father, so Christ also does not have a beginning. Arians did not see the principal

difference between the two. Eventually, in the Creed, the Son was declared co-eternal with the Father and thus unfounded. Agamben cites the words from a historic assembly of bishops called on by Emperor Constantine, that The Son “reigns together with the Father absolutely, anarchically, and infinitely (*pantote, anarchos kai ateleutitos*)” (Agamben 2011, 58). The Father begets the Son, but he is co-eternal with him. On the one hand, then, he has his foundation in the Father as a human being, and, from another perspective, he has no foundation in the Father as *Logos*, and thus he is also anarchical. In a move that cannot be called other than radical, Agamben writes:

If we do not understand this original "anarchic" vocation of Christology, it is not even possible to understand the subsequent historical development of Christian theology with its latent atheological tendency, or the history of Western philosophy, with its ethical caesura between ontology and praxis. The fact that Christ is "anarchic" means that, in the last instance, language and praxis do not have a foundation in being. The "gigantomachy" around being is also, first and foremost, a conflict between being and acting, ontology and economy, between a being that is in itself unable to act, and an action without being: what is at stake between these two is the idea of freedom (Agamben 2011, 59).

What can be the common ground for an investigation of the theological archetype of anarchy and modern political discourses? What is the relationship between government and anarchy? If we trust the already elaborated genealogy of anarchy, then, following Pier Paolo Pasolini and Walter Benjamin, we can easily identify latent or obvious anarchical grounds for bourgeoisie society. According to Agamben,

Benjamin was in this sense right when he wrote that there is nothing as anarchic as the bourgeois order. Similarly, the remark of one of the Fascist dignitaries in Pasolini's film *Salo* according to which ("the only real anarchy is that of power" is perfectly serious" (Agamben 2011, 64).

4. "THE KING REIGNS, BUT HE DOES NOT GOVERN"

The unusual and interpretive reading of early medieval theological texts is an inseparable part of Agamben's general methodological task. By searching the theological-economic foundations of modern political categories, it seems that Agamben tries to refute the classical paradigm of sovereignty, derived from political theology. However, if our observation and remarks are correct, Agamben's critique of Schmitt and his disclosure of economics as the structure of governmental forms are the development and problematization of something that remains unsaid and hidden in the works of Erik Peterson. The article *Monotheism as a Political Problem*, which Peterson wrote in 1935 (after his conversion to Catholicism) is implicitly the critique of Schmitt's political theology, which was responded to by Schmitt himself in his *Political Theology II: The Myth of the Closure of any Political Theology*. Schmitt's response structurally resembles Derrida's critique of Heidegger's and Husserl's project of overcoming the traditional metaphysics within the continental philosophical tradition of the West. According to Derrida, despite the effort to overcome traditional metaphysics, both Husserl and Heidegger were trapped in the linguistic and problematic field of that metaphysical tradition. Schmitt also suggests that Peterson's critique of political theology does not go beyond the boundaries of political theology itself. Agamben, who is aware of this, quotes Schmitt: "It is exactly this interpolation, in this context, which is the most intriguing contribution that Peterson – maybe unconsciously – attributed to political theology" (Agamben 2011, 72).

What kind of contribution or interpolation of Peterson into political theology did Schmitt have in mind? Before analysing the pure metaphysical-theological problems, which is a necessary precondition for understanding Agamben's project, it seems that we have to devote some time to the formula that determines the identity and difference between Peterson, Schmitt, Foucault and Agamben. Usually associated with Adolphe Thiers, the formula that will

become the subject of reflection for all above-mentioned thinkers is as follows: *le roi regne, mais il ne gouverne pas*. Foucault, for instance, in his lecture *Security, territory, population*, which Agamben cites, writes:

While I have been speaking about population a word has constantly recurred... And this is the word “government”. The more I have spoken about population, the more I have stopped saying “sovereign”. I was led to designate or aim at something that again I think is relatively new, not in the word, and not at a certain level of reality, but as a technique. Or rather, the modern political problem the privilege that government begins to exercise in relation to rules, to the extent that, to limit the King’s power, it will be possible one day to say, “the king reigns, but he does not govern” (Agamben 2011, 111).

The division between government and reign, as we have already seen, was accomplished, according to Agamben, in the Trinitarian economy, in which being and acting were separated. As it is well known, Agamben considers himself the developer of the field of problems circumscribed by the works of Michel Foucault. For this reason, Agamben’s objection against Foucault does not aim at the negation of Foucault’s theory but its amendment and confirmation. Foucault, in contrast to Agamben, confines himself to the pattern of pastoral power and leaves patristic the Trinitarian economy unnoticed. He is interested in the modern forms of power and government and their historical structures. Therefore, *the government of men*, as a bio-political technique in the case of Foucault, is linked to the pastoral paradigm. Foucault explains the pastoral power as follows:

Pastorate does not coincide with politics, pedagogy, or rhetoric. It is something entirely different. It is an art of “governing men,” and I think this is where we should look for the origin, the point of formation, of crystallization, the embryonic point of the governmentality whose entry into politics, at the end of the sixteenth and in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, marks the threshold of the modern state. The modern state is born, I think, when governmentality became a calculated and reflected practice. The Christian pastorate seems to me to be the background of this process (Leshem 2016, 5).

Agamben briefly examines the characteristics of Christian pastorate and entirely relies upon the works of Foucault. According to Agamben, one of the main functions and tasks of the pastorate is the *government of souls* (*regimen animarum*) and, respectively, it should be mentioned as the *technique of techniques*. For Foucault, pastoral power became the hidden *matrix* or *model* of political government. The binding concept of the *government of men* and pastorate is *economy*, which Foucault finds it in the works of Gregory of Naziansus. Foucault defines pastorate as *oikonomia psychon*, which one can understand as an affection or the government of souls and, at the same time, as the care of it. At first glance, this last interpretation of economy is much more relevant but one should be more patient with respect to disclosing its mystery for contemporary politics. What is the relationship between the pastorate, which means care of individual souls as well as care of the whole of humanity, and economy? If the function of the pastorate is defined as the care *omnes et singulatim*, then it should be extrapolated on the field of politics. As Marie-Jose Mondzain noticed, “The pastoral economy is the mimesis of the providential economy” (Mondzain 2005, 37).

As we already emphasized, Agamben wants to develop further the problems delineated by Foucault and to determine how they are grounded in the intellectual tradition of the West. His analysis of the theological genealogy of government and bio-political managerial power makes him differentiate between reign and government, which at first appear to represent nothing more than politically loaded concepts. However, as Agamben’s investigation shows, functionally and by content, they are related to the metaphysical and theological picture of the world. For this reason, I would prefer to characterize Agamben’s *Homo Sacer* period of writings as metaphysical-political. What is the meaning of the formula *the king reigns, but he does not govern*, which became the unresolved puzzle for the historians of political thought, theologians and philosophers? Agamben’s thesis concerning the double structure of power and government is fed up by the late antique and early medieval texts.

First, we do not have to be surprised that before the construction of the basic categorical apparatus of political science and positive law, particularly in the theological tradition, we can find the terms and concepts relating to the divine government of the world, which now constitutes the cornerstone of the political vocabulary. Before the separation of executive and legislative powers in the secular-profane sphere, as it is shown by Agamben, the concepts *ordinatio* (*ordering*) and *executio* (*execution*) emerged during the period of articulation of general and particular providential theology. God does not only govern the world, but he also takes care of it: this is the structure of a providential machine, which presupposed both elements. In the 2nd century, Aristotle's commentator Alexander of Aphrodisias wrote against the Stoics that God does not care about tiny details in the world and, therefore, He does not govern directly, but through mediation. He establishes the universal and transcendent laws through which the world is governed. According to Alexander of Aphrodisias,

The providence exercised by a king over the things he governs does not proceed in this way: he does not take care of everything, universal and particular things, continuously or in a way that none of the things that are subjected to him--and to which he would dedicate all his life--would slip his mind. The mind of the king prefers to exercise his providence in a universal and general way: his duties are indeed too noble and dignified for him to take care of these trivialities (Agamben 2011, 116).

In Agamben's view, that something, which in Christian theology becomes *providentia generalis* and *providentia specialis* in the writings of Alexander Aphrodisias, appears as *kat' hauto* (by itself) and *kata symbebekos* (accidental) forms of Providence. However, as Agamben puts it, and which for him has a paramount importance, Alexander did not confine himself to the dichotomy between general and particular providence. Following him, Agamben seeks the answer to the question "what is this particular intermediate nature of providential action-involuntary, yet not accidental?" (Agamben

2011, 117). This question is not limited to Providence by itself, nor to accidental providence. Agamben finds this kind of intermediary nature of providence in the writings of Alexander, which by their structure resembles an argument justifying the existence of Evil. Aphrodisias calls it *collateral effect that is calculated* (Agamben 2011, 118).

What is the meaning of *collateral effect* in the context of the divine government of the world? Is it possible that the divine plan, or providence, contains in itself unintended collateral effects? On the one hand, we have the idea of an almighty and omnipotent god and, on the other, we are facing the problem of justification of Evil, which the double structure of Providence serves to solve in addition to the idea of the collateral effect. Here, our main interest is the problem itself and not the formal historical narration, which does not go beyond the boundaries of certain traditions and theories. Agamben is a true archaeologist who, by meticulously reading the texts, unearths concealed concepts and problems and tries to use them for the sake of the genealogy of the present. Apart from Alexander of Aphrodisias, he finds the theme of *collateral effect* in the writing of Philo of Alexandria. Philo's work is about providence and he writes that:

Hail and snow-storms, and other things of that kind, are {collateral effects} (epakolouthei) of the cooling of the air. And, again, lightning and thunders arise from the collision and repercussions of the clouds ...And earthquakes, and pestilences, and the fall of thunderbolts, and things of that kind... (Are not primary works of nature, but follow necessary things as concomitant effects (Agamben 2011, 119).

Agamben pays attention to the idea that collateral effects determine the general structure of the divine government of the world, and that they are inseparable parts of it. If we take into account Agamben's overall purpose, the motive of his interest in the theme of providence becomes clear. By the force of structural-historical analogy, he criticizes the political constellation of modern states,

which are the so-called bio-political machines exerting their violent influence over individuals. For Agamben, the relation between sovereign power and bare life is mediated by the concept of *exclusion*. If, for Foucault, the process of subjugation happens through *inclusion, control* and *surveillance*, in the case of Agamben, *inclusion* is replaced by *exclusion*. Precisely through this exclusion, sovereign power is able to include the citizens or non-citizens in the sphere of its control. In one of his public lectures, Agamben said something that was latently implied in *The Kingdom and the Glory*. Before quoting Agamben, we have to say that it is extremely unusual for him to use empirical facts and evidence. We can only apply his complicated theoretical edifice to concrete empirical phenomena in order to see them from a different angle and, at the same time, to check the validity of his often-provocative theoretical claims

When today, military strategies give the name collateral damages or in French *bavure* to the calculated effects of military interventions which can result in the destruction of cities, and in human casualties, they unwillingly develop this very old theological paradigm. But – if our hypothesis is correct – also in this case, the collateral effect is not something secondary or something casual but defines the very essence of an act of governance. There are no casualties in the act of governance. Because the act aims to collateral effects. In a way, the American military says: We killed one thousand persons. This was just a collateral effect of an actually good act. We have to reverse: It is true, but the collateral effect is the way in which the act of government is realized⁹.

Theologians ascribed the name of ordination to these universal laws. Particular Providence is hierarchically situated on the second level, in which angels perform the function of execution. In accordance with the bipolar structure of the divine government of the world, *ordinatio* and *executio*, cannot exist without each other. In modern political discourse, implicitly based on those theological premises, the crisis of parliamentary and legislative power is obvious. The main power is concentrated in the hands of the executive, and it has clear primacy over the legislative. If Agamben's intention is the critique of Schmitt's political theology and the theory of sovereignty

and, therefore, the further development of Peterson's and Foucault's ideas, he unwillingly finds himself in contradiction and in a vicious circle. Economic theology, as the paradigm or anticipation of modern neo-liberal administrative-managerial power, does not exclude the perhaps unwilling and unaware similarity of Agamben to Schmitt. Despite the difference in the main problems, Schmitt's thesis concerning secularized theological concepts is somehow "shared" by Agamben but without acknowledging it. If, for Schmitt, economics is a secularized theological concept, Agamben thinks that:

The thesis according to which the economy could be a secularized theological paradigm acts retroactively on theology itself, since it implies that from the beginning theology conceives divine life and the history of humanity as an *oikonomia*, that is, that theology is itself "economic" and did not simply become so at a later time through secularization (Agamben 2011, 3).

For both, the condition of political experience is theology. The distinction between executive and legislative power is founded in theology and linked to the idea of general and particular providence. Considering this, Agamben's strategic choice is not quite different from that of Schmitt. Both attempt to find theological paradigms of political phenomena. However, if, with Schmitt, we get an idea of politics based on transcendent sovereignty, in Agamben's case we have to deal with economic theology, which structurally, and by meaning, is different from his conception. We have to search for the difference between reign and government before their articulation in a political context, namely in theological tradition. Reign and government can also correspond to the theological paradigm according to which God's being and praxis, his existence by and in itself, and general history of salvation, aporetically are intertwined in the form of a Trinitarian economy. We should also recall the twelfth book of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, without which it is impossible to speak about Aristotelian *theology*; especially Aristotle's view of God as the unmoved mover, thought of thought and form

of form, which Will Durant describes as *the king reigns, but he does not govern*:

Aristotle's God never does anything; he has no desires, no will, no purpose; he is activity so pure that he never acts. He is absolutely perfect; therefore he cannot desire anything; therefore he does nothing. His only occupation is to contemplate the essence of things; and since he himself is the essence of all things, the form of all forms, his sole employment is the contemplation of himself.³ Poor Aristotelian God!—he is a *roi faineant*, a do-nothing king; "the king reigns, but he does not rule. (Durant 1926. 82)

A structural analogy of the binary opposition between reign and government can be found in Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, namely in the passage concerning the idea of good, which has a transcendent and immanent character toward the world and which did not avoid Agamben's attention.

We must now consider also in which of two ways the nature of the universe contains the good or the highest good, whether as something separate [*kechorismenon*] and by itself [*kat'h' hauto*], or as the order [*τάξις*] of the parts. Probably in both ways, as an army [*strateuma*] does. For the good is found both in the order and in the leader [*strategos*] and more in the latter; for he does not depend on the order but it depends on him (Agamben 2011, 80-81).

This quite complicated passage from Aristotle's *Metaphysics* speaks about the functional interconnection of transcendence and immanence. Agamben adds:

In it, transcendence and immanence are not simply distinguished as superior and inferior, but rather articulated together so as almost to form a single system, in which the separated good and the immanent order constitute a machine that is, at the same time, cosmological and political (or economic-political)" (Agamben 2011, 80).

In Aristotle, it can be said that the immanent interrelation of different elements refers to the relational and not the substantial character of order. Therefore, for all beings as such, their principal of immanent order is directed and linked with the transcendence of Good. In fact, only a few lines later,

Aristotle quotes Homer's words, which will be referenced by Peterson in his article on *Monotbeism as a Political Problem*. This idea is crucial for understanding the tradition of political theology. "The rule of many is not good; let there be one (sovereign)" (Agamben 2011, 8).

However, it is also pertinent to recall Peterson's analysis of the pseudo-Aristotelian treatise *De Mundo*, in which the transcendent Aristotelian God is compared to an invisible mover of the marionettes and to the Persian king, who is locked in his palace and governs, from there, through ministers and servants. Peterson writes:

Here, the crucial question for the image of divine monarchy is not whether there are one or more powers (Gewalten), but whether God participates in the powers [Machten] that act in the cosmos. The author wants to say: God is the precondition for powers to act in the cosmos (he uses the term *dynamis*, adopting a Stoic terminology, but he means rather the Aristotelian *kynesis*), yet, precisely for this reason, he himself is not power: *le roi regne, mais il ne gouverne pas* (Agamben 2011, 70).

The theological doctrine of Trinity, which makes up a significant part of Agamben's investigation, has much the same structure in which God's being (*ousia*) and his participation in the general history of salvation or praxis differ from each other. The functionally interconnected binary opposition of being and action corresponds to the theological-political paradigm of reign and government, in which God (king) reigns, but does not act. The same figure of a non-potent sovereign can be found in Walter Benjamin's *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, where he criticizes Schmitt's sovereign who decides on the state of exception by representing the baroque sovereign who, when needed, cannot make a decision. Both Peterson and Agamben pay a lot of attention to the gnostic tradition, in which there is a passive God (*deus otiosus*) and an active God (*deus actuosus*). Interestingly, with respect to the distinction between reign (kingdom) and government, is the Platonic philosopher Numenius, who differentiates between a transcendent,

self-sufficient and inactive absolute and a second God who is busy governing the world. Ontologically, the first God is supreme and, according to his pure being, he does not act; rather, its actions are exclusive functions of the second God. There is a fragment in Numenius, preserved by Eusebius of Caesarea, which both Agamben and Peterson cite:

For it is not at all becoming that the First God should be the Creator [demiourgein]; also the First God must be regarded as the father of the God who is Creator of the world. If then we were inquiring about the creative principle, and asserting that He who was pre-existent would thereby be preeminently fit for the work, this would have been a suitable commencement of our argument. But if we are not discussing the creative principle, but inquiring about the First Cause, I renounce what I said, and wish that to be withdrawn [. . .] the First God is inoperative [argon] with regard to all kinds of work and reigns as king [basilea], but the Creative God [demiourgikon] governs [hegemonen], and travels through the heaven (Agamben 2011, 77).

It should be noted that Numenius strictly distinguishes between intelligible and sensible worlds (he also differentiates a third God, which Agamben does not mention). First, it is the world of good and absolute transcendence of God, and second, it is the world of a creator (*demiurgos*). The first God is inert and simple, and its being has ontological primacy over the second. Numenius also calls it a first intellect. We can see some contradictions in his theory and, thus, ask some critical questions that are directly connected to Agamben's project. For example, if the first God is unmoved, inert and isolated, how is it possible for him to be the cause of everything? On the other hand, if he is a thinking being, can it be absolutely inert? It would be reasonable to say that Agamben's reign (kingdom) is like an inert God and Benjamin's baroque sovereign. Is the classical paradigm of sovereignty really effaced from political discourse? Perhaps the sovereign is Benjamin's hunchback, who remains invisible while pulling the strings of a puppet that wins all chess games.

5. CONCLUSION

In Agamben's *Homo Sacer* project, the book *The Kingdom and the Glory: For a Theological Genealogy of Economy and Government* is one of his most comprehensive and complex works. Agamben, according to his methodological choice, did not want to complete the work by "solving" some problems but, instead, he recovered something unsaid and developed it further, without any ambition to finally bring it to completion. In this article, through an analysis of theological economy, ontology, anarchy, reign and government, being and acting, I have tried to demonstrate Agamben's main thesis: power, in Western culture, assumed the form of economy, which, according to Foucault's bio-political theory, means *the government of men* and administration.

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Notes

1. Giorgio Agamben, *Il Regno e la Gloria: Per una genealogia teologica dell'economia e del governo, Homo sacer*, 2, Neri Pozza Editore, 2007.
2. Erik Peterson was a German Protestant theologian who, in 1930, converted to Catholicism. Peterson's name in theological circles is well known and it can be mentioned together with Karl Barth, Rudolf Harnack, Hans Urs Von Balthasar and Juergen Moltmann. In philosophy, Giorgio Agamben revitalized his name in his post-Foucauldian genealogy of political sovereignty. He often refers to Peterson's works.
3. Colby Dickinson, *Agamben and Theology*, T & T Clark International, 2011; Colby Dickinson and Adam Kotsko, *On the Coming Philosophy: New use of theology*, Rowman@Littlefield, 2015.
4. See also: Hannah Arendt, *What is an Authority*.
5. See Mondzain 2005, 13.

6. Both Wilhelm Gass and Josef Moingt assumed that the theological usage of *economy* first appears in the epistles of St. Paul. However, Moingt also speaks about the traditional meaning of the term and its use even in the Christian tradition.
7. An Italian word for the English verb *to be* is *essere*, which is rendered differently, according to context. In that case, I prefer to translate it as *essence*, because the Greek *ousia* was translated by Agamben as *essere*. And it simply means *essence*. I found it problematic to translate into English as *being* due to its ambiguity in which the main sense and author's intention disappear. In the German translation, the term is rendered as *Sein*.
8. See Agamben 2011, 53.
9. The source can be found here:
<http://www.pubtheo.com/page.asp?pid=1566>.

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