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Michelle Chaplin Sanchez
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Introduction

Jean Calvin lived life as a refugee. The thinking and writing that produced his most important body of work – the 1559 *Institutio Christianae Religionis* – all occurred at a distance from the institutional bodies of church and state that had cradled and cultivated his own mind and body during his formative years.[1]

In the sixteenth-century, refugees in Europe were unwanted and openly derided – perhaps more overtly than now, when some nations at least present the veneer of hospitality to the displaced.[2] Nicholas Terpstra argues that understanding the early modern European Christian logic of expulsion and migration requires appreciating the ubiquity of the "body" metaphor as a social imaginary or civic religion – or as something akin to what later theorists, such as Carl Schmitt to Ernst Kantorowicz and their interlocutors, would call a "political theology."[3] In *The King's Two Bodies*, Kantorowicz traces how medieval European political theory was shaped by a series of metaphorical exchanges with Christology, sacramental theology, and ecclesiology. These theological debates provided a deep archive of strategies for theorizing the relationship of the body of Christ *as* God-Man to the body of Christ *as* church. Such strategies were deployed and recast by jurists and artists who imagined

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[1] My estimation of the 1559 *Institutio* as Calvin's most important work follows Calvin's own estimation as well as the longstanding and widespread impact of the work relative to Calvin's other writing – evident, not least, in the fact that the book has recently earned its own biography from Calvin scholar and biographer Bruce Gordon.

[2] Bruce Gordon, *Calvin* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009): 198–200.

[3] Nicholas Terpstra, *Religious Refugees in the Early Modern World* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

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the relationships between the natural body of the king and the kingly office, between individual humans and humanity, and later between the citizen and the democratic body politic.[4]

Terpstra argues that by the fifteenth century, the metaphor of the *Corpus Christianum* had been thoroughly internalized at the level of European civic life and that we cannot understand early modern patterns of expulsion and migration without it. The imaginary of the city or nation as *Corpus Christianum* performed several duties. It integrated the lives and activities of lay people with religious and political elites; demarcated the boundary between Christian subjects and their Jewish and Muslim others; and clarified the logic of who should be integrated and who should be expunged. If society was imagined as a body, then a discourse emerges over how to maintain its relative health. To be an exile was to know oneself as that which was deemed "refuse" from the perspective of the institutional center.[5]

By the end of the seventeenth century, following the devastation of the wars of religion, Europe had become a continent replete with exceptional people. In Reformed regions especially, nearly everyone was someone else's refugee. From this vantage, the theological idea of an "exceptional people," chosen by God to wander and establish a promised land, could both borrow from and recast the inherited metaphor of the body politic.[6] The sovereign was no longer identified with the office of the king and sacramental host, whose very substance offered a site of participation capable of adjudicating who was a healthy member and who should be expelled. If there was to be a locus of sovereign power organizing a body politic, that power now had to be identified *with* the exception itself: with a people who knew themselves *as* exceptions chosen to govern a body comprised *of* exceptions. These constraints gave birth to new ways of both imagining and managing collective identity: newly shared religious and cultural practices, ethnic identities, local histories. All of these ways of imagining a corporate entity could strategically resist but also reappropriate the function that had been served by a sacramentally constituted *Corpus Christianum*: to facilitate the determination of which kinds of individual bodies are governable and which are not.

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[4] Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985).

[5] Terpstra, 21. The argument spans chapter 1.

[6] Etienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein, *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities* (London: Verso, 1991). Wallerstein argues that the modern formation of "peoplehood" argues that state preceded nation. 81–85.

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Whether in its overtly sacramental form or its later identarian and purposive forms, this particular and pervasive logic of sovereign power imagines a power that decides whether bodies are identified with the collective body – whether they contribute to presumed criteria of health or not.[7] However, unlike the sovereignty of the *Corpus Christianum*, a sovereignty grounded in the existence of the exception is marked by a kind of puzzle. When sovereignty is imagined as an exceptional people deciding over themselves, this logic perpetuates and organizes – privileges and marginalizes – a multiplicity of exceptional bodies: races, ethnicities, cultures, personality types, genders, pathologies. Yet, in another sense, there is no longer a theoretical "outside." If the site of the collective body is identified with management techniques capable of governing a panoply of exceptions, then what was a sacramental *Corpus Christianum* becomes, simply, *Corpus*. If the refugee *qua* exception could once be expelled and sent outside the body, now the refugee *qua* exception will be reintegrated into the state in a way that preserves the complex identity of the exceptional nation: as slave, migrant, patient, prisoner. How is it possible to get outside the logic of sovereignty when sovereignty operates precisely by producing exceptions and integrating them into the logic of the exceptional nation?

One strategy involves beginning with those bodies and histories that most cut against the grain of the domain in which sovereignty operates.[8] J. Kameron Carter reads Giorgio Agamben's *homo sacer* as one of the few moments in the debate over political theology in which the social body of

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[7] See, for example, Etienne Balibar's discussion of fictive ethnicity as constitutive of national identity in Balibar and Wallerstein, 96f. Agamben's *homo sacer* project can also be read as an account of how modern sovereignty works not only by deciding the exception, but by creating and managing the exception. Magnus Fiskesjö and J. Kameron Carter have criticized Agamben's relative lack of attention to the embodied production of peoples *as* exceptions in the form of slaves, barbarians, and non-White races. See Magnus Fiskesjö, "Critical reflections on Agamben's *homo sacer*" in *Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 2/1 (2012): 161–180; J. Kamerom Carter, "The Inglorious" in *Political Theology* 14/1 (2013): 77–87.

[8] I take this to be a common concern of poststructuralists – particularly the work of Foucault, but also Derrida, Agamben, and Butler, whose work involves efforts to think of the body as a site of resistance or at least unmanageability. I'll return to that conversation shortly. Another approach to critiquing the fascist structure of a secularized incarnational theology might be to heighten divine transcendence and oppose it to every historical-political structure. This is more or less the approach taken by Löwith, but is also resonant with Walter Benjamin's notion of divine violence.

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the sovereign is approached from the perspective of the exclusions it produces.[9] Agamben pulls the notion of *homo sacer* from ancient Roman law as a figure expelled from the city, stripped of legal protections, and thus reduced to "bare life."[10] Agamben proceeds to argue that "production of bare life is the originary act of sovereignty."[11] The modern nation-state makes citizens by first producing the life of the *homo sacer* and then incorporating bare life into dual apparatuses of medical and economic management. In this way, the bodies of citizens are made to participate in the "glory" of sovereignty – or by doxological testaments to success that actually fuels the providential machine. To be a citizen of bureaucratic–economic sovereignty, and to share in its glory, is essentially to participate in the incarnation of the state; to be subject to – and subjectivated by – the bipolar apparatus of modern management that Foucault called "biopower."[12]

Yet, Carter argues that Agamben misses an opportunity in this account when he fails to theorize sovereignty from the perspective of the "inglorious" *homo sacer* – the body of those who remain unincorporated or marginally incorporated into the sovereign body:

> *Homo sacer*ization … now means something quite materially and somatically specific that is lost to view in Agamben's text, but that nevertheless haunts the text. To undergo non-Europeanization, which perhaps is the specific form of *homo sacer*ization in the modern/colonial world, is precisely to be denied governance. That is to say, it is to be denied the position of master within the order of sovereignty. It is to be marginalized or denied the place of the center around which all difference is to be organized and then governed … Agamben's suggestive

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[9] Importantly, Carter locates the development of this particular critique of sovereignty much earlier in black studies, beginning at least with W. E. B. DuBois, but notes its near-total absence among white theorists and critics of sovereignty.

[10] Across his work, and particularly the multivolume *homo sacer* project, Agamben distinguishes "bare life" from *zoe* and *bios*, or the form of natural/animal life and the form of political life, respectively.

[11] Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereignty and Bare Life* (Redwood City, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 98.

[12] Notably, Agamben charts the emergence of this particular logic of sovereignty much earlier than Foucault, tracing it to early Christian debates over Christology and the trinity. I discuss this in much greater detail in Chapter 4, which is devoted to Agamben's account of glory and glorification as a lens for reading Calvin's doctrine of providence. There, I treat Agamben's relation to Foucault's biopower as well as the way he reads governmentality and glory in relation to theological debates over providence and incarnation, as well as practices of liturgical acclamation. For an important discussion of biopower, see Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality 1: The Will to Knowledge* (New York: Vintage, 1978), 142f.

> claims about glory call for more careful reflections on the glorious and especially the inglorious aspects of corporealization.[13]

In another place, Carter links the corporeality of the inglorious to the metaphor of the abject: a substance which is neither separate from nor central to the body, such as tears, saliva, feces, and urine.[14] "In the field of the political, the abject is neither friend (subject) nor enemy (object)," but "exists in the zone between life (full citizenship) and death (the enemy as one who must be killed)." As in the early modern logic of expulsion, the abject is tied to that which must be marginalized or pushed away to render the body pure. If the early modern *Corpus Christianum* was itself constituted through the institutionalized management of narratives and practices materialized at the level of the body, then the abject of that body would be the refugees who were not executed, but whose position with respect to the health of the collective body was expunged as a peripheral impurity. If such figures might reveal something of the underside of sovereign glory – or the extent to which that sovereignty is itself constructed and ritually perpetuated *through* the expulsion of the inglorious – then is it possible to harness a critique of modern sovereignty by beginning with the perspective of an early modern refugee?

Calvin lived life as a refugee during a time of tectonic shift. He lived as an exception at a time when the imaginary of the European state as *Corpus Christianum* was most naturalized, yet just before the exception would be reintegrated into the central logic of the nation-state. From the age of twenty-five, Calvin's life and activity took place in liminal cities like Geneva and Strasbourg: at the margins of both the Roman Catholic and French monarchical domains.[15] A number of Calvin scholars have begun to explore what occupying this fraught position might have meant for Calvin as a writer. After all, he did bring the relative privileges of an elite French education. Although Calvin was not high born, he was the

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[13] Carter, "Inglorious," 81–82; 85.

[14] For more on abjection, see Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982); and in the context of theorizing the hybridity and marginalization of ethnic identity in the United States, see Rey Chow, *The Protestant Ethnic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003).

[15] During the decades in which the papacy was located in Avignon, every single Pope was French, and for many, French identity came to be inscribed with Catholic piety. Christopher Elwood discusses the full extent to which the French monarchy came to represent a privileged locus of the *corpus Christi*, and enjoyed legitimacy according to the same sacramental logic through which the church claimed to hold the monopoly on the sacred. See Elwood, *The Body Broken* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

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beneficiary of patronage that led him through some of the most important French universities: Montaigu, Lyon, Bourges, Paris. These privileges did not prevent his exile, but they granted him both a network of other elite exiles and the skills to leave a record of what it meant to write in exile – from the vantage of one rejected by the governing bodies that had formed him. There are some obvious ways that this vantage impacts his writing. For example, it is replete with metaphors of pilgrimage and journey and figures of labyrinths and abysses. In letters and commentaries, there are passages where he depicts himself as the weeping prophet Jeremiah or as the wandering Apostle Paul. He also set to work retheorizing power around the community of the excluded – renaming them as elected.

This underscores the obvious irony attached to the mere suggestion that Calvin be read as an abject figure. Calvin is famous for forwarding a strong version of divine sovereignty. While Herman Selderhuis has suggested that readers of Calvin "who do not connect 'predestination' and 'providence' with the concept of being 'on the road' will never understand any of these ideas," these are also the very theological categories that are most tied to the logic of modern state sovereignty that understands itself as both exceptional and central.[16] Yet it is also true that for Calvin, theorizing these ideas could not have been easy. After all, he had to harness the relative audacity to read scripture and then reframe himself as chosen *for* exile, as a pilgrim whose dangerous journey was not just guided, but willed by hidden providence, a providence that exceeded the body of the *Corpus Christianum*. This places the theorist before a crossroads.[17] The will of one who is excluded might either seek revenge by harnessing a logic of sovereignty around the justification and superiority of the excluded – a move that Nietzsche would call *ressentiment*. Or the will of the excluded might devise the understandably more difficult task of challenging that logic itself – a move that, for Nietzsche, involved the gesture of affirmation.

The image of Calvinism most prevalent in critical and sociological literature opted for the former path. Max Weber, Michael Walzer, Charles Taylor, and Philip Gorski are only some of the most widely read theorists who narrate an affinity between Calvinist theologies and practices emergent in the seventeenth century to key postures of modern sovereignty.[18] Many are familiar, by now, with the claim that later Calvinists linked signs of election to reason-driven worldly activity rather than ritual practice, thus promoting a vision of market sovereignty to offset and elude that of the *Corpus Christianum*. Or that Calvinists reconstructed their own sovereign body through practices of discipline that could be easily transferred to the logic of the modern state as well as the rationalizing subject. And then, of course, there is the logic of exceptionalism itself, evident in early America from the city on the hill to Manifest Destiny, but visible also in Calvinist-influenced polities including Prussia, the Netherlands, England, South Africa, and even France. Each of these polities integrated or persecuted Calvinism to varying degrees, but in so doing adopted an understanding of their own nation as exceptional that came to underwrite internal discipline alongside external efforts at hegemony.

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[16] Herman Selderhuis, *John Calvin: A Pilgrim's Life* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 38.

[17] Though my emphases and interlocutors are different, this way of reading Calvin's political thinking – with and against the texture of his writing – is partly informed by Roland Boer's *Political Grace: The Revolutionary Theology of John Calvin* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009).

Yet, the case of Geneva – one of the early cities to welcome refugees, for obvious reasons – presents a little more ambiguity. Geneva seems to have reconstituted itself as a body by drawing on the theological imaginary of *creatio ex nihilo*, rather than the body of Christ strictly speaking. For a people living "on the road," like Calvin himself, scripture could facilitate the direct address of divine authority without recourse to royal, noble, or ecclesial mediation. It could act as a map or guide capable of tying present to past and individual people to each other. But scripture alone cannot materialize a body. The Divine Word does not just exist in isolation; it *creates*.[19] Scripture likewise needs a body to address and shape in order to do its work. As early as 1540, Genevans adopted the motto *Post Tenebras Lux* ("After darkness, light"), which alludes both to the primordial act of creation as narrated in Genesis – "Let there be light" – and to Calvin's characteristic claim that divine providence should be understood as ongoing acts of creation. "To make God a momentary Creator, who once for all finished his work, would be cold and barren, and we must differ from profane men especially in that we see the presence of divine power shining as much in the continuing state of the universe as in its inception."[20] Providence is the perpetual act of bringing light out of darkness.

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[18] While I do not engage Charles Taylor or Michael Walzer explicitly, this book's argument is in implicit conversation with their urge to link Calvinist reform movements unequivocally with discipline and disenchantment. In *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), Taylor argues that the Calvinist wing of the sixteenth century reform movements served as a particular "engine of disenchantment" (77). Concerning Calvin in particular, Taylor forwards a reading of divine sovereignty as a zero-sum game in which immanent life is evacuated of transcendence: "Calvin's radical simplification could perhaps be put this way: We are depraved; and thus in the work of our salvation God does everything. Man 'cannot, without sacrilege, claim for himself even a crumb of righteousness, for just so much is plucked and taken away from the glory of God's righteousness'" (78). This quotation is from *Inst.* 3.13.3, and for Calvin it sets the stage for a particular kind of relationship between creation and God in which God's righteousness is directly related to all of creation, rather than segmented into parts. This, I will argue, is crucial to ascertaining Calvin's critique of political theology, or of any urge to locate the divine in a single assemblage of person, race, culture, nation, or state. I share certain of Taylor's sympathies in his critique of "modernity." I will argue, however, that close readings of theologies such as Calvin's, with attention to their pedagogical quality, furnishes tools for critiquing and recasting modernity's self-understanding rather than merely diagnosing it. For a range of the class disenchantment arguments similar to Taylor's, see Michael Walzer, *The Revolution of the Saints: A Study in the Origins of Radical Politics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965); Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Baehr and Wells (New York: Penguin, 2002). Philip Gorski's *The Disciplinary Revolution: Calvinism and the Rise of the State in Early Modern Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003) picks up on these themes, but focuses on sociological evidence to do so. I will engage Gorski's argument at several later points.

Pamela A. Mason's translation of a 1728 sermon demonstrates the extent to which providential language remained inscribed in Genevan identity two centuries later:

> *A People made anew, a People created*: Our allies & we, we are this People which God has formed, this People which he has pulled, so to speak, out of nothingness, in an amazing manner. *Who would have said*, a few years before the Reformation, that such a great revolution would occur all over Europe, *who would have said* that a small number of Persons, pious, striving toward truth & enlightened, [but] powerless, without authority, without credit, would produce such a great change, one would have regarded that prospect as a vision pure and simple, as the least probable thing in the world. Nevertheless, that is what happened. God said once more, Let There Be Light, & there was Light. He revived the dry bones of Ezekiel's vision. He created an entirely new World; a World, consequently, which is obliged to celebrate him, as the Author of its subsistence.[21]

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[19] The account I'm developing of the relationship between Word and creation comports with the dynamic Randall Zachman advances in *Image and Word in the Theology of John Calvin* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009), opposing the idea that Calvin promotes Word over and against material referents. Zachman writes, for example, that "We must always hear the Word in order to be able to see the living images of God; but concomitantly we must always open our eyes to see the living images of God even as we hear the Word of God" (2).

[20] *Institutes* 1.16.1.

[21] This is Mason's translation of a selection from Jean-Alphonse Turrettin, *Sermons ur lejubile de la Reformation établie il y a deux-cens Ans, dans les Eglises de la trés illustre & trés puissante République de Berne. 7. Janvier 1728*. Emphases in original. Mason, 29.

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The sermon suggests the formation of a new mode of existence, but not out of existing forms – not out of a move to make the exception into the rule. The claim, here, is not that the *Corpus Christianum* has been reconstituted around the figure of "Our allies & we." It is that creation offers an entirely new world to house a "people." This is the crossroads that depart from the suggestion of a new, shared fictive identity. Will the new world be built around the fictive, imagined body of the exception? Or will the new world offer a setting in which such fictions work to refuse the logic of corporate embodiment? There are at least the seeds here for thinking about different logics of sovereignty and gaining a richer perspective on a present forged out of competing and tangled logics of how the world is organized, what it means, and who decides.

This book pauses at the crossroads and sits with the text that Calvin produced, rewrote, rewrote again, and deemed his most important: the 1559 *Institutio Christainae Religionis*. It was produced before the "Calvinism" of scholars' construction; before the worst of the wars of religion; before the emerging European nation-state; at the very inception of scientific advancements, colonizations, and enslavements that were mostly unbeknownst to Calvin. For all of its style and polemic, its tethers to ancient teachers and present foes, the *Institutio* remains a text produced by a refugee who was exiled for calling the Mass – the ritual of the *Corpus Christi Mysticum* undergirding central imagery of late medieval sovereignty – idolatrous. When Calvin fled his homeland in 1534, it was after reformers had plastered Paris with placards declaring the Mass an abomination.[22] It's significant that this attack was received as not merely heretical, but seditious – as an assault not just on the church, but on the state.[23] Because what was at stake was not an argument over sacramental theology in the abstract, but the more fundamental living question of where and how the power of God materializes on earth. The Placards questioned the social metaphysics that tied the *Corpus Christi Mysticum* to the *Corpus Christianum*. And by refusing the Mass, Calvin counted himself with those deemed inglorious from the vantage of the French *Corpus Christianum*. If Calvin was so deeply opposed to the logic of idolatry that he was willing to risk expulsion, then it might not be unreasonable to expect that his writing opposes the project of *political* theology more generally.

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[22] Gordon, *Calvin*, 40f.

[23] For an account of this logic in its historical context, see Elwood 48–52.

Political theology remains bound up with the modern operation of sovereignty to the extent that sovereignty continues to trade in Christian theological metaphors. We continue to ask how political sovereignty forms a "people" (creation); how it preserves and governs itself in time and place (providence); how it saves the people from threat, often by claiming the legitimate use of sacrificial violence (atonement); and how it might ultimately progress toward some fuller realization of its dominion (judgment and glory). These are at once general questions of the location and operation of power and discourses that resonate with two distinct theological doctrines: that of creation and providence; and that of the incarnation. From the incarnation, we get the claim that divine power reveals and redeems by means of embodiment – through bodies that look and act in a particular way, or bodies who represent sovereignty by organizing themselves properly within time and space. From creation and providence, we get a larger discourse on how divine power makes and governs ordinary time: an imaginary of how God draws, marks, tends, differentiates, and manages. Not surprisingly, both doctrines – providence and incarnation – play key roles in Calvin's *Institutio*.

These doctrines also play key roles in contemporary conversations that continue to circulate around Carl Schmitt's 1922 *Political Theology*. For Schmitt, "political theology" is a critique of the suggestion that liberalism, or a state governed by the rule of law, offers a legitimate alternative to authoritarianism. There are always exceptional cases that reveal the limits of the law, which means that liberal democracy remains structurally dependent on a law *giver* – a person or mechanism that "decides on the exception."[24] Here, Schmitt discerns a permanent theological structure to the logic of sovereignty:

> All significant concepts of modern theory of the state are secularized theological concepts not only because of their historical development—in which they were transferred from theology to the theory of state, whereby, for example, the Omnipotent God became the omnipotent lawgivers—but also because of their systematic structure, the recognition of which is necessary for a sociological consideration of these concepts.[25]

For Schmitt, the permanence of political theology does not mean that all political arrangements are tacit theocracies beckoning to and bowing

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[24] Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985), 5.
[25] Schmitt, 36.