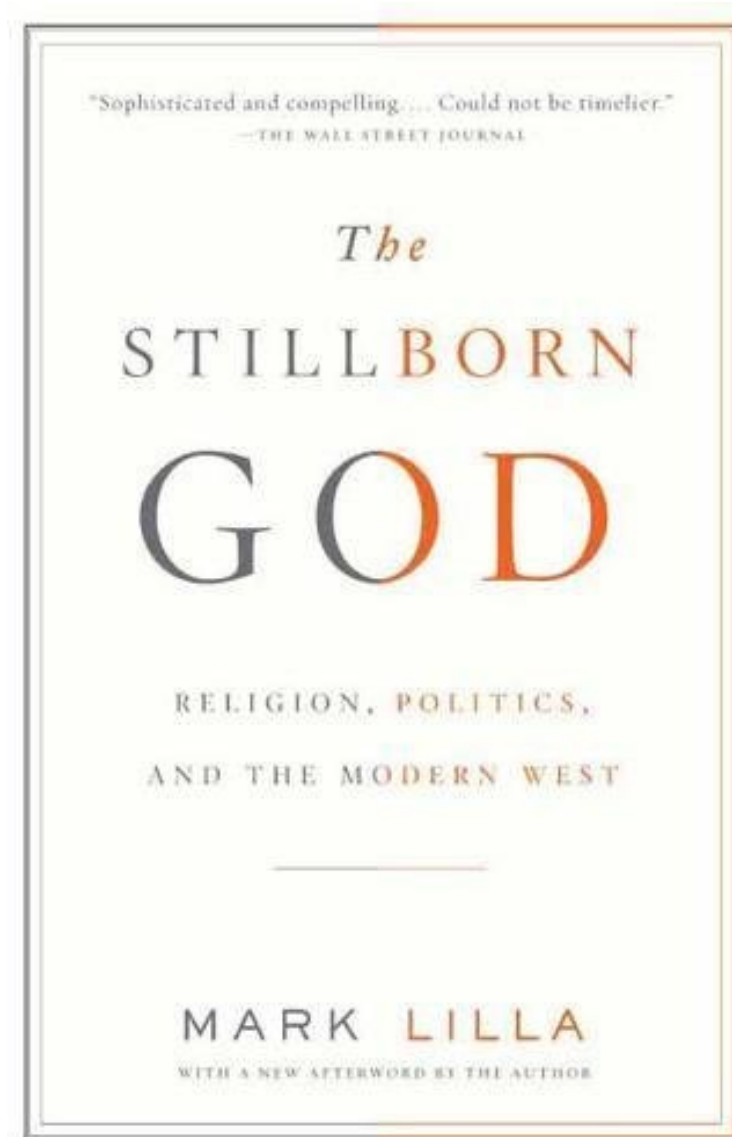


(Get free) The Stillborn God: Religion, Politics, and the Modern West

## The Stillborn God: Religion, Politics, and the Modern West

Mark Lilla

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#305241 in Books Mark Lilla 2008-09-23 2008-09-23 Original language: English PDF # 1 8.00 x .80 x 5.30l, .58 #File Name: 1400079136341 pages The Stillborn God Religion Politics and the Modern West | File size: 36.Mb

**Mark Lilla : The Stillborn God: Religion, Politics, and the Modern West** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Stillborn God: Religion, Politics, and the Modern West:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Democracy has an inherent, fatal, centripetal flaw. By owen Mark Lilla shows how knotty religious problems thought to lie deep in philosophy continue to affect and corrupt our modern secular project of politics in a democracy. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. a good book for someone

who is seeking more religious freedom

By N. J. Price a good book for someone who is seeking more religious freedom

13 of 15 people found the following review helpful. "The liberal deity turned out to be- a stillborn God, unable to inspire genuine conviction among those seeking ultimate truth"

By Clay Garner Epigraph - "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God." EXODUS 20: 45

This ancient command changed the western world. This abstract, never-to-be-seen, reality claims ultimate devotion. To replace this with devotion to human, always-visible, authority - changes everything. However, this substitute God was stillborn.

Who is Lilla's 'Stillborn God'? - "Liberal theology began in rational hope, not fevered dreams. Its moderate wish was that the moral truths of biblical faith be intellectually reconciled with, and not just accommodated to, the realities of modern political life. Yet the liberal deity turned out to be - a stillborn God, - unable to inspire genuine conviction among those seeking ultimate truth." (299)

"For what did the new Protestantism offer to the soul of one seeking union with his creator? It prescribed a catechism of moral commonplaces and historical optimism about bourgeois life, spiced with deep pessimism about the possibility of altering that life. It preached good citizenship and national pride, economic good sense, and the proper length of a gentleman's beard." "But it was too ashamed to proclaim the message found on every page of the Gospels, that you must change your life. And what did the new Judaism bring to a young Jew seeking a connection with the traditional faith of his people? It taught him to appreciate the ethical monotheism at the core of all biblical faith and passed over in genteel silence the fearsome God of the prophets, his covenant with the Jewish people, and the demanding laws he gave them. Above all, it taught a young Jew that his first obligation was to seek common ground with Christianity and find acceptance in the one nation Germany whose highest cultural ideas matched those of Judaism, properly understood. To the decisive questions Why be a Christian? Why be a Jew? liberal theology offered no answer at all." (299)

Lilla's idea is that the world is now returning to the questions about religion and politics that occurred in the sixteenth century. Hobbs, Locke and Hume led the transition from political theology to political science. Changed Christendom. He says that this separation reconnected in post WW1 Germany. However, this was changed by reactions to Rousseau, Hegel, Kant, Barth, etc.

PART II. The Crisis

2. The Great Separation

PART III

3. The Ethical God

4. The Bourgeois God

PART III

5. The Well-Ordered House

6. The Redeeming God

7. The Stillborn God

Afterword

The idea of "political theology" is central. Politics was a branch of theology for thousands of years. The "experiment" of separation is only a few hundred years. It has now reappeared. "And since we no longer understand these things, it is no longer certain that we understand ourselves." (9)

This book was inspired by the return of messianic impulses like nazism and communism. The leaders of such return were educated men fighting the darkness of 1914 with a promise of biblical redemption. One example is Hegel. Hugely influential, he wrote this in 1790: "We need a new mythology. However this mythology must be in the service of ideas., it must become a mythology of reason. . . Thus the enlightened and the unenlightened must finally shake hands. Mythology must become philosophical to make people reasonable, and philosophy must turn mythological to make the philosophers sensuous. Then there will be eternal unity among us. . . . A higher spirit, sent from heaven, must found this new religion among us; it will be the last, the greatest achievement of mankind." (171)

This religion became nationalism, nazism, fascism, etc. Lilla adds that Hegel is transferring the Christian goal of reconciliation from religion to the modern political state. (172)

Excellent explanation of the source of "Christian Cosmology." Some bible, some Plato, some Muslim, some Ptolemy and some Aristotle. Why? The bible does not need or use cosmology for Jews or Christians. "Yet a number Jewish and Christian theologians in late antiquity were seduced by the temptation to reconcile scriptural teachings with the cosmological speculations of the Greek philosophers, for whom cosmology and ethics were linked." (59)

Thomas Aquinas connected cosmology to politics, this called "natural theology". The new science disproved Aquinas and "natural theology", not bible truth. However, by this point the church had committed to cosmological truth as the source of political authority, not bible doctrine. The study of nature - atoms, plants, planets, chemicals, stars, galaxies, animals or humans to find ethics is still trusted. Cannot be done. "Physics does not imply ethics." (61)

Even Pascal, perhaps the greatest mathematician of the age, considered the God of rational theology to be an idol, a fetish of calculators. . . For Pascal the scientific revolution was to be welcomed as a liberation of God from the chains of natural theology. . . Pascal was important because he did not deny the discoveries of the modern sciences; he looked them in the face and even contributed to them. And if anything, he was more honest about their implications than his rationalist adversaries. "The eternal silence of those infinite spaces terrifies me." (63)

All the more reason to believe in Christianity, he wrote in the pensees. Scripture reveals God in ways science can never touch. Striking observation that the modern secular thought has nothing to replace the medieval world view. The modern cannot take a "worldview" from science. To go from Copernicus to Newton to Einstein makes the point. Science offers ever-changing ideas not certain truth. This may be the fundamental problem of modernity. There is no mental picture for anyone to paint to feel connected to existence. There is no link between God and man. (65)

Lilla presents Rousseau's writing as reintroducing religion into politics. The vast difference from past was that Rousseau found God in the human heart, not in heaven. This made humans the center of political faith on earth, not God in heaven. Kant and then Hegel responded to this idea, leading to the worship of the national state. Protestant theology adopted most of this view. Religion changed from pleasing God to pleasing humanity. The

German mind wanted to "reinterpret biblical faith as an expression of human religious consciousness and social interaction rather than a revelation from God. . . Even today, one can see its attractiveness. The new liberal theology wedded romantic soulfulness with the modern conviction that man attains happiness by freely developing his capacities, not by submitting them to God's authority. . . But in the end this liberal theology did what all political theologies do: it sanctified the present, putting god's seal of approval on the modern European state." (300)The house that stood came crashing down in August 1914. The liberal theologians in Germany had to explain the war. Herman Cohen, noted Jewish scholar, composed "the most learned, dispassionate, and therefore pathetic defense of the German war effort." In a letter to American Jewry "he defended German militarism, not as a necessary response to external threats but as part of the 'ethical life of the people' and an expression of a Kantian conception of duty. He then claimed that Jews everywhere had a stake in the success of Germany, which since the nineteenth century had become their spiritual home." (246)Sad. Cohen wrote: "Western Jews as a collectivity have an intellectual and spiritual connection with Germany. . . . Next to his fatherland, every western Jew must recognize, revere, and love Germany as the motherland of his modern religiosity." (247) Cohen died in 1918. His wife in Theresienstadt in 1942. The theologians "of both faiths taught a common core of "values": moral universalism, toleration, political progressivism, and patriotism. But values are not divine commands; nor, in the end, do they provide divine hope and solace." (248)If God is not needed, politicians will offer messianic redemption. Lilla says the Anglo-American tradition lacks the words to understand religion and politics there or anywhere else. "It is instructive to remember that the greatest work on the role of religion in American political life was written by a Frenchman who was a devoted student of Rousseau: Alexis de Tocqueville. Since then we have been groping in the dark." (304)Concluding page -"The heritage is difficult as well because it demands self-awareness. There is no effacing the intellectual distinction between political theology, which appeals at some point to divine revelation, and a political philosophy that tries to understand and attain the political good without such appeals. And there are, psychologically speaking, real dangers in trying to forge a third way between them." "One danger is the theological sanctification of a single form of political life, which is a common story in human history. Another is spiritual despair in the face of political failure, which is central to the story recounted here. The stillborn God of the liberal theologians could never satisfy the messianic longings embedded in biblical faith, so it was inevitable that this idol would be abandoned in favor of a strong redeeming God when the crisis came." "The pathos of the liberal theologians was that they could neither have responded spiritually to the passions they unleashed, nor understood how to control them politically, as Hobbes and his philosophical followers had. The river separating political philosophy and political theology is narrow and deep; those who try to ride the waters will be swept away by spiritual forces beyond their control." "Those of us who have accepted the heritage of the Great Separation must do so soberly. Time and again we must remind ourselves that we are living an experiment, that we are the exceptions. We have little reason to expect other civilizations to follow our unusual path, which was opened up by a unique theological-political crisis within Christendom. This does not mean that other civilizations necessarily lack the resources for creating a workable political order; it does mean that they will have to find the theological resources within their traditions to make that happen." "Our challenge is different. We have made a choice that is at once simpler and harder: we have chosen to limit our politics to protecting individuals from the worst harms they can inflict on one another, to securing fundamental liberties and providing for their basic welfare, while leaving their spiritual destinies in their own hands. We have wagered that it is wiser to beware the forces unleashed by the Bible's messianic promise than to try exploiting them for the public good." "The final sentence warns: "We have chosen to keep unilluminated by the light of revelation. If our experiment is to work, we must rely on our own lucidity." (309) Of course the clear problem with that, is the human need for understanding, purpose and justification, not just "experiment". Lilla's whole book reveals his grasp of this conundrum. This book is accessible to the general reader. It is trenchant without being rude. Lilla speaks with conviction and presents his reasons clearly. It is a history of ideas not events. I found connections between writers that revealed why they wrote and reasoned at that time. Provided insights that others have overlooked. Eleven pages of brief footnotes. Index. Learned a lot.

A brilliant account of religion's role in the political thinking of the West, from the Enlightenment to the close of World War II. The wish to bring political life under God's authority is nothing new, and it's clear that today religious passions are again driving world politics, confounding expectations of a secular future. In this major book, Mark Lilla reveals the sources of this age-old quest-and its surprising role in shaping Western thought. Making us look deeper into our beliefs about religion, politics, and the fate of civilizations, Lilla reminds us of the modern West's unique trajectory and how to remain on it. Illuminating and challenging, *The Stillborn God* is a watershed in the history of ideas.

From Publishers Weekly Starred . This searching history of western thinking about the relationship between religion and politics was inspired not by 9/11, but by Nazi Germany, where, says University of Chicago professor Lilla (*The Reckless Mind*), politics and religion were horrifyingly intertwined. To explain the emergence of Nazism's political theology, Lilla reaches back to the early modern era, when thinkers like Locke and Hume began to suggest that religion and politics should be separate enterprises. Some theorists, convinced that Christianity bred violence, argued

that government must be totally detached from religion. Others, who believed that rightly practiced religion could contribute to modern life, promoted a liberal theology, which sought to articulate Christianity and Judaism in the idiom of reason. (Lilla's reading of liberal Jewish thinker Hermann Cohen is especially arresting.) Liberal theologians, Lilla says, credulously assumed human society was progressive and never dreamed that fanaticism could capture the imaginations of modern people assumptions that were proven wrong by Hitler. If Lilla castigates liberal theology for its naiveté, he also praises America and Western Europe for simultaneously separating religion from politics, creating space for religion, and staving off sectarian violence and theocracy. Lilla's work, which will influence discussions of politics and theology for the next generation, makes clear how remarkable an accomplishment that is. (Sept. 14) Copyright Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. From Booklist\*Starred \* Political science begins in the wars-of-religion-devastated seventeenth century with Hobbes' treatise Leviathan, with its theory of the state based on philosophical, not theological, reasoning, sanctioned by humans, not God. After outlining the political implications of the three different conceptions of divine-human relations, Lilla begins with Hobbes, too, and the "Great Separation" between God and earthly authority that his thinking inspired. Humans being by nature disputatious, barely had desacralized politics got off the ground than the Romantic philosophers Rousseau and Kant argued to bring God back to ground statecraft ethically. A later Romantic, Hegel, subsequently made the ethical political God downright salvific, at least for the bourgeois Protestant state (with eventually dire consequences, thanks to such teleological ideologies as Nazism and Communism). Cultural critic Richard Weaver's famous dictum ideas have consequences seems to be the leitmotif as Lilla traces the imperiled life of the nontheological polity that Hobbes first formulated, that was realized tacitly in England during the eighteenth century and explicitly by the U.S. Constitution, and that has been adopted by most of the West despite successive attempts to weaken or destroy it for God's sake. Riveting, engrossing reading, even though it is history-of-philosophy. Olson, Ray "Sophisticated and compelling. . . . Could not be timelier."The Wall Street JournalIntroduces the reader to one of the most important chapters in modern history.The New York Sun A lucid book of great learning and shrewd insights into political and religious psychology.The Boston Globe"Provocative. . . . Adds nuance and complexity to the intellectual account we tell about the West's thinking on religion and politics."The New York Times Book