

Preface

This study will inquire into the paths by which and the reasons why power in the West has assumed the form of an *oikonomia*, that is, a government of men. It locates itself in the wake of Michel Foucault's investigations into the genealogy of governmentality, but, at the same time, it also aims to understand the internal reasons why they failed to be completed. Indeed, in this study, the shadow that the theoretical interrogation of the present casts onto the past reaches well beyond the chronological limits that Foucault assigned to his genealogy, to the early centuries of Christian theology, which witness the first, tentative elaboration of the Trinitarian doctrine in the form of an *oikonomia*. Locating government in its theological locus in the Trinitarian *oikonomia* does not mean to explain it by means of a hierarchy of causes, as if a more primordial genetic rank would necessarily pertain to theology. We show instead how the apparatus of the Trinitarian *oikonomia* may constitute a privileged laboratory for the observation of the working and articulation—both internal and external—of the governmental machine. For within this apparatus the elements—or the polarities—that articulate the machine appear, as it were, in their paradigmatic form.

In this way, the inquiry into the genealogy—or, as one used to say, the *nature*—of power in the West, which I began more than ten years ago with *Homo Sacer*, reaches a point that is in every sense decisive. The double structure of the governmental machine, which in *State of Exception* (2003) appeared in the correlation between *auctoritas* and *potestas*, here takes the form of the articulation between Kingdom and Government and, ultimately, interrogates the very relation—which initially was not considered—

between *oikonomia* and Glory, between power as government and effective management, and power as ceremonial and liturgical regality, two aspects that have been curiously neglected by both political philosophers and political scientists. Even historical studies of the insignia and liturgies of power, from Peterson to Kantorowicz, Alföldi to Schramm, have failed to question this relation, precisely leaving aside a number of rather obvious questions: Why does power need glory? If it is essentially force and capacity for action and government, why does it assume the rigid, cumbersome, and “glorious” form of ceremonies, acclamations, and protocols? What is the relation between economy and Glory?

Bringing these questions back to their theological dimension—questions that seem to find only trivial answers on the level of political and sociological investigations—has allowed us to catch a glimpse of something like the ultimate structure of the governmental machine of the West in the relation between *oikonomia* and Glory. The analysis of doxologies and liturgical acclamations, of ministries and angelical hymns turned out to be more useful for the understanding of the structures and functioning of power than many pseudo-philosophical analyses of popular sovereignty, the rule of law, or the communicative procedures that regulate the formation of public opinion and political will. Identifying in Glory the central mystery of power and interrogating the indissoluble nexus that links it to government and *oikonomia* will seem an obsolete operation to some. And yet, one of the results of our investigation has been precisely to note that the function of acclamations and Glory, in the modern form of public opinion and consensus, is still at the center of the political apparatuses of contemporary democracies. If the media are so important in modern democracies, this is the case not only because they enable the control and government of public opinion, but also and above all because they manage and dispense Glory, the acclamative and doxological aspect of power that seemed to have disappeared in modernity. The society of the spectacle—if we can call contemporary democracies by this name—is, from this point of view, a society in which power in its “glorious” aspect becomes indiscernible from *oikonomia* and government. To have completely integrated Glory with *oikonomia* in the acclamative form of consensus is, more specifically, the specific task carried out by contemporary democracies and their *government by consent*,¹ whose original paradigm is not written in Thucydides’ Greek, but in the dry Latin of medieval and baroque treaties on the divine government of the world.

However, this means that the center of the governmental machine is empty. The empty throne, the *hetoimasia tou thronou* that appears on the arches and apses of the Paleochristian and Byzantine basilicas is perhaps, in this sense, the most significant symbol of power. Here the theme of the investigation touches its limit and, at the same time, its temporary conclusion. If, as has been suggested, there is in every book something like a hidden center, and the book was written to reach—or elude—it, then this center is to be found in the final paragraphs of Chapter 8. In opposition to the ingenuous emphasis on productivity and labor that has long prevented modernity from accessing politics as man's most proper dimension, politics is here returned to its central inoperativity, that is, to that operation that amounts to rendering inoperative all human and divine works. The empty throne, the symbol of Glory, is what we need to profane in order to make room, beyond it, for something that, for now, we can only evoke with the name *zoē aiōnios*, eternal life. It is only when the fourth part of the investigation, dedicated to the form-of-life and use, is completed, that the decisive meaning of inoperativity as a properly human and political praxis will be able to appear in its own light.