**Sovereign Order?**

**Carl Schmitt’s Definition of Sovereignty in Light of Concrete Order-thinking**

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Carl Schmitt’s 1922 book, *Political Theology*, starts off with the famous definition of the sovereign as the one who decides on the exception. A number of starkly decisionist statements can be found in the book and the notion of sovereignty it offers is usually read in light of those. In this paper it will be argued that Schmitt’s notion is informed by concrete order-thinking rather than decisionism – a mode of legal and political thought that Schmitt fleshed out in his 1934 book *On the Three Types of Juristic Thought*.

A reading of *Political Theology* through the lens of concrete order-thinking (a) clarifies, and explains the relationship between, the elements that make up Schmitt’s notion of sovereignty, namely, law, exception, decision, order, norm, normalcy, and the state, (b) makes clear that the Schmittian sovereign decision is not a decision *ex nihilo* but one that is guided and legitimated by the existing organization of life in a political community with its prevailing hierarchies and notions of normalcy, and (c) brings into view the presuppositions and limitations of Schmitt’s notion. The paper closes with a discussion on whether, and how, *Political Theology’s* definition of sovereignty can be useful for understanding state violence and the management of extraordinary crises in contemporary liberal-democratic societies.