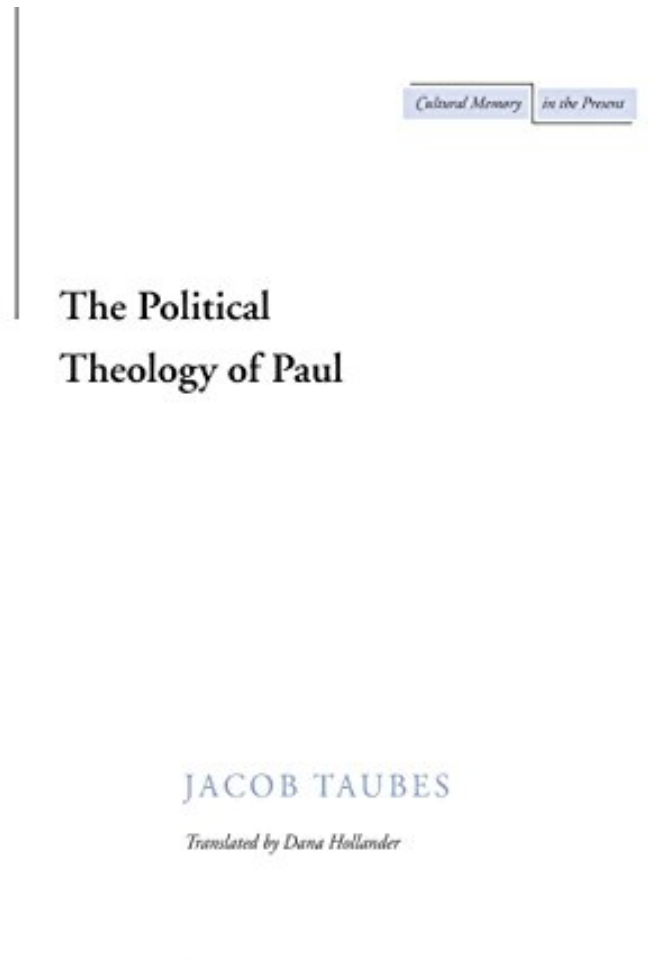


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The Political Theology of Paul (Cultural Memory in the Present)

Jacob Taubes

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Jacob Taubes : The Political Theology of Paul (Cultural Memory in the Present) before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Political Theology of Paul (Cultural Memory in the Present):

8 of 8 people found the following review helpful. Paul's ExperienceBy Timothy LavenzTaubes was in an advanced stage of cancer when he gave these lectures in February 1987, just weeks before he died. He could not even stand up to deliver them, and was in the ICU for one of the days of that week. But in spite of these circumstances, or indeed

because of them, these talks are incredibly lucid and intellectually rigorous beyond compare. They truly do come across as they are described: as a spiritual testament, charged with an existential urgency, centered around questions that surely animated Taubes throughout his entire life. This book is a testament to that life and these questions. It is scholarly but free-flowing, challenging but often humorous, grounded in facts and yet deeply meditative and personal. No one will doubt the importance of Paul's contribution to the world and to human thought. Love him or hate him, he is there, and the talk about him and his letters does not appear to be dying down anytime soon-- if anything, it's only picking up. But Taubes is not interested in partisan arguments, choosing sides here or there, or in recruiting Paul for his own aims. Taubes has no "agenda" here; he simply wants to get the story straight. To do so, he demands that every theme be thread "through the eye of a philological needle." In other words, he sticks with the text(s), resisting interpretations of Paul that project their own ideas on him or simply follow the standard lines of the Christian church(es). "It's easy to read the story of Paul one-sidedly and to overlook latent elements within him", he reminds us. "No one understood him, one might say, but then no one completely misunderstood him either." Taubes sticks to these latent elements and tries to understand the misunderstandings. Above all, he is concerned with Paul's experience-- whatever it is that animated his unprecedented spiritual innovations and prompted his politically explosive letters and his new vision of Israel. This means studying in depth how that experience got translated, first into Paul's own Letters, and from there into its countless interpretations (or misunderstandings), from Marcion to Schmitt. But the implicit hypothesis seems to be that Paul's political theology can only be understood beginning from this experience. It is that experience that I think Taubes tried to live (he describes himself as a Paulinist) and to which these talks give body. The first section, "Paul and Moses", paints a picture of Paul in his historical context as someone concerned above all with the establishment and legitimization of a new people of God, against the Roman and rabbinical powers that were out to separate him from the love of God. We're reminded here that the word "Christian" never once appears in Paul, and that he is really concerned with a new understanding of Israel as "all Israel". In other words, Paul is trying to outbid Moses himself, animated by the same concerns of guilt and atonement. But Paul, against a kinship of the flesh, interprets a kinship of the promise. This kinship is not based in religious, institutional, or worldly things (no Jew, no Greek-- and no Christian!). Nothing in nature, flesh, or "works". Indeed, it is not based in anything immanent, but solely in SPIRIT and LOVE. Taubes points out what is latent in Romans 9:1-3, when Paul tells us that he would have himself accursed from the Messiah, from his people, the covenant, the fathers, etc., all for the sake of establishing this community in love (i.e., "all Israel") and to show the true meaning of the "promise" (which amounts to a promise of the transcendence of love and the promise of a new kind of human community). After countless excursus, analyses, and touching anecdotes from his long life, Taubes goes so far as to show how Paul is polemical against Jesus himself, namely in Romans 13:9. In his view, what Paul says there constitutes an "absolutely revolutionary act": he no longer professes the dual commandment of Jesus [love the Lord and love your neighbor, Luke 10:27], but a single one: "love thy neighbor as thyself". Of course, this is just a taste of all that Taubes shares in this first section (which includes some beautiful passages discussing the experience of the Day of Atonement la Rosenzweig) but ultimately what drives Paul's "political theology" appears to be this: "all members are equal... in pneuma and in agape with one another. Sociologically this means: a new kind of union, a new intimacy is created" (p 52). In the second section, "Paul and Modernity", Taubes links Paul with a whole wealth of thinkers and movements old and new: Marcion, Harnack, Barth, Spinoza, Kierkegaard, Schmitt, Benjamin, Nietzsche, and Freud among others. The last three I've listed appear to be the most important to Taubes in relation to Paul. Romans 8, he tells us, has its strictest parallel in Walter Benjamin's "Theologico-Political Fragment." There, Benjamin writes, "for nature is Messianic by reason of its totally and eternal passing away," echoing the message in 1 Cor 7:31. He also presents a "nihilistic method" of world politics directly in line with Romans 13. As for Nietzsche, Taubes weaves a web of associations and aversions between him and Paul that truly fascinate, from the critique of the concept of law, to the transvaluation of values, to questions of guilt (which N wants to get rid of), to martyrdom (which N wants Dionysian, anti-Christian), and inspiration (which N wants immanent, atheistic). Taubes refers to him as an "opponent" but for that very reason presents him as incredibly formidable (and as a professor of philosophy, he's quite equipped to do so). But the book ends with an arrow pointing in the opposite direction: to Freud, a direct descendant of Paul in that he teaches us that guilt is constitutive of our human being. The focus is on his Moses And Monotheism, and with that Taubes runs out of time. However, it is clear that both of these figures point toward an "exodus from Biblical religion", an exodus rooted, strange as it may seem, in Paul and his desire to establish a new community rooted in pneuma and agape. (In my opinion, no matter how strange this will sound to contemporary Christians, it is time to start rereading Paul as the herald of an exit from religion, not as the founder of one.) I should also mention that there is an Appendix which includes letters between Taubes and Schmitt, a bit on their story, and an Afterword written by the editors that takes the book section by section, connecting the dots where Taubes is often only suggestive. The scholarly apparatus, in general, is top notch, and the editors deserve a lot of credit for making this work accessible in book form. Upon completing my review, I feel like I've gotten nowhere near conveying the beauty of this book, and especially nowhere near conveying the sense of "Paul's experience". I believe it takes an encounter with the book, which I hope you will chance. For those interested in a real reading of Paul and the history of the complicated reception of his political theology, as little colored by partisan

lenses as possible-- but also rooted, it can't be denied, in the spirit-- this book welcomes you. I would also point you to Giorgio Agamben's *The Time That Remains*, which takes up many of the themes in this book and is dedicated to Jacob Taubes. 3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Paul without Christianity By Lost Lacanian Jacob Taubes's *Political Theology of Paul* is one of the thrilling books on Paul I've read in some time. The book is actually transcriptions of lectures Taubes gave toward the end of his life. So if you only have tolerance for linear argument, then this book will probably infuriate you. But, like in the case of the Seminars of Jacques Lacan, those who work through the text will be rewarded with gems of insight. The book has two parts. Part 1 offers "readings" of Romans. In Part 2, Taubes encounters figures of modern thought in light of his Paul. Taubes's project, as far as I see it, is to separate Paul from the Christian institution, to give us a Paul without Christianity. When Paul wrote Romans, Taubes emphasizes, Christianity had not yet been invented. At best, "Christians" were a radical, perhaps heretical, sect of Jews, much like the Essenes or the Zealots. So however we read Paul, we must read him outside the influence of the Church, Taubes argues. I found that following Taubes in this endeavor has led to a refreshing and radical Paul. For those who are following the growing interest in Paul in contemporary critical theory, Taubes's *Political Theology of Paul* is a must read. Its influence on Agamben's *Time That Remains* (which is dedicated to Taubes) is apparent. It's interesting to compare Taubes's Paul book with Badiou, Žižek, and others who have written on Paul. 0 of 13 people found the following review helpful. Good By James Hallenbeck I got exactly what I ordered. It came within the timeframe given. The book itself was in great shape. The soft cover wasn't glossy like some publications are.

This highly original interpretation of Paul by the Jewish philosopher of religion Jacob Taubes was presented in a number of lectures held in Heidelberg toward the end of his life, and was regarded by him as his spiritual testament. Taubes engages with classic Paul commentators, including Karl Barth, but also situates the Pauline text in the context of Freud, Nietzsche, Benjamin, Adorno, Scholem, and Rosenzweig. In his distinctive argument for the apocalyptic-revolutionary potential of Romans, Taubes also takes issue with the political theology advanced by the conservative Catholic jurist Carl Schmitt. Taubes's reading has been crucial for a number of interpretations of political theology and of Paul including those of Jan Assmann and Giorgio Agamben and it belongs to a wave of fresh considerations of Paul's legacy (Boyarin, Lyotard, Badiou, Žžk). Finally, Taubes's far-ranging lectures provide important insights into the singular experiences and views of this unconventional Jewish intellectual living in post-Holocaust Germany.

"As always with Taubes, it is all very apocalyptic and reasonably brilliant or, at least, brilliantly distorted and filled with strokes of genius the genius of a charlatan at his very, very best." (Hebraic Political Studies) From the Inside Flap This highly original interpretation of Paul by the Jewish philosopher of religion Jacob Taubes was presented in a number of lectures held in Heidelberg toward the end of his life, and was regarded by him as his spiritual testament. Taubes engages with classic Paul commentators, including Karl Barth, but also situates the Pauline text in the context of Freud, Nietzsche, Benjamin, Adorno, Scholem, and Rosenzweig. In his distinctive argument for the apocalyptic-revolutionary potential of Romans, Taubes also takes issue with the political theology advanced by the conservative Catholic jurist Carl Schmitt. Taubes's reading has been crucial for a number of interpretations of political theology and of Paul including those of Jan Assmann and Giorgio Agamben and it belongs to a wave of fresh considerations of Paul's legacy (Boyarin, Lyotard, Badiou, Žžk). Finally, Taubes's far-ranging lectures provide important insights into the singular experiences and views of this unconventional Jewish intellectual living in post-Holocaust Germany.