



Abstract from Article

COVENANT OR LEVIATHAN? POLITICAL THEOLOGY FOR MODERN TIMES

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Published: *Scottish Journal of Theology*, Vol. 47, 1 (1994), 19-41.

Abstract

Federalism or centralism - this is a decisive question in the political structuring of Europe today. The socialist centralism of the command economy and the ideological surveillance of the people has collapsed. The federal republic with decentralized forms of communication and a diversity of regional, local and personal initiatives proved stronger. But federalism or centralism is also the problem of the internal unity of Europe. Do we want a democratic Europe with strong citizen participation or a smoothly functioning state machine which takes care of the citizens and takes away their autonomy? Federalism or centralism - this is not only a practical question of politics, but rather also a question which emerges out of the basic trust and the basic fears of human beings. Don't we expect from the State first of all 'security' and protection from enemies? Didn't chaos break out in the Balkans after the fall of the united Yugoslavian state and a horrible 'struggle of all against all' begin? Doesn't history show that human beings act like wolves toward others if they are not tamed by a strong hand? But who guarantees us that this 'strong state' which offers protection and security will not itself become the wolf and eat up its citizens, moving from the security State to 'State security'? As history also shows, out of the security States have come the dictatorships which disregard and destroy people, to which we have given the names of the well-known animals of prey: the terrible 'Leviathan', the state 'Moloch' and the 'Stasi-octopus'. How do we then come to pluralistic freedom without chaos and to peaceful unity without dictatorship? To answer these present-day questions, I want to offer a contribution out of the history of political theology at the end of the modern era in the 16th and 17th centuries. Perhaps we can recognize our own problems in the complex situation of the 16th/17th centuries - and in those beginnings also the possibility of their resolution. The word 'covenant' stands for the federalistic state idea as it was developed by the so-called Calvinist 'monochromachians' in the development of the right of resistance against incipient and religious absolutism in France. The theological-political thoughts are taken from the *Vindiciae contra Tyrannos* (1574, printed 1579) of which Philip Duplessis Mornay is believed to be the author. The word 'Leviathan' stands for the influential book of the same title by Thomas Hobbes in 1651 (Latin 1668) about, 'The Matter Forme and the Power of a Common Wealth, Ecclesiastical and Civil'. It is the utopia of the security state which unites spiritual and secular power and allows neither the division of power nor the right of resistance. I speak as a theologian, not as a political scientist, and I will look at both schemes according to their theological dimensions and their implicit theological presuppositions. I will compare them, drawing upon Luther's Circular Disputation of 1539 about the resistance against the apocalyptic 'werewolf'.