

Bernard Bourdin. *The Theological-Political Origins of the Modern State: The Controversy between James I of England and Cardinal Bellarmine*.

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This book analyzes the controversy between James Stuart and Robert Bellarmine over the 1606 oath of allegiance as a fundamental moment not simply in the confessional history of early modern Europe, but in the development of modern notions of state and sovereignty. Carl Schmitt looms large here. Even though Bourdin does not endorse entirely Schmitt's thesis of the homology of political and theological structures, he nevertheless shares Schmitt's view that the birth of political modernity, far from being a product of secularization, has an intrinsically theological component.

The first three of the book's six chapters set up the background of the controversy. Chapter 1 focuses on the Elizabethan period. On the Protestant side, it centers on Richard Hooker, whom Bourdin sees as the precursor of James's doctrine of royal supremacy and as the theorist of "typically Anglican" theological and ecclesiological concepts (40). On the Catholic side, it examines Francisco Suárez and Robert Persons. Chapter 2 centers on Scotland: it offers an overview of the political theories of the Scottish Presbyterians (especially George Buchanan) and of William Barclay. Chapter 3 summarizes James's ecclesiastical policy, informed, for Bourdin, by the "desire to 'reunite' Catholics and Protestants in an Anglican ecclesiological model" (106). English Catholics thought that James would concede them some form of religious freedom, and when they saw their hopes frustrated they reacted violently. Hence James's need to test with the oath the loyalty of his Catholic subjects. The last three chapters examine Bellarmine's and James's positions. Chapter 4 explains Bellarmine's doctrine of the indirect power of the pope; chapters 5 and 6 offer a close reading of, respectively, the *Trew Law of Free Monarchies* and the *Apologie for the Oath of Allegiance*.

Chapters 5 and 6 are the most useful, for their accurate examination of the theological and ecclesiological issues at stake in James's political theory. By explaining attentively James's use of theological-biblical language in order to construct his juridico-political theory, the central section of chapter 5 offers a suggestive hermeneutical perspective on James's text. Bourdin's approach neglects other important aspects, such as the polemical and political significance of James's works. Nevertheless, it remains useful to be reminded of the centrality of theology in early modern European political debates.

The greatest weakness of this book is that it gives almost no sense of the historical significance of James's and Bellarmine's arguments. For instance, in chapter 4 Bourdin makes virtually no mention of the School of Salamanca. Thus, by failing to show the fundamental modifications made by sixteenth-century theologians in response to the Reformation, he gives the impression that certain theological concepts remained unchanged from Augustine and Aquinas to Bellarmine through the medieval papalists.

Also, the lack of historical depth mars the author's account of the political thought of Francisco Suárez and Robert Persons. Suárez came late to the controversy, and his political theory cannot be understood without considering the post-Reformation Catholic elaborations on natural law and on the nature of the political commonwealth in its relationship to the Church. Because Bourdin does not contextualize historically these debates, the originality and implications of Suárez's thought, as well as its relationship with Bellarmine's theory, remain unexplained. Concerning Robert Persons, Bourdin limits his analysis to a rather superficial reading of a few texts (all from the 1580s and 1590s), especially the *Conference about the Next Succession to the Crowne of England*, which should not be taken at face-value as representative of Persons's political thought, because of its ambiguity and polemical edge. Moreover, without appreciating the specificity of the political and religious context of Persons's works, the significance of his political views is lost. Indeed, the works of Thomas McCoog and Michael Questier, which have greatly contributed to our understanding of the internal dynamics within the English Catholic community, do not appear in Bourdin's text or bibliography.

Also troubling is Bourdin's simplistic and essentializing use of religious labels, and especially his pervasive use of *Anglicanism* to identify a lineage of English Protestantism going from Hooker to Andrewes and James. As Patrick Collinson, Peter Lake, Anthony Milton, and others have shown, English Protestantism was not a monolithic political and theological *via media*, and therefore much attention should be paid to the polemical value of theological and political concepts. The significance of James's theo-political views can be properly understood only by considering the fluid and multilayered nature of English Protestantism.

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