

Colloquium On Violence & Religion Bulletin



COV&R-Bulletin No. 15 (Oct. 1998)

Wolfgang Palaver, Die Mythischen Quellen des Politischen, Carl Schmitts Freund-Feind-Theorie,

Verlag Kohlhammer, Stuttgart Berlin Köln, Beiträge zur Friedensethik, 1998.

'The Mythical Sources of the Political' is a short monograph adapted from a Habilitationsschrift submitted to the Theological Faculty of the University of Innsbruck. It is not a comprehensive evaluation of Schmitt's entire work, but a theological critique of Schmitt's famous and disreputable political theology, in particular his 'friend-enemy' theory. Schmitt's context of discovery was Nazi Germany, but to understand the context of justification one has to go further back in history. Wolfgang Palaver argues that Schmitt's thinking is very close to mythical thinking in spite of the Catholic garment Schmitt has put on it. His political theology is portrayed as a mixture of mythical and Christian tradition.

According to Schmitt, the concept of politics - whose quintessential criterion is the distinction between friend and enemy - is interesting as a diagnostic instrument, but should not be considered as a political program. Nevertheless, the concept is not free from ambiguities. On the one hand, Schmitt denies that his political concept amounts to the annihilation of the enemy, while on the other he speaks about the idea of intensity with regard to the distinction friend-enemy. By the latter he means that the political increases with the intensity of the distinction friend-enemy. In other words, highlights of great politics go hand in hand with outbursts of hatred. In this monograph Palaver dives into the complicated history of interpretation of Schmitt and pays attention to the German philosopher Heinrich Meier in particular, whose work has drastically changed its history. Heinrich Meier distinguishes between political philosophy that flourishes on the soil of human wisdom, and political theology that prospers on the soil of obedience to the truth of revelation. On account of this distinction he considers Schmitt a political theologian, and reconstructs Schmitt's theory along the lines of an enmity between the serpent and humankind proclaimed by God in paradise. Meier sees the theologoumenon serpent vs. humankind reflected in Schmitt's political theology. All attempts to overcome this antithesis are to be seen as works of the Antichrist. Wolfgang Palaver cannot follow Meier's interpretation of Schmitt. In a very valuable discussion, Palaver considers Christian Meier's (not the same Meier) attention to Aeschylus' influence on Schmitt through his play *Eumenides*. This play represents the myth of the political. Aeschylus describes in the *Eumenides* how the system of the blood feud has been overcome by a new administration of justice (Rechtsordnung) or Polis-order. War should be exported from the interior of the sociopolitical order to the exterior. In other words, the internal peace of the polis is only possible due to violence directed to the outside of the polis.

Among the rival interpretations Palaver's proposal, which follows Girard's, is superior and very adequate for interpreting Schmitt. The mimetic theory agrees with the

interpretation of Aeschylus. For René Girard and Wolfgang Palaver Aeschylus' Eumenides is a typical example of ritual canalization of internal violence towards the outside. On the basis of this Eumenides interpretation it can be shown that the friend-enemy distinction has religious-ritual and mythical sources. They are an important distinguishing mark of political thinking and acting as such, and not only in ancient Athens of Aeschylus. In short, with the Girardian theory the ambivalence and contradictions characteristic of Schmitt's theory can be explained.

Palaver's conclusion is that Schmitt does not have a biblical but a mythical political theory and according to him, the difficulty is that the Christian elements are presented in mythical logic. He demonstrates this by elaborating on three issues: Schmitt's interpretation of the sermon on the Mount, his understanding of original sin which he connects with a theory of predestination, and the connection between the doctrine of the Trinity and the distinction of friend-enemy. These discussions are interesting, in my view, because they represent theological ingenuity. Palaver reduces these Schmittian insights to non-biblical and mythological thinking originating from the scapegoat mechanism.

Wolfgang Palaver writes that thinking one's way through Schmitt's work might be a precondition for every political theory. A biblical ethics of peace should go through this purgatory to offer a sustainable contribution to peace. He warns that whoever prematurely closes the eyes for the reality disclosed by Schmitt might have no access to the offer of Christ's grace.

Some concluding points: 1. I have read this book with much pleasure and delight. Many insights for theology and politics are to be harvested. It turns out that Girard's theory is extremely fruitful and performs miracles in elucidating Schmitt's complex theory. 2. The Girardian sauce is sometimes so dominant that the food itself cannot be tasted any more. By this I mean that the discussion of Eumenides does not give insight into the structure of Aeschylus' play, but into the theory of Girard.. 3. The hypotheses of René Girard itself are not contested. That is acceptable, but sometimes the hypotheses are identified with the biblical revelation, and in my view that is going too far. 4. A reviewer is never satisfied. I would not encourage Wolfgang Palaver to sojourn any longer in Schmitt's black Catholicism. Whoever touches pitch runs the risk of being defiled. I am really interested in Wolfgang Palaver's own theological contribution to political philosophy in which he makes use of the results of this interesting book.

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