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# Theological Foundations of the Political Power Ontology

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**Abstract**---The article is devoted to the study of the normative and theological foundations of political power origin and belongs to the field of political theology research. Despite the narrow field of research, the work is devoted to the study of a separate aspect of social life as a whole. The study of the theological foundations of political power was carried out within the framework of the neoinstitutional methodological paradigm, taking into account the data of hermeneutic analysis, which is an applied aspect of the work. Political power is considered by the authors in the framework of a broader aspect - the ontology of the social, as part of the fundamental layer of being. The authors, within the framework of the theological paradigm, considered the main ontological concepts of the political, analyzed the correlation of key political concepts - "power", "authority", and "sovereign". Various positions on understanding the essence of political power, as well as on the origin of this phenomenon in the historical and theological key are considered, the points of view of both domestic and foreign experts are studied. They revealed the key dichotomous unity of God-established and God-givenness, which underlies the social phenomenon of power, the institutional categories of "faces of power" - "potestas" and "auctoritas" - are correlated. They correlated various ideas about the essence of political ontology in general, as well as modern and historical approaches to understanding the norms and foundations of the political and social.

**Keywords**---authority, philosophy, political philosophy, political theology, political, power, social, theology.

## Introduction

The conceptual foundations of the political are among the scientific interests of many philosophers. The point of view about a certain simplicity of medieval theories and concepts is becoming a thing of the past; it is being replaced by a deeper understanding of the complexity of the concepts. Total determinism by God in Christian ontology and theology is natural for the epistemological model of that historical period, but the medieval concepts, nevertheless, are explicitly or latently contained in modern philosophical teachings. The relevance of addressing the topic of searching for the ontology of the political is due to the need to identify new vectors for studying and evaluating the actions of political actors of various sizes. The process of globalization, with a significant impact on the international and domestic policies of sovereign states, leads to the transformation of the very understanding of the political, blurring the boundaries between politics and other spheres of society. However, to analyze modern transformations of the political, it is necessary to turn to the experience of the political ontology of other epistemological paradigms. The most interesting and effective from a research point of view is the philosophical and theological doctrine of the Middle Ages and its categorical apparatus (Baume, 2009; Korf & Rowan, 2020).

Medieval theology and philosophy were the sources of political forms of communication development and the theoretical basis for the changes in the perception of politics in general, in connection with which the relevance of the chosen topic is beyond doubt. This work aims to study the ontological principles of the political in the medieval normative-theological tradition. The novelty of the research lies in the combination of methodological approaches that involve the consideration of politics and political categories from a metaphysical and institutional legal standpoint (Royce, 2017). The theological doctrine of the Middle Ages provides the possibility of combining two levels of perception and expression of the ontology of the political through formal legal categories such as "power", "authority", "opportunity", "possession", etc. The study of these concepts in the context of the history of philosophy seems necessary for the analysis of modern forms of political transformation.

The era of the Middle Ages is a historical period of several conceptual explanatory model creation and development, including those related to the study of such phenomena as politics and law. Most of the political theories and concepts that modern political philosophers use in their works were formulated within the framework of medieval theology. A lawyer and political philosopher Karl Schmitt rightly notes the following: "All exact concepts of the modern doctrine of the state are secularized theological concepts" (Schmitt, 2005). In his works "Political Romanticism" (Schmitt, 2017), "The Concept of the Political" (Schmitt, 2008), "The Theory of the Partisan: An Interim Note on the Philosophy of the Concept of the Political" (Schmitt, 2004), "Nomos of the Earth" (Schmitt, 2008), etc. K. Schmitt puts forward the idea of theological concept explication and the need to draw an analogy with the Christian theory of creationism. In our opinion, turning to theology in the context of studying the ontology of political and key political phenomena has a deep methodological potential. But the paradigm of poststructuralism, which is quite widespread in our country, has clear parallels and correlates directly with the medieval theological myth of the Apocalypse. The

main concepts of postmodern philosophical reflection are based on the idea of “end”, “finitude” as the ultimate ontological phase of its existence, eventually leaving a permanent state of post-apocalypse. "Death of the author", "death of the subject", "death of the social" and other "narratives" of postmodernism implicitly includes apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic tendencies of medieval thought.

## Method

The methodological basis of the work is determined by the specifics of the research subject. The field of political theology is extremely difficult in terms of research and requires an integrated methodological approach in the context of studying various aspects of this subject. The main methodology must include a set of general scientific and general logical methods: analysis and synthesis, induction, and deduction. The dialectical method of ascent from the abstract to the specific was used to identify the general laws of political life development. The methods of formal logic were used to study the eventual manifestations of the political (Ching & Chan, 2020; Putrayasa, 2021).

The study is based on the principles of the neoclassical philosophical approach, implying methodological pluralism and synergetic unity of several theoretical concepts. The comparative-historical method was used in the study of political power concepts in various philosophical and theological doctrines of the Middle Ages; cross-temporal comparison made it possible to identify common and distinct features and classify approaches to identify the sources of political power. The system approach is focused on examining modern political trends in the context of a single multi-aspect phenomenon. As the main methodological tradition of studying the political, we used the "conflict model", most fully substantiated in the works by K. Schmitt.

## Results and Discussion

A.F. Filippov notes that the term "political theology" was first introduced into academic circulation by the domestic revolutionary philosopher, one of the founders of anarchism, M.A. Bakunin (Filippov, 2019). Bakunin in his work "Political Theology of Mazzini and the International" sharply criticizes the ideas of the Italian revolutionary G. Mazzini about the divine mission of Italy in the world political movement, and also criticizes Mazzini's use of theological discourse from the position of atheism. Nevertheless, despite the negative connotation of Bakunin's use of the term "political theology", the term itself subsequently firmly entered the scientific circulation and allows to development of the study of the political within the framework of the theological paradigm. Even though the thesis about the need to oppose medieval philosophy to the ancient tradition is taking root more and more in the modern academic space, in our opinion, the Middle Ages reflects, transforms, and uses the achievements of ancient philosophical thought in the theological interpretation. The medieval theological tradition assumes an unconditional divine, the sacred origin of the political principle.

The ontological concept of the divine creation of the world and all its elements was characteristic of several ancient Greek philosophers, but the Christian interpretation has several specific features, methodologically important for

explaining the origin of the political in the context of political theology. The Apostle Paul in his 3rd message to Romans affirms the ontological basis of the nature of power: "For there is no power which is not divine; the existing authorities are established" (Rom 13: 1). For the medieval type of sociality, the presence of personified and unique rulers - kings, emperors - was a natural thing. From the ontological position of the Christian doctrine, the question of power is posed as follows - presenting the very phenomenon of power as a dichotomous unity of being established by God and being placed by God ([Rosenberg, 1999](#); [Nightingale, 2017](#)). And if in the first case the thing about an institutionalized, single source of power, i.e., power is perceived as a social institution of the City of the Earth, then in the second case, speaking of godlessness, the thing is about the specific carriers of this power, where the personality of the ruler plays an important role in the theory itself.

The issue of power in general theoretical meaning is a theological, ideological and psychological issue at the same time ([Krasnov & Volchkova, 2019](#)). And nevertheless, from the ontological aspect, the institution of earthly authority by God could not raise doubts: "And God blessed them, and God said to them: be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea [and over the beasts] and the birds of the air, [and over every cattle, and all the earth,] and over every living thing that creeps on the earth" (Gen. 1:28); "... you crowned him with glory and honor, and set him over the works of your hands; you put all things in subjection under his feet. But when he subdued all things to him, he left nothing that was not subject to him" (Heb. 2: 7-8). Nevertheless, the question of the position of God and the establishment of God, their direct distinction in the texts of Holy Scripture is not posed directly. There are only some indirect distinctions in the text itself, which gave rise to many interpretations among theologians and philosophers of the Middle Ages.

The solution to the issue of distinguishing between God-placed and God-established earthly power can often be reduced to their identification within the framework of a direct religious Christian dogma: "And Daniel said: blessed be the name of the Lord from everlasting to everlasting! For He has wisdom and strength; He changes seasons and years, dethrones kings and sets up kings ..." (Dan. 2: 20-21). At that, the text of the Bible contains only one exception: "He made a leader for each nation, and Israel is the lot of the Lord" (Sir 17: 14-15). Thus, in the text of Scripture itself, a clear logic can be traced: any power comes from God, despite its immanent properties, based on the very person of the ruler - he can be a despot and a tyrant, or maybe a monarch of the people's welfare. Here comes the identification of God-placed and God-established power. It does not matter what kind of power it is. Israel alone is the seat of the Lord's reign.

The medieval ideas about the universe, formed in the texts of theologians and directly in the Holy Scriptures, are filled with a rather derogatory attitude towards the Earthly City, which is a vale of sin and suffering, and since all power is from the Lord, then the cruel ruler fully corresponded to the idea of a sinful kingdom and was presented as a kind of punishment to the people for their sins. But about the socio-political, which was naturally included in the theological and philosophical discourse, the problem of power, its definitions, and ontological status caused a huge number of interpretations. Naturally, the most striking

flowering occurred in the era of the High Middle Ages, when the struggle between secular power, which in the overwhelming majority of cases was represented by the monarch, and the religious power represented by the Holy See and the Pope, intensified; a theoretical search was conducted for various types of power legitimation and power legitimacy because the texts of Scripture and the Constitution of the Papal See were an instrument in political struggle and an attempt to adapt the teaching itself to each specific case ([Burke & Stephens, 2018](#); [Kim et al., 2012](#)).

That is why the very personality of the monarch, his personal, psychological qualities were of great importance. Thus, within the framework of the formal political theology of the Middle Ages, various political and legal doctrines were developed, based on the Holy Scriptures and the Constitution of the Popes, since the Pope himself, as the successor of the first Pope - the Apostle Peter - was recognized as infallible, and all his actions were the embodiment of divine will and providence. The entire history of the Middle Ages is the history of the conceptualization of a dichotomy - the emergence of more and more new terms and interpretations that explain the relationship between the political (that is, the secular) and the divine in various variations. The central concept of political theology is the concept of "power", which in the medieval tradition was expressed in four terms: Auctoritas, Potestas, Dominium, Imperium. A.V. Marey notes in his studies that, one way or another, all these terms belong to the category of "power" and are used as "the names of power" in various contexts and interpretations ([Marey, 2020](#)).

At the same time, the exact meaning of the concepts is extremely difficult to preserve when translated into Russian and without taking into account the peculiarities of the situations in which these terms were used by the subjects of political discourse. Nevertheless, Marey suggests to evaluate these terms as dichotomous pairs and translate auctoritas as "authority", potestas - "power", dominium - "possession", imperium - "command" in the most general form. The medieval Christian tradition assumed that "there are two emperors, two principles that govern the world: royal power and the sacred power of bishops" (auctoritas sacra pontificum et regalis potestas) ([Blumenthal, 2001](#)). Thus, an emperor was recognized as "potestas", that is, the possession of the possibility of action, and for the church it was "auctoritas" - the authority that legitimizes these very actions. "Potestas" and "auctoritas" are two sides of the same coin, two faces of power, and one is impossible without the other. A ruler who possesses potestas but lacks auctoritas turns into a tyrant and despot whose actions are contrary to the divine plan, and the population, by virtue of this circumstance, gets the opportunity to overthrow such a sovereign. At the same time, the church, possessing only "auctoritas", is not able to manage society without a secular ruler, since, according to the theory of "Two Swords" by the theologian Bernard of Clairvaux, secular power granted by God, "the second sword", cannot be used by the church directly, but only indirectly, through the actions of a ruler.

## Summary

Thus, we can conclude about the natural development of political and legal value categories during the Middle Ages. In addition to the creation of the

methodological and terminological apparatus of the political, which are undoubtedly the achievement of Christian theology, the Middle Ages also left an imprint on the ethical and ideological aspects of politics. Political ideals, mixing with religious values, formed new ideological doctrines, new ethical principles, and hybrid forms of institutional organizations that have found application in the practical politics of the New and Modern times, starting with the ideology of political romanticism and ending with radical political-religious movements. In this regard, turning to the study of theological principles of the political seems to be extremely relevant in the context of modern political reality ([McCormick, 2011](#); [Meyer et al., 2012](#)).

## Conclusion

The dichotomy of medieval political theology is reflected in the medieval concept of the king-sovereign. The extensive work "Two bodies of the king. An outline of the political theology of the Middle Ages" by E. Kantarovich ([Kantorovich, 2013](#)) describes the idea of the reigning king with two bodies - natural (mortal) and political (immortal, invisible, giving the right to make decisions and act in the interests of the people). There is an invisible unity between the two bodies of the ruler that connects the worldly and the divine. However, even in the presence of unity, the political body of the king always surpasses the natural one - the king is, first of all, the "viceroy of the power of God," the ruler of his nation.

The figure of the sovereign is also presented as a secularized image of Christ, reflecting his dual nature as God-man. The power of the sovereign is divine, but not by nature, but by grace, "the power of the king is the power of God; It belongs to God by nature, and to the king by mercy." Thus, the king is God "by grace", and he performs all his actions as a mortal man, at the same time endowed with "the grace of God." These ideas were reflected in the priest-king doctrine, which was extremely popular during the heyday of the Middle Ages. However, with the decline of the role and authority of the church, the inevitability of centrifugal forces made it necessary to reconsider the foundations of the sovereign ruler's legitimacy.

New sources of legitimacy for secular power were found in the appeal to the law. The balance between the two branches of government was short-lived; in different historical periods, the Church and royal power fought for the right to possess the "potestas" and "auctoritas" and, thus, to concentrate all power over the state and the population in their hands. Three historical milestones can be mentioned related to the declaration of the writings of Pope Alexander II, Innocent III, and Boniface VIII, who tried to revise the ratio of "potestas" and "auctoritas" in favor of ecclesiastical authority. The last attempt, undertaken by Boniface VIII, finally formalized the conflict between ecclesiastical and secular authorities, and the actions of Pope Clement V led to historical events that went down in history under the name "The Avignon Captivity of the Popes", which, in turn, finally marked the defeat of the Christian Church in the struggle for the possession of "potestas" and "auctoritas". The royal power, which originally owned the "potestas", acquired the "auctoritas", and at the same time independence from the need for church legitimization of their actions ([Graham, 2000](#); [Winner, 1979](#)).



However, the overthrow of the Church institution role, which for many years was a necessary source of political power legitimation, gave rise to the need to search for a new legitimizing principle of the political, since the historical period of the Renaissance proved the inconsistency of the idea of self-identification and self-legitimization of the political by practical politics as such. This source was law, as was noted earlier. The new doctrine "religio juris" ("the religion of law") has replaced theological dogmas. The concepts of "state" and "nation" began to acquire a new meaning, public institutions of power began to acquire the totalitarian character that the Church previously possessed. The appeal to legal institutions as a means of the political legitimization into existence remains today, but it is noteworthy that in the conditions of modern realities, the right as a source of legitimacy is endowed with "potestas", but the political already retains "auctoritas".

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