

# Hobbes on Christian Liberty

## I Can the sovereign compel belief?

### I.1 Carl Schmitt

The sovereign state power alone, on the basis of its sovereignty, determines what subjects of the state have to believe to be a miracle.<sup>1</sup>

### I.2 Hobbes

if we see not, but only hear tell of a miracle, we are to consult the lawful Church; that is to say, the lawful head thereof, how far we are to give credit to the relators of it. ... in these times, I do not know one man, that ever saw any such wonderful work ... that a man endued but with a mediocrity of reason, would think supernatural: and the question is no more, whether what we see done, be a miracle; [but] whether the miracle we hear or read of were a real work, and not the act of a tongue, or pen; ... in plain terms, whether the report be true, or a lie. In which question we are not every one, to make our own private reason, or conscience, but the public reason, that is, the reason of God's supreme lieutenant, judge; and indeed we have made him judge already, if we have given him a sovereign power, to do all that is necessary for our peace and defence.

A private man has always the liberty, (because thought is free,) to believe, or not believe in his heart, those acts that have been given out for miracles, according as he shall see, what benefit can accrue by men's belief, to those that pretend, or countenance them, and thereby conjecture whether they be miracles, or lies. But when it comes to confession of that faith, the private reason must submit to the public; that is to say, to God's lieutenant. But who is this lieutenant of God, and head of the Church, shall be considered in its proper place hereafter.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Carl Schmitt, *The Leviathan in the State Theory of Thomas Hobbes*, p. 53.

<sup>2</sup>*Leviathan*, 37.18. See also 46.33 on compulsion of belief.

## 2 Christian liberty

### 2.1 Martin Luther

the whole Scripture of God is divided into two parts: precepts and promises. The precepts ... were ordained, however, for the purpose of showing man to himself, that through them he may learn his own impotence for good and may despair of his own strength. For this reason they are called the Old Testament, and are so.

For example, “Thou shalt not covet,” is a precept by which we are all convicted of sin, since no man can help coveting, whatever efforts to the contrary he may make. ...

Now when a man has through the precepts been taught his own impotence ... Then comes in that other part of Scripture, the promises of God, which declare the glory of God, and say, “If you wish to fulfil the law, and, as the law requires, not to covet, lo! believe in Christ, in whom are promised to you grace, justification, peace, and liberty”<sup>3</sup>

### 2.2 Hobbes

See *Leviathan* 47.19.

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<sup>3</sup>Martin Luther, *Concerning Christian Liberty* (1560).