

Revolution and Revelation

**Theology in the Political Thought of Friedrich Julius Stahl,
Wilhelm Weitling, and Karl Theodor Welcker**

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ABSTRACT

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This dissertation deals with the political thought of three authors of the *Vormärz* era in Germany: the liberal Karl Theodor Welcker, the socialist Wilhelm Weitling, and the conservative Friedrich Julius Stahl, who were all central in the early formation of the modern political ideologies in Germany, in the decades leading up to the revolutionary year of 1848.

The thesis proceeds from a critical discussion about how religion has been unsatisfactorily treated in much intellectual history, something also witnessed in research on Weitling, Stahl, and Welcker. The aim here is to deepen the understanding of the early evolution of the modern political ideologies in Germany, by investigating the intersection of political thought and Christian theology in the works of three leading thinkers of the time.

The approach taken in this study is a contextually informed historical semantics, a text explication based on certain key concepts. Each thematic chapter proceeds from concepts dealing with crucial political topics important to the political thought of the period between the revolutionary years of 1789 and 1848. These topics are headlined as Religion, Society and History.

This reading of Welcker, Stahl, and Weitling shows, first, that theological dimensions made up an important part in the discussions about and formulations of the meanings of central political concepts of the era, such as liberty and equality; second, that there was a prevalence of what we mainly recognize as theological concepts, such as revelation and the Kingdom of God in political debates; and third, that there was an intense political struggle around the very meaning of Christianity itself, connected to politics and to the state.

The early development of the political ideologies should thus not be interpreted as a secular endeavor or a struggle where some were for and others against Christianity. In this *Vormärz* context, the case was rather that political thinkers tried to formulate their own vision of Christianity and public order. Concisely put, Welcker's Christian order was one of individual moral autonomy, Stahl's one of revealed divine authority, and Weitling's one of revolutionary earthly material equality. While the political thought of modernity has often been conceived as standing in a dichotomous relation to religion, this study points to the need not to neglect, separate, or teleologically interpret religion, but to write an intellectual history which deals with religious and political thought as interacting and intersecting.

Keywords: Friedrich Julius Stahl, Wilhelm Weitling, Karl Theodor Welcker, religion and politics, political theology, political ideologies, *Vormärz*, nineteenth-century Germany, intellectual history, history of political thought, history of ideas, historical semantics.