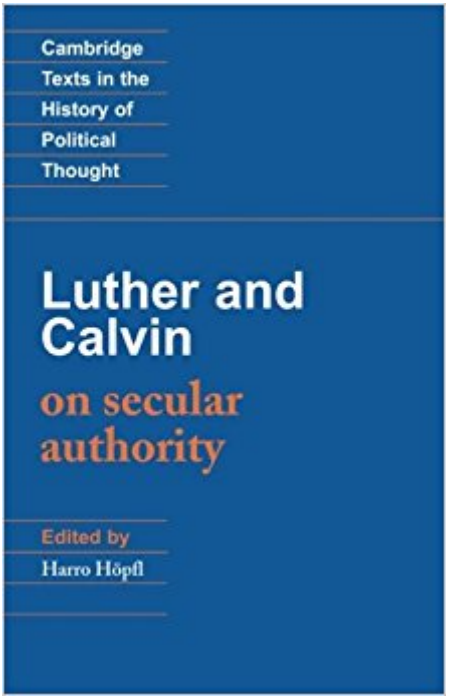
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Luther And Calvin On Secular Authority (Cambridge Texts In The History Of Political Thought)



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Synopsis

This volume contains new, unabridged translations of Luther's On Secular Authority and Calvin's On Civil Government. These works represent the authors' attempts to balance their commitments to the maintenance of order in Church and polity on the one hand, and the overriding imperative of uncompromising obedience to the will of God as revealed in Scripture on the other. The book is intended to be readily intelligible to students and nonspecialists, but precise enough for scholars. The introduction relates the works to the thought and activities of their authors, and a glossary, chronology and bibliography are also provided.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

'Dr HÃƒÂ¶pfl has provided his readers with an excellent translation of two seminal reformation texts realting to secular authroity ... It deserves to become a standard text for any concerned with sixteenth-century political thought.' Journal of Theological Studies

Text: English (translation) Original Language: German, Latin --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

This text addresses two basic questions: (1) ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“For Christians, what role should secular government play in our lives? and (2) Should we be obedient to God, the State, or

both?ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â•Answers are provided through select passages from the writings of two well renowned theologiansÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â •Martin Luther (a German monk who spearheaded the Protestant Reformation) and John Calvin (a French minister and the father of Calvinism).In short, both men recognize the authority, necessity, and the explicit distinctions between, divine and secular authority. Both also recognize that the former reigns supreme and that the ChristianÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s primary allegiance is to God and not the State. That being said, both have somewhat divergent interpretations as what that actually means for the Christian in secular society.Calvin has a more optimistic view of mankind, and believes that government should be used as a tool to mold the hearts of men into more upright, righteous people. He says that ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“civil government has its appointed end ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â¦ to cherish and protect the outward worship of God, to defend sound doctrine of piety and the position of the church, to adjust our life to the society of men, to form our social behavior to civil righteousness, to reconcile with one another, and to promote general peace and tranquility.ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• Note how Calvin sees a very proactive and positive function of government to defend, adjust, form, and promote.Luther, on the other hand, had a more pessimistic view of humanity and divides humans into two groupsÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â •the believers and the non-believers. He thought the former group to be in the minority, and amongst them, the people who actually acted as they should are few and far between. Accordingly, he suggests that the State exists not to play such an aggressive role in society and should punish evil (a more negative formulation), cognizant that without some form of established order, the evil that men are predisposed to do would run amok. Luther thought Christians didnÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢t essentially need secular authority because if they lived according to divine law, there would be no need to obey the subordinate secular authorities. He still contends, however, for the sake of others and to lead by example, that Christians ought to obey secular laws when not in contradiction to the scriptures.Many readers would be particularly surprised what both men say about a ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“justÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• war.The book is very short (less than 100 pages) but isnÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢t necessarily a quick read. I personally believe that this deserves a position on the bookshelf of anyone involved in theological study or education.The scriptures in the Bible always remain the same, but the interpretation of those who read It differ. I believe this point is particularly relevant today since many political and religious demagogues use the Bible as a means to justify their proposals and actions. This book provides two insightful perspectives on the role of civil government in a ChristianÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s life and allows you to think and form your own opinion. On Secular Authority will serve anyoneÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â •seminary professors and students, theologians, pastors, teachers, or the simply curiousÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â •well and provide intelligent

insight into a dilemma that still reverberates now as it did hundreds of years ago when these words were written.

Excellent

EXCELLENT

Very good translation.

This book deserves a couple of reads. Serious theologians, pastors, political parishioners can all benefit from a careful reading of this book. Today with the religious right, and secularists battling it out in every political campaign, a culture war doing the culture more harm than good from both sides, this book needs to be read more.For the most part, aside from some commentary you have Luther’s writings and Calvin’s writings on both sides. Tricky is to see the subtle difference that becomes profound in practice. Luther says that there are two authorities to which all CHRISTIANS are subject. Calvin starts his treatise saying that all men are subject to both these same authorities. This makes a profound difference in what the church is and what the state is. For Luther the church is about the gospel proclaiming the forgiveness of sins, and the only people that are subject to whatever authority it has are Christians who have been won for Christ by the work of the Holy Spirit. They willfully follow the churches teachings concerning morality, and subject themselves to the forgiveness of sins. The two authorities are the church and state. Christians don’t need the state to tell them to do good, in so far as they are Christian, but saint and sinner, as they are the state will need to curb the activity even of Christians at times for the good of society.However, the state is about enforcing laws and keeping peace. To this end all people need be subject to it. The state can’t afford to forgive sins, or confuse its role with that of the church. To the state has been entrusted the sword, and it isn’t for good looks.Calvin though would confuse this by making all people subject to both the church and the state, there may as well be only one authority then. And sadly as Calvin’s Geneva showed this becomes the case. Rather than being about the forgiveness of sins, the church becomes a persecutor, another arm of the state enforcing man made laws in the name of Christ.This book does much to show the differences between the two men. Luther was not a Calvinist.

As with all of these Cambridge "Political Writings" series, this book is perhaps better title "Essential

Political Writings" or "Basic Political Writings", for it is far far from comprehensive, in fact it contains only a chapter of one of Calvin's "Institutes" and a small piece by Luther. Yet as is also the case with this Cambridge series, it is an excellent translation with a very good introduction. This is a very useful text and is as essential for academics as it is fascinating for the generally curious. Highly recommended, as long as the buyer does not believe it is a one-stop-shop for the "secular" (whatever that word means in then 16th century) thought of these two reformers with regard to government.

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