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Luther, Martin and Jarrett A. Carty. Divine Kingdom, Holy Order: The Political Writings of Martin Luther

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Luther, Martin and Jarrett A. Carty.
Divine Kingdom, Holy Order: The Political Writings of Martin Luther.
Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2012. Pp. xi, 525. ISBN 978-0-7586-2711-7 (hardcover) $59.99.

Jarrett A. Carty has provided—for scholars of history, religious studies, political science, and theology—a great service in making available this anthology along with a very fine introduction. This book gives readers both major and minor works wherein Luther addresses themes regarding the relationship of church and state. However, it is no mere compilation of interesting texts, but includes a call for a particular way to read Luther on the question of church and state.

In the introduction, Carty makes the case that charges of inconsistency or incoherence that have regularly been levelled against Luther's treatment of political writing are incorrect (5). He outlines three test cases wherein his thesis can be examined: questions regarding the permissibility (or not) of resistance to those in authority, the role of marriage in the reformed territories, and the role of Roman law in German lands. Regarding the first, Carty notes that Luther's unrelenting refusal to allow any form of resistance of princes by paupers—especially evident in texts such as *Against the Robbing and Murdering Hordes of Peasants* (1525) and *An Open Letter on the Harsh Book Against the Peasants* (1525)—was not paralleled in his advice to the Protestant princes of the Schmalkaldic League as it met in Torgau in 1530 to discuss resisting the Emperor. In the second case he notes that sometimes Luther understands marriage to be a civil affair, whereas at other times, as a theologian, he advocates rules regarding marriage practices in the emerging Lutheran territories. With respect to the third, Carty underscores Luther's earlier refusal of Roman law in favour of customary German laws—a position reversed by 1530. Carty makes the case that Luther's changes are always contextually informed and his

decisions are always derived from the touchstone that "in limiting temporal government, Luther was liberating it" (15).

Carty also gives the reader new to Luther a helpful orientation to the manner in which Luther distinguishes the Reigns, or Kingdoms (sometimes called *Reiche*, other times *Regimente*) of the Left and Right; of temporal and spiritual governments. He notes that Luther discerned God's handiwork in promoting the flourishing of the world via good government and God's parallel work in offering this same world the gifts of Word and Sacrament. Luther understood these latter as the means whereby God's promises of divine presence and the future consummation of the divine will both sustain the faithful. Luther is often accused of introducing the divorce of secular from sacred, but Carty rightly underscores that Luther understood the same God to be Lord of both Reigns. Carty makes a strong case for this reading of Luther, and he both marshals texts that clearly support his thesis and deals deftly with those that do not.

The translated texts made available to the reader are divided into three major subsections: "The Reformation of Temporal Government," "The Political Teachings of Scripture," and "Luther's Applied Political Thought." All are ordered chronologically. It was, of course, a delight to re-read these texts in reviewing this anthology. Luther is never dull to read, and this particular way of ordering his work was largely helpful. Carty sets the scene for selected texts—excised from Luther's Works (American Edition)—which are helpfully abridged for the reader. Readers familiar with these texts, however, might be disappointed to see that many of the footnotes that assist our reading of Luther—such as those explaining German proverbs—are left out of this anthology. By and large, however, the introductions to each section are adequate to address pressing questions and locate the text in terms of Luther's broader theological agenda. Here and there, texts are missing that one might have expected. His *Lectures on Galatians* (1535)—with its sustained attention to the theme of justification by grace through faith—has significant ruminations on the ways in which God is at work behind the various "masks" of emperor, prince, teacher, etc. Also missing is Luther's treatment of the distinction of kinds of temporal government (chiefly, home and the state) as elucidated in his *On the Councils and the Church* (1539). In the main, however, a good cross-section of genres and time periods is used in Carty's effort to introduce Luther's theology of the state and to disabuse readers of the simplistic charge that Luther is incoherent and/or

inconsistent in his attention to both the so-called secular and sacred as ordered by God for the well-being of humankind. But will Carty convince his audience?

Luther scholars generally recognize that the sheer volume of Luther's writings, across broad swaths of genre and audience, makes it easy to locate inconsistencies in Luther's thought. Moreover, some see Luther as more of a provocateur than a systematician, and so expect inconsistency in his writings which were generally occasional in nature. Perhaps Carty fights a battle better conceded in order to bring to the fore those themes Luther vigorously defended, such as justification and—especially pertinent to the present study—vocation. The Swedish theologian Gustaf Wingren in his magisterial *Luther on Vocation* underscored how Luther's treatment of the two Reigns cannot be understood in abstraction from his theology of vocation. God calls the Christian to live as a prince, soldier, baker, mother, etc. in society precisely in order to advance the well-being of the created order. This is understood to be intrinsically satisfying, socially beneficial, and religiously significant. Vocation bridges the two reigns. More could have been made of this, as of Luther's treatment of the three distinctions, or orders in creation: church, state, and household. Carty notes that Luther draws attention to these in his later *Lectures on Genesis* (1535–45) on page 17. It would help the reader to know that this distinction is evident as early as 1519 in his *The Holy and Blessed Sacrament of Baptism* and funds a view of a nuanced versus monolithic state.

Despite these few shortcomings, this is a marvellous book. It would serve well in courses on the theology of Luther as well as the development of political thought. It nicely brings together significant texts, contextualizes them, and provides the reader with the service of excising extraneous material. This book is a welcome offering and I heartily commend it.

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