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DIVINE KINGDOM, HOLY ORDER: The Political Writings of Martin Luther. By Jarrett A. Carty

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DIVINE KINGDOM, HOLY ORDER: The Political Writings of Martin Luther. By Jarrett A. Carty. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2012. 525 Pages. Hardcover. \$59.99.

Divine Kingdom, Holy Order is a useful addition to the vast literature on Luther's political thought. In this anthology, Jarrett A. Carty has collected the texts from *Luther's Works* that touch significantly on topics such as law, government, authority, and war. To this he has added a brief, general introduction to Luther's political thought, solid introductions to the selections, notes to secondary literature throughout the volume, and a brief bibliography.

The introduction is an excellent brief exposition of the subject. Carty presents a nuanced and historical account of Luther's understanding of the two governments. He takes seriously Luther's own assertion that he had restored temporal government to its proper place by recognizing it as God's establishment and God's gift. Perhaps more important in terms of recent works in this area, Carty ably expounds the inherent and fundamental consistency of Luther's approach to resisting God-appointed authorities.

The reformer had the same message for both princes and peasants when it came to rebellion: there can be no armed resistance to a superior authority. Yes, you must obey God rather than man, but you may also suffer for it.

The bulk of the volume presents the selections that demonstrate Luther's approach with brief introductions so that the reader can grasp the situation that elicited a particular text. Rather than presenting all the texts chronologically Carty has divided them into three sections: overtly political writings, exegetical works that touch on political themes, and text that represents Luther's political thought in practice. Thus the first section, *The Reformation of Temporal Government*, contains the texts one would expect to encounter in this volume, such as "To the Christian Nobility" and "Temporal Authority." Here the reader finds Luther's two kingdoms thinking propounded, advanced, and defended against both the papal monarchy and the overreaching of secular rulers. Following this solid first section, the anthology comes into its own with the second section, *The Political Teachings of Scripture*. Here Carty has included portions of Luther's lectures and commentaries that touch on political themes. That Luther might have commented on topics such as the duties rulers and subjects owe each other in the course of a biblical lecture will come as no surprise to anyone who has read even a smattering of his commentaries or sermons. Yet many readers will be surprised to find Luther's commentary on the Song of Songs here, especially since the subject of government is not merely incidental to the text. Instead, Luther understood the entire book to

be an allegory of a ruler (Solomon) and his people. Similar surprises await the reader in the third section that deals with applied political thought. Luther brought his political ideas to bear in concrete situations—some well-known in this context, like the Peasants' War, and some not, such as Luther's appeal to the authorities to refuse to allow unauthorized preachers, presumably Anabaptists and the like, in their territories.

There is much to like in this volume, but it is not perfect. The introductions should provide more of the medieval background to the sixteenth-century debates and developments elucidated here. To be fair, Carty has his hands full with the immediate context for these works and the literature on Luther and his thought. Yet Luther's appeal to the princes as emergency bishops in "To the Christian Nobility" becomes more understandable in light of the medieval proprietary church system, in which the nobility directly controlled churches in their territories. The practice was still common in Luther's day despite several centuries' worth of papal attempts to eradicate it. Likewise, it might have been noted at some point that the debate over conditions for resisting a God-appointed ruler did not originate in the sixteenth century but had a long history in medieval writing on the nature of tyranny.

As mentioned above, all of the texts presented here can be found in *Luther's Works*. The decision not to add newly translated material is understandable but still somewhat unfortunate. It means, for example, that although "On War against the Turk" is in this volume, the reader cannot compare it with Luther's "*Eine Heerpredigt wider den Türken*" ("An Army

Sermon against the Turks”) because that text was not translated for *Luther’s Works*. (Since there was no need for both texts in that edition, which was meant to be a general collection of the reformer’s writings, “*Heerpredigt*” was not included.) Yet anyone seriously considering Luther’s political thought would benefit from consulting it alongside “On War” in this anthology.

Putting aside, however, what is not in this volume, what is here is a nice collection of texts for which Carty has provided the essential historical context along with a solid introduction to the nature and scope of Luther’s political thought. Any reader interested in the topic will be well served by this anthology.

Paul W. Robinson