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Acknowledgements

Richard Tuck, Quentin Skinner and Raymond Geuss all offered encouragement and tried to impose some shape on the form and content of the book, especially the introductory material and the footnotes. Christine Lyall Grant had the herculean labour of standardizing the format of a recalcitrant text. And my colleague Russell Price once again placed at my disposal his remarkable ability to see what is actually on the printed page, as opposed to what I imagined was there. He also demanded, and usually got, a large number of clarifications. To all of them my most grateful thanks, even if (probably unwisely) I did not always follow their advice. The book is dedicated to HJH (to make up for the fact that it’s not only when translating that I can’t always find the right words), and to MH and GWA, because they too should have a dedication.
Introduction

The movement for religious reform and regeneration which attained self-definition and organization from about 1520 onwards – in the next century it came to be called ‘The Reformation’ – engaged the attention of princes and magistrates from the very beginning, whether as patrons, beneficiaries or opponents. For their part, the spokesmen and prime movers of reformation, usually clerics subject to ecclesiastical discipline from which only secular rulers could shield them, habitually sought to enlist rulers in their cause, particularly when the papacy and a part of the clergy proved obdurate. Secular rulers had been involved more or less officially in the administration, finances, staffing and even the doctrine of the Church since the late Roman Empire. Conversely, ecclesiastics doubled as secular potentates or were members of a ‘Church’ which, humanly speaking, was a polity with its own rulers, laws, courts and subjects, as well as its own taxes and property. Such was the interpenetration of secular and spiritual in the sixteenth century that no reformation of religion could take place without a transformation of the public order of the commonwealths of Christian Europe, and no such transformation could be institutionalized without the assistance of secular rulers.

Martin Luther (1483–1546) was a former Augustinian monk and priest, and a lecturer at the University of Wittenberg. As an ecclesiastic, and especially after his excommunication by the papacy in 1521, not only his freedom to work but his very life depended on the protection of secular rulers, notably the very cautious but nonetheless firm and loyal Frederick the Wise, Elector of Saxony, to whom Luther paid eloquent
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if oblique tribute in *On Secular Authority*. From the beginning of his career as a reformer, he had looked to secular rulers to initiate or consolidate reformation. In 1520 he addressed one of his seminal pamphlets *To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation*. In it he sought to persuade the Emperor and the princes of Germany to use their authority to eliminate the ill-gotten wealth, temporal power and chicaneries of the papacy and the higher clergy, to see to the summoning of a Council of the Church, to ensure a married, preaching and resident parish clergy, to reform the theology and philosophy curricula of the universities (where clerics were educated), and to institute a drastic limitation on the number and size of the religious orders. In all this they were not to be frightened or side-tracked by the raging and anathemas of Rome, or the monopoly of teaching authority claimed by the ‘spiritual estate’: every Christian is a member of the ‘spiritual estate’ in this regard, entitled to judge doctrine for himself. In a word, what confronted Christians was the ‘tyranny’ of the Roman Church. Any Christian ought to do what he could to overturn this tyranny, but secular rulers were more advantageously placed than others to act effectively.

Luther’s strategy for reformation was not at all distinctive. The reformers originally intended, and continued to intend, the reformation of the whole of Christendom. They soon found, however, that such comprehensiveness was impracticable in the foreseeable future. Thenceforth the Reformation took divergent paths. The ‘Radical Reformation’ is a term commonly used to refer to those who either sought the take-over of secular authority by the self-selecting members (or leaders) of churches composed exclusively of ‘the Elect’, or more usually withdrew from contact with secular authority as far as possible, and formed themselves into voluntary and exclusive (although proselytizing) congregations. This course of action frequently brought them persecution at the hands of the secular authorities. The ‘Magistral’ (or ‘Magisterial’) Reformers, on the other hand, who included Luther and Calvin, aimed at, or found themselves committed to, a reformation limited to particular territories subject to the jurisdiction of some secular ruler or magistracy not implacably opposed to ‘the Gospel’. All the inhabitants of these territories, once reformation had been made official by their rulers, were expected to foreshadow ‘popyry’ and subscribe to evangelical religion as a condition of residence. These inhabitants were described as composing the ‘Church’ of that particular
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territory, or Land, the Landeskirche. The price for the cooperation of secular authorities in declaring reformation official, and implementing the changes in the public order that it required, was entitlement to intervene in the appointment of the clergy (and the related profession of teachers) and usually surveillance of every aspect of the life of 'their' Landeskirchen. A reformation in this manner, however limited and unsatisfactory, at least guaranteed some approximation to the inclusiveness of the Old Church and protected against disorderly (and even violent and millennialist) proceedings and sectarianism.

A strategy of enlisting the cooperation of sympathetic secular rulers was obvious enough, but ecclesiastical independence, however compromised in practice, soon proved to be something which was not to be thrown away casually. Indeed, all the reformers who took this course soon learnt what indeed they might have anticipated, namely that the favour of princes is fickle and unreliable, and never comes without strings. More immediately pressing, however, was the fact that some rulers proved hostile to reformation. In On Secular Authority Luther named some of them, but he left the most important one unidentified: the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V, whom he had known to be his implacable opponent from the Reichstag at Worms in 1521 onwards. Luther's first response to such hostility was to assert complete autonomy for the Church, a position as untenable as his earlier open invitation to princes to take the work of reformation in hand.

Luther: On Secular Authority

Luther had been meditating a book devoted to the rights and duties of secular rulers for some time when, on 7 November 1522, George Duke of Saxony issued an edict which prohibited the buying and selling of Luther's translation of the New Testament, and demanded the surrender, by Christmas, of all privately held copies, in exchange for the purchase price. This episode spurred Luther on to immediate and rapid composition: he was able to write the prefatory Letter to On Secular Authority by Christmas Day, 1522, and the book appeared in March 1523.

Most (though not all) of the main themes and organizing ideas that informed Luther's thought about the polity are to be found in this work. Nothing else from his pen comes even close to it in generality, specificity of concern with the polity, or coherence; hence its appearance
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here. Nevertheless, it can no more be taken as a digest of the whole of Luther’s political thought than any other of his writings. Luther certainly brought to his political thinking the preoccupations of a highly sophisticated theology. But he also brought to it much else that may or may not have been coherent with that theology, but was certainly independent of it. Moreover, he was inclined to speak generally and abstractly, when his attention was in fact focussed on specific persons, occasions and issues. In 1522/3, he was mindful chiefly of rulers hostile to reformation. But when Luther’s mind was on sympathetic princes and magistrates, or on the threats posed to the world and reformation alike by ‘fanatics’, ‘prophets’, ‘murderous hordes of peasants’ and suchlike, a quite different account of ‘secular authority’ made its appearance, an account which was equally general and abstract in form, but much more favourable and indulgent towards secular rulers. That attitude is not entirely absent even in On Secular Authority, which contains some of Luther’s harshest generalizations about rulers.

On Secular Authority, then, shows Luther at his most hostile to secular authority: true religion is presented here as being more divorced from the life of the civil community than in any earlier or later account, as more private and more personal; a more restricted jurisdiction is assigned to rulers; and the true Church is portrayed as more independent of their authority. Conversely, we find Luther here offering a justification of religious toleration that squares neither with his later attitude to the repression of heresy and blasphemy, nor with a good part of the themes of his theology. And, finally, this text contains no intimation of the idea that public, political measures might be taken against an ungodly ruler.

Thus in On Secular Authority Luther represented the Church as a free congregation (Gemeinde, also meaning a community, parish or commune), in which every Christian is a ‘King, Priest and Prophet’. This was not intended to deny the practical necessity of a distinct priestly office; indeed Luther was not even opposed to a reformed episcopacy. Rather his point was to assert the fundamental liberty and equality of all Christians, and to subject all hierarchies and earthly superiors to this fundamental liberty and equality. Hence also Luther’s occasional displays of an inclination to allow to congregations a much greater say in the appointment and supervision of ministers, an inclination congruent with the idea (also nurtured in the ‘Radical Reforma-
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The notion of the Church as a free and voluntary congregation, tolerant of authorities other than Scripture only to the extent that these are merely the appointed agents of the congregation. This theme in his thought proved evanescent; more usually he tolerated appointment and payment of pastors and teachers by magistrates and princes, which de facto was already the practice.

Such a vision of Christian equality and Christian liberty (the latter being an evangelical slogan and the title of Luther's most famous work) was clearly incompatible with the use of coercion, lawcourts and ordinary civil penalties and punishments as instruments of ecclesiastical order; hence Luther's insistence on the need to keep secular and spiritual 'government' distinct, despite the obvious practical impossibility of doing anything of the sort. By parity of reasoning it seems that the Church cannot be anything but a voluntary and indeed a private association. This latter implication Luther here accepted, albeit without appearing to realize that it entailed the denial of the idea that the Church should have a membership coextensive with that of some civil polity. This idea he merely took for granted, for his object was always to reform an existing Church, not to found a new one.

At this time Luther had not fully discerned the threat posed to the orthodox reformation and (as he came to see it) to the peace of the whole world by the sectarians' 'gathered' churches, composed exclusively of the Elect. The appeal of this idea of the true Church, so closely analogous to the persecuted, or at best tolerated, assemblies ('churches') of Christian believers of the New Testament, was one he found hard to resist. Conversely, he never gave any reason why civil subjection and membership of a particular Church should coincide.

On Secular Authority thus marshals the arguments which could be used to advocate religious toleration, and even the reconstitution of churches as private associations, and does it so cogently that Sébastien Châteillon (Castellio) could simply reproduce this part of the book in his own plea for toleration. Luther was not of course adopting this position merely out of political expediency. On the contrary,

Sébastien Châteillon, Castalio or Castellion (Castellio), 1515–63, was an evangelical humanist who, after conversion, left France for Strasbourg in 1540 and was made head of the newly founded Academy of Geneva by Calvin the following year. Theological differences with Calvin obliged him to leave Geneva for Basle in 1544, where he remained until his death, writing (inter alia) a translation of the Bible in Latin and French. After the execution of the noted heretic Servetus in 1550, Châteillon, under the pseudonym Martinus Bellius, published Whether Heretics are to be Persecuted, 1554. See below, p. xxiv.
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libertarian, egalitarian, communal motifs were part of the texture of his theology.

What holds Luther’s political thought together is not unchanging doctrines or attitudes, but the continuing attempt to establish a congruence between his views of the polity and his (logically as well as chronologically) prior theology of the Christian and his relationship to God. In this attempt he employed a vocabulary, and the assumptions it encapsulated, which were highly derivative and conventional; there is nothing in Luther’s political writings reminiscent of the genius for devising the appropriate concept, or of that relentless independence and thoroughness so characteristic of his theology. And the fact that he simply appropriated an extant vocabulary, rather than submitting its contents to inspection, led him into certain tangles, much as it did his contemporary, Machiavelli.

Let us begin with the title of the book: Von Weltlicher Oberkeit. *Weltlich* is a highly troublesome term, and not only for the translator. It is the adjective from *Welt*, the world, and thus means: secular, temporal, worldly, earthly. It had a well-established usage in distinguishing between the secular, or temporal, authorities of Christian commonwealths and the spiritual and ecclesiastical ones, and in this sense the term is neutral and merely designative. This is the principal sense of the term here: Luther’s subject was secular authority and secular rulers, not popes, prelates and priests.

But the matter is not as simple as this. Terms derive part of their meaning from those to which they are usually counterposed, and part from the company they habitually keep. The standard antonyms for *weltlich* were terms with highly favourable connotations: heavenly, celestial, eternal, spiritual; conversely, ‘the world’ was commonly linked with ‘the devil’ and ‘the flesh’, not least in the works of St Augustine, Luther’s and the Reformers’ favourite patristic theologian. So although *weltlich* does have a neutral, merely designative sense (‘secular’ as opposed to ‘ecclesiastical’), it wears the pejorative connotation of ‘worldly’, ‘this-worldly’ (which are the same word in German as ‘secular’) on its sleeve. Neither ‘secular’ nor ‘temporal’ quite capture this; both will serve equally well or badly.

Luther used this terminology in *On Secular Authority* to distinguish areas of jurisdiction and competence for ‘secular’ and ‘spiritual’ governors. The distinction is crucial to the implicit *non sequitur* in Luther’s argument that because rulers are ‘secular’, they are to concern them-
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...selves only with secular matters. But on Luther’s own understanding, religion is not a sphere of life, or a class of matters, things or concerns, but rather an aspect of every sphere of life, every matter, every thing or concern. Nevertheless, in Part II of On Secular Authority he attempts to safeguard religion against the unwelcome attentions of ungodly princes by trying to separate secular and spiritual matters, allocating them to their respective agencies. He does not of course ask exactly what is a \textit{weltlich} matter, but then neither did his successors until the next century; he casually takes it that secular matters are matters concerned with the body, honour and property. Now, since bibles, Luther’s proximate concern, were very much property (indeed the rulers confiscating them were scrupulous in refunding the purchase price, thus respecting their character as property), Luther was already in difficulty: not every item in the genus property is of the same kind, it seems. Exactly the same goes for secular peace, tranquillity, justice and so forth.

Luther saw the duty of secular governors, traditionally enough, as keeping the peace, enforcing conformity to laws, protecting the law-abiding and punishing law-breakers. But his language here also generates ambiguity. His term for the law-abiding is \textit{die Frommen}, which in his vocabulary means: those who do their duty to God and men, and hence: the just or morally upright (cf. Glossary: just). But this term does not make the distinction Luther was careful to make elsewhere (e.g. in On Good Works of 1520) between ‘outward’ justice, mere conformity to rules, and ‘true’ or ‘inward’ justice, which is a quality of the intention. Similarly, Luther’s term for law-breakers is simply ‘the wicked’ (\textit{die Bösen}), or ‘evil-doers’ (\textit{Übeläter}). Thus what Luther actually says is that the duty of rulers is to protect the good and to coerce, inhibit and punish the wicked.

In the same way, he left vague the distinction between civil and moral law. At various points, he casually asserted that true Christians naturally obey ‘the law’. This makes sense only on the assumption that \textit{das Recht} (i.e. positive law, the law of the land; cf. Glossary: law) in fact ordains what is morally and spiritually right (\textit{recht}). He then argues that Christians accordingly need neither laws (which must mean positive laws), nor anything that goes with the enforcement of laws. He furthermore infers from this that Christians are no threat to rulers, but rather a positive asset. In any case, the crucial component of a civil polity for Luther is not secular law at all, but rulers. Indeed at various points in
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On Secular Authority he goes out of his way to voice the opinion, characteristic of early modern partisans of absolute monarchy, that a wise prince must have discretion to override the law, must indeed keep it as firmly in hand as the head of a household keeps under his discretion such rules as he has made for the disposition of the domestic order. What matters is rulers and ruling; it is these that constitute a polity.

The principal organizing idea in Luther’s political thought is Oberkeit (cf. Glossary: authority). German-speakers of Luther’s time would automatically have resorted to this now obsolete term to translate potestas (which Lonitzer, see p. xxiv, used in the title of his translation) or auctoritas, ‘authority’. It is for this reason that the title of the book has here been rendered as ‘On Secular Authority’, which also follows the precedent set by other translators. But in fact the synonymity of auctoritas / potestas and Oberkeit is by no means perfect. At many points in the text it has been necessary to substitute ‘superiors’, ‘those in (or with) authority (or power)’, or even the infelicitous word ‘superiority’. For, unlike ‘authority’, the German word cannot fail to call to mind the persons who are in authority, ‘superiors’ (die Oberen, also obsolete). And this property of the term sits well with the character of Luther’s thought, for he tends to personalize political authority.

Luther thus conceives of the polity as a relationship between superiors and inferiors, rulers and subjects, public and private persons. Unlike Calvin, he does not qualify this by any civic humanist notions of private persons as citizens (for Luther they are ‘subjects’), or of rulers as generically ‘magistrates’. Rulers are ‘superiors’, ‘princes’ (Fürsten) and ‘lords and masters’ (Herren). The emphasis, implicit in the very terminology Luther employs, is throughout on the right to command, the duty to obey, and the mastery over resources to ensure compliance with commands. The completion of this circle would be to treat law itself as a species of command: it is not, however, clear that Luther took this step. And because he did not equate the law of the Holy Roman Empire with the will of Holy Roman Emperors, he was able in the 1530s to assert a legal right of godly princes subject to the Holy Roman Emperor to resist the Emperor when he acted outside his constitutional authority. Calvin and his followers were to take exactly the same line with the French kings (or regents) and the anciennes lois of France, a line of argument already implicit in the Institution (p. xviii below). But in On Secular Authority Luther gets nowhere near this; the rigorously a- or

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anti-political ethic of New Testament Christianity can find no relation-
ship of the Christian to the polity other than an in-but-not-of-the-
polity quiescence, service to rulers in the things which are Caesar’s, or
prayer and suffering (‘passive resistance’); this is the manner of con-
ducting themselves towards tyrants consistently enjoined upon private
persons by both Luther and Calvin.

What secular authority (in other words, rulers and their power) is put
into the world to do, as far as Luther is concerned, is to prevent chaos,
given the overwhelming preponderance of the ungodly and the Un-
Christian in the world. This cannot be done by laws alone, or by law-
making: the point is not to make new laws, but to enforce existing ones.
The crucial term here is Gewalt, which, according to the Grimm’s’
Deutsches Wörterbuch, means any or all of: power, strength, might,
efficacy . . . empire, rule, dominion, mastery, sway, jurisdiction,
government, protection . . . potestas, facultas, imperium, dictio, arbitrium,
tus . . . potentia, vis, violentia, iniuria, indignitas. Its most prominent
meaning, however, is force, power or might. In many passages in On
Secular Authority Luther uses the term interchangeably with Oberkeit;
he might indeed have used it for the title of the work. But what potestas
would conceal, and Oberkeit partly conceals, is that Gewalt can mean –
and often in the text does mean – mere coercion, force, or violence. For
what is crucial, given Luther’s Augustinian cast of thought, is not that
power should be exercised legitimately and by duly authorized office-
holders (potestates), but that someone should use force (Gewalt) to
prevent the ungodly from tearing each other to pieces, even if those
who use such force are no better than those against whom they use it.
God’s will and purposes are served whether rulers act from benevolent
or wicked motives. ‘Frogs need storks.’ Nor was the distinction (of
which Luther was of course perfectly well aware) between an office and
its occupant of any consequence: it is enough for Christians to know
that power itself is of divine ordinance, and provided rulers do not use
their power to ‘hurl souls into hell’, one person will do as well as
another for a ruler. Calvin took much the same view. Thus Luther’s
original (1522) translation of the crucial scriptural passage Romans
13.1–3 – much of Protestant political thought may be read, and indeed
presented itself, as a commentary on this text – was: ‘Let everyone be
subject to the Oberkeit and power (Gewalt), for there is no power
(Gewalt) but from God. But the power (Gewalt) which is in every place
[this seems to mean: whatever Gewalt is to be found anywhere] . . . ’ The
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1544 version, however, reads: 'Let every person be subject to the Oberkeit, which has power (Gewalt) over him. For there is no Oberkeit but from God. But wherever there is Oberkeit . . .' The version Luther offered in On Secular Authority is almost identical to the 1522 text. Thus it seems that there was a distinction for Luther between Gewalt and Oberkeit; although he could use them interchangeably, the latter had more of a connotation of legitimacy, the former of force. In 1523 the distinction was a matter of indifference to him, but it was force and coercion he was concerned to stress.

It is in this connection that ‘the sword’ should be mentioned. For Luther this is the symbol, emblem and substance of secular authority. This was conventional enough. And of course there is a Christian tradition of embroidering on certain biblical texts which mention the ‘sword’. Most of these are prominently displayed in Luther’s text; some are conspicuous by their absence in both Luther and Calvin; e.g. Matthew 26.52; Isaiah 2.4 (a favourite with the ‘Radical Reformation’ in its quietistic phase); Luke 22.38. But however conventional the usage, metaphors are never innocent, and there is no doubt that Luther meant the ‘sword’ reference most literally; it is not the Judge, but the Executioner who epitomizes ruling for Luther.

Calvin: Institution of the Christian Religion

Jean Calvin (1509–64), a former student of law and already the author of a commentary on Seneca’s On Clemency, was obliged to flee his native France for Basle in 1534 because of his evangelical convictions. In 1536 he published the first (Latin) edition of his Institution of the Christian Religion. The book was an immediate success. Luther himself welcomed it, and it is clear from the book itself that Calvin’s conversion had taken place under Lutheran auspices. There is, however, no unequivocal evidence that Calvin had ever read On Secular Authority (see p. xxiv below). The part of the book that is offered in translation here began life in that edition as the concluding section of the final chapter: ‘On Christian Liberty, Ecclesiastical Authority (potestas), and Civil Government (administratio)’.

The linking of these three themes and the choice of ‘civil government’ for the peroration of the book were signs of the times. So is the Epistle Dedicatory, addressed to the then king of France, François I, but
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retained in the editions subsequent to his death. In that Epistle Calvin assured the addressee (and with him all rulers) of the orthodoxy, piety and political dutifulness of his Protestant subjects. The rest of the book scrupulously avoided anything connected with the polity, until the last chapter. There, the main point Calvin was concerned to convey about the bedrock evangelical doctrine of Christian liberty was that it was entirely compatible with the most perfect submission to temporal authority. Obedience is also the dominant theme of the last section, ‘On Civil Government’. For, although the very last paragraph of the section, and therefore of the whole book, exhorts Christians to ‘obey God rather than men’, the rest had been at pains to stress the Christian duty of obedience to rulers, irrespective of the quality of their titles, their conduct or their religion. If disobedience to ungodly commands becomes inevitable, it must take the form of prayer, supplication, suffering or exile, but not rebellion.

Calvin was a second-generation reformer. He began work only when reformed religion was already dividing into denominations, sometimes bitterly hostile to each other; during his career the Romanists were beginning to put their house in order and the Council of Trent finished its deliberations in 1563. The military fortunes of the German Protestants were at a low ebb in the 1540s, and in France the kings became as hostile to the ‘new religion’ as the Emperor Charles V. To compound these difficulties, Romanists delighted in tarring the Magistral Reformers with the brush of anabaptism; and sectarians, indeed, continued to dog every step of the orthodox reformers. Shortly before Calvin composed the first Institution, a horrified Christendom had seen the rise and apocalypse of an anabaptist venture in millenial rule at Münster (1533–5), an insurrection terminated only by the combined forces of Catholic and Protestant princes, and with exemplary savagery. Peasant wars, religious wars and civil upheavals were all alike blamed by the papists on ‘the Fifth Gospel’, which had originated in Luther’s satanic pride and insubmission (however euphemized into the doctrine of Christian Liberty) and which was now bearing fruit according to the character of the tree.

These charges were hard to rebut. By this time, the German Lutherans (with Luther’s somewhat reluctant assent) had indeed devised a justification for resisting their supreme overlord the Emperor both politically and militarily. Equally, the Reformers had become anxious to restore some element of clerical independence. But reformed
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religion was now, if anything, more acutely dependent than ever on the protection of rulers against Romanists without and sectarians within.

In the circumstances, insistence on the duty of political obedience was imperative, but equally any statement of that duty had to be a qualified one. Calvin’s original strategy, as a reading of the text which brackets out the post-1536 additions makes clear, closely resembled that of Luther’s in 1523. On the one hand, he inculcated an (if anything) even more extreme doctrine of political obedience and passivity; on the other, he tried to safeguard true religion by means of Luther’s distinction between the jurisdictions of secular and spiritual governments, allotting to rulers charge over a ‘merely external’ righteousness, while leaving true piety and religion to God and an unspecified ‘Church’. And Calvin’s 1536 discussion of the Church confined itself almost exclusively to a congenial and conventional assault upon the ‘tyranny’ of the Romanists, instead of broaching the divisive and intractable matter of the public order of a reformed Church.

In one passage, Calvin went further and cautiously advanced the doctrine devised by Lutherans to justify war against the Emperor: if a civil order of laws and institutions (a politia/police) provides for them, ‘popular magistrates’ may collectively resist ‘tyrants’. Lutherans had said ‘lesser magistrates’. Calvin hazarded the view that modern Estates General, Reichstage or Parliaments may be institutions of this sort, corresponding to Spartan Ephors and Roman Tribunes of the People. Here he was relying on the distinction between public persons, for whom political action was legitimate and indeed a duty, and private persons, to whom the doctrine of ‘passive obedience’ (a significant sixteenth-century euphemism, which clearly meant passive disobedience) continued to apply with undiminished rigour. ‘Popular magistrates’ are public persons. In his later work, Calvin added nothing more to the doctrine of resistance; the momentous developments it received in Calvinist circles are the work of his followers in France, Holland and elsewhere. However, the interpretation of ‘tyranny’ and of what was the actual police of (for example) France, left a great deal of latitude. Calvin’s growing antipathy to monarchy also left its mark on the Institution.

But despite his conventionally Lutheran distinctions between Christian liberty and civil obedience, true and external justice, spiritual and civil governments, Calvin also from the first allotted to magistrates the policing of ‘idolatry’, ‘sacrilege’, ‘blasphemy’, and other public affronts.
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to religion (in other words popery and anabaptism); this was by then also Luther’s doctrine. Equally, he was careful to distinguish between popish, tyrannical impositions, and just and acceptable laws necessary for the good order of the Church, as for any other human association, and to be enforced by rulers.

Changes in Calvin’s thinking are first manifested in the second edition of the Institution of 1539, the (first) French translation of 1541, and in the most fundamental revision of all for our purposes, the (Latin) edition of 1543. By this time Calvin, in company with others, had reformed and reorganized the Church in Geneva, until his expulsion in 1538; had had first-hand experience at Strasbourg of sympathetic magistrates, of a well-ordered Church in a free city, and of the diplomacy, ecclesiastical and civil, of the reformed polities with each other and with the Romanists; he had been restored in late 1541 as leading ‘pastor’ of Geneva and had been able to implement the main lines of a reformed Church there, with the sometimes reluctant but indispensable cooperation of the magistracy. The rest of his life was spent in Geneva, participating in its ecclesiastical and civil life, consolidating its reformation and specifically the authority of the ‘Venerable Company of Pastors’, a collegially organized clerical body charged with governing Geneva in its spiritual and ecclesiastical aspects. All this, in Calvin’s interpretation of the lessons to be learned, left its mark on the Institution and in his voluminous scriptural commentaries. It should be borne in mind that when he wrote the first edition of the Institution, he had no experience of managing church affairs; unlike the first generation of Reformers, he had not even been a priest in the Old Church. Some of the salient changes appear as alterations to the text of the first edition; some others cannot be found in the passages translated here and are therefore briefly rehearsed below.

Thus from the Institution of 1541 onwards, the ‘invisible’ Church composed exclusively of the Elect almost completely recedes from view. All Calvin’s interest now came to centre on the ‘visible’ Church, its organization, authority and activities. The original last chapter was broken up into three separate chapters; a discussion of the concrete organizational features of ‘visible’ Churches was added. The ‘political’ chapter (which is what the original section ‘On political administraio’ had now become) ceased to be the last chapter. But in the last edition of the book, the only one with whose structure Calvin professed himself satisfied, it again became the last chapter. Here the ecclesiastical

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section was again part of the same ‘book’, Book IV: ‘Of the Outward Means of Salvation’, chs. 1–12. But Calvin’s ecclesiology now encompassed a comprehensive account of what he deemed to be the scripturally ordained order of a true visible Church, as well as a greatly expanded anti-papist polemic, an activity to which he remained addicted.

The reformed Church, from 1543 onwards, is again seen to be ‘governed’ by a ‘clergy’ – Calvin did not hesitate to use such terms – with a degree of independence and authority. All the other Magistral Reformers had recognized by about 1530 that they had given far more to secular authority than they had ever intended. The recruitment of ecclesiastical personnel and the supervision of the doctrine, piety and morals of the congregation, so it was now generally believed, ought at least in some measure to be in the hands of a Reformed ministry, and not simply one of the things which secular rulers attended to, or neglected.

Any attempt to raise the standing, independence and power of the clergy was of course bound to meet with resistance from ostensibly evangelical rulers and congregations, all seasoned anticlericals. A clear distinction had therefore to be drawn between the ‘tyranny’ of popes and prelates, and the rightful authority of a godly company of Reformed pastors. In any case, it was a genuine concern of Calvin to avoid any recurrence of the corruption of the Gospel. He appears to have seen the avoidance of any semblance of monarchy as the principal organizational preservative against ecclesiastical tyranny. The alternative was a collegial, corporate ministry, permitting nothing more monarchical than a primus inter pares; speaking in the language of political theory, the best form for a Church (and more important, Calvin would have added, the form ordained by Scripture) is aristocracy or the mixed polity, compounded of aristocratic and democratic components. The more godly the congregation, the more reason for a democratic (or in ecclesiastical terms, congregational) component; there was, at any rate, no justification for stripping congregations of every vestige of authority in the supervision of the clergy. For, just as an aristocracy’s individual members are to police each other, so aristocrats collectively need to be policed, just as subjects collectively need to be policed by the collectivity of rulers.

Such reasoning was of course equally applicable to the polity; indeed, a striking aspect of Calvin’s ecclesiology is the extent to which it
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is suffused with political terminology; the whole of the doctrine of the mixed polity was derivable, and in fact derived from, classical and medieval political thought. But it was entirely idle for Calvin to specify the best (indeed the only scriptural, and therefore the only ultimately tolerable) order of the Church, if he did not at the same time reflect about how a civil polity might be ordered which would allow the instituting and functioning of such an ecclesiastical order. But certain difficulties stood in the way of a forthright formulation on Calvin’s part of an inferential argument about the best structure of a polity.

Just as Luther inclined to the providentialist view that Romans 13 refers to whomever we find equipped with power, and that Christians have no business curiously inspecting the titles of those they find in authority, so did Calvin. In the 1536 Institution he had even denied that it was legitimate for private men to discuss amongst themselves what would be the best form of polity: God’s decree establishes different forms in different places. But in subsequent editions, Calvin himself introduced (in section 8) an explicit if circumspect advocacy of the aristocratic or mixed form of polity. Thus the best form of civil polity precisely parallels the divinely ordained form of ecclesiastical polity. His hostility to monarchy also became more and more apparent, although it is to be found in the ecclesiological chapters of the Institution and in his scriptural commentaries, rather than in the political chapter. (A section from the first edition which had argued a divine predilection for monarchy, however, remained; it was not Calvin’s way ever to retract anything he had written.) He also made clear that what he opposed was not political speculation as such, but seditious discussions on the part of private men.

What is more, he now virtually abandoned the attempt to distinguish an area of secular matters, over which secular rulers were to have jurisdiction, replacing it with a much more defensible distinction between the means employed by secular and spiritual governors respectively. And in section 9 he insisted that the competence of magistrates extends to both tables of the Decalogue, in other words, to the policing of man’s relations with God as well as of those with his fellow man: upholding God’s honour is their principal duty.

All this presupposed (a) a vigorous and independent Church, with a vigorous collegial clergy acting on its behalf; and (b) godly magistrates. Calvin’s difficulty was that he needed a godly magistracy to second the ‘spiritual’ weapons employed by the clergy on recalcitrant congre-
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gations: although piety would have forbidden him to admit it, he never for a moment supposed that merely spiritual weapons would be enough; more palpable back-up from secular punishments and threats was indispensable to the ‘building up’ of the Church in the world. But a magistracy equipped with such power and legitimacy was well placed to interfere in the Church. What was needed, therefore, was a secular authority limited in its capacity to do evil, but not inhibited in any way in doing the work of God, with agencies to act as guarantors and sureties for its good behaviour. No such authority is attainable, for this would require the sanitation of power. Nevertheless, in so far as something could be done along these lines, Calvin did it.

It is possible to give for Calvin what it was impossible to give for Luther, a brief summary of his political theology. In the universe there is only one absolute and unconditionally authoritative imperium, maiestas, puissance: namely God’s. All rightful authority in the world is directly or indirectly derived from God’s. Unlike his followers and unlike the much more philosophically sophisticated Jesuit theologians and philosophers who opposed them and Divine Right alike, Calvin was not interested in the precise manner in which this derivative authority is attained; he speaks of it as being ‘delegated’, as ‘legation’ (the authority of a legate), as exercised by vice-gerents, ‘representatives’ (vicarii, vices), or lieutenants (place-holders or -takers). In connection with ecclesiastical authority, Calvin also speaks of ‘envoys’ or ‘ambassadors’. But in each case his language recalls the metaphor of the relationship between an emperor and his subordinates, the point of the metaphor being of course to stress the extreme conditionality of the authority of the latter on the former. To denote the function of both civil and ecclesiastical governors, Calvin employs the words ministerium, administratio, officium, functio and munus, which incidentally echo fairly exactly Luther’s terms Dienst and Amt. Such terms were highly congenial to Calvin, for duty is the key-note of his ethic. All authority in the world is an administering, doing the the work of someone else, under instruction. Calvin’s preferred terms are ministerium, administratio; his very choice of words emphasizes that all authority in this world is conditional, limited and derivative. Conversely, he does on occasion use the term imperium interchangeably with dominatio, when his point is to stress the illegitimate extent of authority claimed by princes and popes; dominatio is here interchangeable with ‘tyranny’. The function of such language is, of course, not in the least to minimize

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the significance of rightful authority. On the contrary, no more ‘majestic’ authority than one derived from God can be imagined. Rather, what is being said is that for as long as such authority confines itself to its proper ‘office’, it is invested with God’s own majesty and dignity. But the moment magistrates exceed their measure of authority, they become (at least in respect of those particular actions, and perhaps wholly) akin to robbers, usurpers and invaders.

To designate a well-ordered polity, Calvin uses the term ‘Christian polity’, which arguably would have been a contradiction in terms for Luther. Since a Christian polity is characterized by a two-fold government, a double ‘ministry’ of magistrates and pastors, both deriving their authority from God, and both charged with governing the same body of persons, the only possible relationship between them is one of cooperation and mutual restraint, ideally complemented by some measure of restraint imposed on both in turn by the congregation/citizensry. The end at which this cooperation aims is the ‘building up’ (aedificatio, a Pauline term) of God’s kingdom in the world.

‘Restraint’ is in some ways the notion best fitted to characterize Calvin’s political theology and ecclesiology. Fallen humanity is constitutionally prone to wickedness, for which Calvin had a wide range of terms which modern English cannot match; the passions in each man are conceived by Calvin to resemble a boiling cauldron or a smouldering fire. Where there is no external restraint (as is notably the case with kings), the fire ‘breaks out’ and ‘rages’ (to use Calvin’s and Luther’s favourite terms for the conduct of the wicked and tyrants). The imposition of a ‘bridle’ or ‘brake’ is therefore indispensable. But restraining is not enough: for there is God’s work to be done, and people must be directed to it. So that, whereas Luther’s metaphor for the polity is the ‘sword’, Calvin’s is the school or the ‘bridle’: the two-fold government imposes ‘discipline’, direction and restraint together.
A note on the translations

Texts used for these translations

For Luther's Von Weltlicher Oberkeit I have used the text in the Clemen edition.¹ I have also referred to the admirable East German students' edition, particularly valuable for its contextual information and footnotes,² and the modernized German version.³ I have compared my translation, once completed, with that of J. J. Schindel.⁴

Luther never made the book accessible to a wider public by means of a Latin version, but he did not repudiate it either, for it was reprinted many times with his authority and he also refers to it in 1526 in his Whether Soldiers too can be in a State of Grace. An accurate and elegant Latin translation was made by Johann Lonitzer (Lonicerus) in 1525;⁵ it tells us what an intelligent sixteenth-century Lutheran made of Luther, but has no independent authority. I have been unable to discover whether Luther was in any way directly associated with it; Lonitzer had formerly been his amanuensis. At any rate Latin editions of Luther's collected writings in the sixteenth century did not include it, whereas German collections always included Von Weltlicher Oberkeit. If Calvin

⁴ In J. Dillenberger (ed.), Martin Luther Selections (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1961), and (in a revised version) in vol. xlv of Luther's Works (St Louis, Concordia, and Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), pp. 75–130. This is a very competent translation.
⁵ De sublimiore mundi potestate, M. Lutheri Liber, donatus latimisate a Ioanne Loniceru, no place of publication ((Strasbourg), 1525). Lonitzer had been Luther's secretary, and was then teaching in Strasbourg.

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was familiar with the work, it would have been in Lonitzer's translation. Another (partial) translation was made by Sebastien Châtelion (Castellio), and reprinted pseudonymously as a plea for toleration: Martini Luteri (some versions had Aretii Cathari) de magistratu seculari, secunda pars, in Martinus Bellius (pseud.), De haereticis an sini perseuendi . . . doctorum virum . . . sententiae, Magdeburgi apud Georgium Rausch [pseud., in fact Basle,] 1554.

For Calvin's Latin Institutio Christianae religionis my text is that of P. Barth and W. Niesel,6 collated with the French Institution de la Religion Chrétienne in the Corpus Reformatorum7 edition. I have consulted the excellent edition and translation of J. T. McNeill and F. L. Battles8 as well as the translation (done in 1561) by Thomas Norton, who worked (competently) with the 1559 Latin edition.9 The much-reprinted Beveridge translation is mostly useless.

Aims of these translations

The brilliance of both Luther and Calvin as translators can only occasion despondency in lesser mortals attempting the same task. Their homogeneity of style and elegance of expression are quite beyond my capacity; all I have sought to provide is a text which does not constantly cause the reader to stumble, falter or pause, but which is entirely free of anachronism. I postulate readers who know that translation is ultimately impossible; who, although they cannot manage the originals, are prepared to acquire a familiarity with technical terms; and whose zeal will occasionally lead them to refer to the original. For such readers I have included in the Luther translation page references to the Clemen edition. Where my author uses the same term to clamp together a passage or perhaps the whole structure of his reflections (as for example Luther's Oberkeit and weltlich, or Calvin's politia/polic), but relies on the range of connotation which their term has but no English term can match, I have not hesitated to include the original

9 The Institution of Christian Religion . . . according to the Author's Last Edition . . . (London: Reinolde Wolfe and Richarde Harison, 1561). 'Last' means most recent (i.e. 1559); Calvin died in 1564.
A note on the translations

term in brackets in the text, in modernized spelling in the case of Luther.

Stylistically, Luther’s piece has proved particularly hard to handle, for there is no modern English genre which corresponds to it even approximately: although written and intended as a pamphlet, it reads like a sermon and is so described by Luther himself in the text. He could therefore afford to labour points to death (as it seems to us), be by turns folksy and erudite in the same paragraph, buttonhole his readers (hearsers?), use free-floating demonstrative pronouns and adjectives (‘this’, ‘that’, ‘it’) without a second thought, and achieve precision by successive approximations of expression. A translation that reports all this faithfully, as the present one does, cannot fail to remind a reader that the original was not written by one of our contemporaries.

An approximate genre for Calvin’s Institution of the Christian Religion, a treatise written in scholarly language, is admittedly not impossible to find, but it presents other difficulties which are just as intractable. There are two final versions: the Latin of 1559, and the French of 1560. The latter is so free a rendering that the editors of the Corpus Reformatorum and other scholars until well into this century held it to be the work of an amanuensis, and (according to some) not a very competent one at that. That view has now been decently buried, but the evidence adduced for it graphically underlines the discrepancies between the two versions. Both, however, are equally authentic and authoritative. Therefore, although I am offering a translation of the Latin version, I have kept the French in view in every line, signalling the more striking variations by means of a footnote (where a line or a whole passage is involved) or in the body of the text (where it is a matter of a word or two).

In the main, these discrepancies simply reflect the difference between sixteenth-century French and humanist Latin, and also the different audiences to which the two versions are addressed. The French version presupposed a less learned public and is therefore both more colloquial and in places more explicit. Presumably it was, for example, French colloquial usage which induced Calvin to refer systematically to ‘Saint Peter’ or ‘Saint Paul’ in the French versions, but simply to ‘Paul’ or ‘Peter’ in the Latin ones. Latin, on the other hand allowed Calvin to indulge his humanist passion for superlatives, emphatic words, pleonasm, copulative, doubltets, litotes. and for ‘dignified’ expression; he was reluctant to allow a verb to slip by without

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adorning it (as it seemed to him) with an adverb and seems to have thought nouns naked unless decently clad with some adjective; and no Old or New Testament figure ever ‘says’ anything: they ‘declare’, ‘testify’, ‘bear witness’. In addition, an inflected language permits the almost limitless accumulation of dependent clauses and sub-clauses, especially when abetted by the use of the ablative absolute and the gerund. Sixteenth-century French was relatively tolerant of such things, just as it also viewed the free-floating demonstrative pronoun and adjective with equanimity, but it is closer to modern English in its structure and sensibility. And where Calvin himself ignored some copulative, pleonasm, emphatic word etc., or changed the structure of his sentences and paragraphs, or was indifferent about which precise word to use, when rendering his Latin into French, I have felt free to follow his example. I must admit that at times I have simply abandoned the unequal struggle to find an English-sounding equivalent for some humanist excrecence, and have simply taken the French. Conscience of course obliged me to signal the fact.

The 1559/1560 Institutions are the last of a long line of editions and translations which had begun in 1536. Calvin sometimes added entire new chapters and even recast the whole structure of the book, but more usually he used existing paragraphs from the previous version and interpolated additions, qualifications and amplifications. To allow readers to follow the movement of Calvin’s opinions over the years, I have noted the dating of the most substantial interpolations. In the chapter translated here, the order of paragraphs remained unchanged.

Finally, both my authors fashioned their own translations from the Septuagint and the Hebrew for their copious citations from Scripture, but the old Church Vulgate was as much a part of the furniture of their minds as the Authorized Version (and for some of us, the Douay-Rheims-Challoner) is of ours. My translations are mostly taken from the AV, itself the product of men nurtured on the Genevan Bible, but depart from it where necessary. The practice of using modern Bible translations, as if this were what Luther or Calvin understood the Bible to say, is indefensible.
Chronology

1483 Martin Luther born at Eisleben in the Electorate of Saxony on 10 November.
1491 Birth of Ignatius Loyola, founder of the Jesuits.
1502 Frederick Elector of Saxony founds University of Wittenberg.
1507 Luther ordained priest, having entered Augustinian Order in 1505.
1509 Jean Calvin born at Noyon in Picardy on 10 July. Erasmus publishes The Praise of Folly.
1512 Luther visits Rome January/February.
1513 Probable date of the composition of Machiavelli’s The Prince, first published in 1531.
1515 Luther’s Wittenberg lectures on St Paul's Epistle to the Romans.
1516 First edition of Thomas More’s Utopia.
1517 Luther publishes his Ninety-five Theses.
1518 Luther achieves fame/notoriety, refuses to recant.
1520 Luther publishes On Good Works. Papal bull Exsurge Domine against Luther. Luther publishes The Papacy at Rome, Appeal to the German Nobility, On the Babylonian Captivity of the Church and The Freedom of a Christian.
1521 Melanchton publishes the Loci Communes, a Lutheran theological treatise. Luther excommunicated by Leo X and outlawed
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at the Imperial Diet at Worms. Riots and iconoclasm at Wittenberg.

1522 Luther’s Faithful Warning to all Christians to guard against riots and disturbances. Publication of his German translation of the New Testament.

1523 Luther publishes The Right and Power of a Christian Community to judge all doctrine and appoint and dismiss Teachers and On Secular Authority.

1524–5 German Peasants’ War. Müntzer preaches the coming end of the world.

1525 Luther publishes Against the Heavenly Prophets, Admonition to Peace, Against the Robbing and Murdering Hordes of Peasants, and An Open Letter about the Harsh Book against the Peasants. Marries Katharina von Bora. Zwingli publishes On True and False Religion. Erasmus’ anti-Lutheran On the Freedom of the Will; Luther replies with On the Enslaved Will.

1526 Luther publishes Whether Soldiers too can be in a State of Grace.

1527 Quietist Anabaptists of Switzerland and Lower Germany publish the Schleitheim Articles.

1528 Imperial mandate threatens death penalty against Anabaptists

1529 Imperial Diet at Speyer, where Lutheran estates first given the name ‘Protestants’.

1530 After failure of Emperor Charles V’s attempts to reimpose Catholic orthodoxy at Imperial Diet of Augsburg, where Lutherans present their Augsburg Confession, Lutheran princes unite in the Schmalkaldic League against the Emperor and Catholic princes.

1531 Death of Zwingli in the battle of Kappel between Catholic and Protestant Swiss cantons. Luther publishes Warning to his dear Germans.

1532 Calvin publishes his Commentary on Seneca’s ‘De Clementia’.

1534 Calvin flees France for Basle after the Affair of the Placards and the subsequent persecution of French ‘Lutherans’. First complete edition of Luther’s German Bible.

1534–5 Anabaptists take over Münster; their ‘Kingdom’ overthrown by joint Protestant–Catholic forces.

1535 Geneva declares reformation.


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1537 Calvin writes the Confession of Faith and the Catechism for Geneva.
1538 Calvin expelled from Geneva; minister to the French congregation at Strasbourg.
1539 New, extended edition of the Institution. First volume of complete works of Luther.
1540 Calvin marries Idelette de Bure. Papacy formally establishes the Jesuit Order. Calvin's Reply to Cardinal Sadolet's Letter to the Genevans and his Commentary on St Paul's Epistle to the Romans.
1542 Calvin publishes his Psychopannychia.
1543 Substantially revised edition of the Institution (Latin; French translation 1545).
1544 Calvin's Brief Admonition against the Anabaptists.
1545 Council of Trent opens 13 December. Luther publishes his last anti-papal tract: Against the Papacy at Rome, founded by the Devil.
1546 Luther dies at Eisleben 18 February.
1547 Emperor defeats the Schmalkaldic League at Mühlenberg and attempts to impose a religious compromise, the Interim. Calvin's Acts of the Council of Trent with The Antidote and his Adultero-German Interim.
1548 Calvin publishes his Commentaries on St Paul's Epistles to the Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians. French edition the same year.
1549 The Zurich Consensus on the Matter of the Sacrament between Jean Calvin and the Church of Zurich.
1551 Calvin's collected Commentaries on all the Epistles of St Paul.
1553 Servetus executed at Geneva for heresy. Theodore de Bèze (Calvin's collaborator and later successor) publishes The Punishment of Heretics by the Civil Magistrate.
1554 Sebastien Châteillon (Castellio) publishes Whether Heretics are to be Persecuted.
1555 Peace of Augsburg stabilizes existing territorial divisions