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978-1-107-05274-1 - The Cambridge Companion to Christian Political Theology

Edited by Craig Hovey and Elizabeth Phillips

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Interest in political theology has surged in recent years, and this accessible volume provides a focused overview of the field. Many are asking serious questions about religious faith in secular societies, the origin and function of democratic polities, worldwide economic challenges, the shift of Christianity's center of gravity to the global south, and anxieties related to bold and even violent assertions of theologically determined political ideas. In fourteen original essays, authors examine Christian political theology in order to clarify the contemporary discourse and some of its most important themes and issues. These include up-to-date, critical engagements with historical figures like Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, and Immanuel Kant; discussions of how the Bible functions theopolitically; and introductions to key movements such as liberation theology, Catholic social teaching, and radical orthodoxy. An invaluable resource for students and scholars in theology, the *Companion* will also be beneficial to those in history, philosophy, and politics.

Craig Hovey is Associate Professor of Religion at Ashland University and Executive Director of the Ashland Center for Nonviolence. His publications include *Bearing True Witness: Truthfulness in Christian Practice*, *Nietzsche and Theology* (2011) and *To Share in the Body: A Theology of Martyrdom for Today's Church* (2008).

Elizabeth Phillips is Tutor in Theology and Ethics at Westcott House, an Anglican theological college affiliated with the University of Cambridge. She is the author of *Political Theology: A Guide for the Perplexed* (2012).

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Preface

Three things are undeniable when it comes to discussions of the contemporary state of political theology. First, there is a significant resurgence in interest in political theology within the academy. Increasing numbers of books are being published in the field, and increasing numbers of political theology courses are being offered. Second, this increased interest has not arisen from a single locus, and its motivations and expressions are numerous. Differing inquiries carried out under the same name, “political theology,” are specializations within theology, political science, political philosophy, Continental philosophy, Critical Theory, and history of philosophy. An online search for syllabi in political theology brings up courses offered in universities and seminaries, by theologians, political scientists, philosophers, and historians. Third, if there is any way to draw together all these differing types of political theology under one heading, having something vaguely to do with how the theological and the political impinge upon one another, we see that this is not an area of interest limited to the academy. Questions surrounding the political assertions of various fundamentalisms, secularism and secularization, real and perceived conflicts between the political values of the Christian West and global Islam, ongoing rumblings of postcolonial struggles – these and many more – feature routinely in the headlines and in popular conversation. Our historical moment is ripe for the kind of sustained exploration of theopolitical questions we seek to address here.

This slim volume, however, is not an attempt to address the entire breadth of this resurgence or of all the relevant current issues. Nor have we attempted a comprehensive introduction to all the major sources, thinkers, and doctrines of political theology. We commend *The Blackwell Companion to Political Theology*, edited by Peter Scott and William T. Cavanaugh, as an excellent and relatively comprehensive introductory companion of that sort.

In this volume, our particular interest is in political theology as a focus of Christian theology – an inquiry carried out by Christian

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theologians in relation to the political, where the political is defined broadly to include the various ways in which humans order common life. The structure of this volume is itself meant to make an argument about that field of inquiry. Because of the focus of this argument, many relevant thinkers, movements, and issues have been excluded. We could not hope to make a coherent argument about all of global political theology, and have in reality only addressed those political theologies outside the English-speaking West that have impinged most directly and influentially upon academic theology in the English-speaking West. We have not attended sufficiently to Africa, Southeast Asia, or the political theologies of Eastern Orthodoxy.

In addition, due to the length of this volume, thinkers, movements, and topics that deserve attention in their own right are dealt with in relation to one another. Black theology and feminist theology in particular deserve their own chapters. Including a chapter on eschatology and not on the other key Christian doctrines is also a clear limitation. Finally, due to our own limitations as editors, we are certain that other oversights and unintentional exclusions will be called to our attention in the reception of this volume. We welcome these questions as these are the conversations that keep scholarship moving forward and that make Christian theology a living tradition.

The argument of this volume about the contemporary discipline of political theology relates to how it has emerged over the past century and the types of questions it now addresses in its various forms. In Part I, we explore how the discipline has taken shape in recent decades. We contend that the current shape of political theology is best understood as having been most influenced by three mid-twentieth-century streams: the distinctive political theology of Europe following World War II, liberation theology's prominence in Latin America as well as in the liberative politics of black and feminist theologies, and public theology's quest for wide, popular appeal in the diverse communities of the United States.

Since its ancient beginnings, the political has always been an unmistakable and inextricable thread within Christian theology and practice. Yet, as the various threads of theology were picked apart in the specializations of the modern academy, and as the various settlements of the church and the modern state were negotiated in Christian practice, something of the political thread seemed to have dropped somehow. In the mid-to-late twentieth century, diverse Christian voices began to say that Christianity must regain its political presence in relation to specific problems. German theologians began to question the

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inwardness of European Christianity, and grappled with the complicity of this Christianity with the politics of the Third Reich. In Chapter 1, Jürgen Moltmann, one of these pioneering political theologians, gives his account of the emergence and task of political theology.

However, from the mid-twentieth century, Europe was no longer the uncontested center of Christian theology in the west. In other locations and contexts, liberative political theologies also arose in roughly the same period. Black theologians in the United States began to question the politics of white Christianity, and to question how Christianity became co-opted to support slavery and segregation. Women theologians questioned the sexism of Christian doctrine and practice, bringing into theology the critical insight of feminism that the personal is the political. And Catholic laypeople and clergy began to question the Christianity of Latin America, which propped up oppressive regimes and was voiceless in the face of extreme poverty and suffering. In Chapter 2, Miguel De La Torre discusses the origins and continuing work of liberation theologies, showing the distinctive ways that these advance from the perspectives of oppressed peoples.

Nearer the end of the twentieth century, new political theologies arose in North Atlantic contexts in response to concerns about secularization, the loss of Christianity's public voice, questions about religious pluralism, and hopes for the revitalization of civil society. In Chapter 3, Hak Joon Lee describes the impetus for public theology, especially its distinctive and determined attempt to shed Christianity's preference for "sectarian" ways of framing social and political issues at the expense of a wider moral consensus.

In each of these three streams – with differing social catalysts, sources, interlocutors, and themes – theologians sought to recapture some dimension of politics that they identified as lost or endangered in the theology and practice of Christianity in their contemporary contexts. Yet the political had never been absent from Christian practice, nor had it disappeared in theology in the preceding century. Political theology must be understood in relation to two related and overlapping discourses. In Catholic thought, politics has been central in Catholic Social Teaching, while in Protestant theology, political issues have been approached through the lens of social ethics. In Chapters 4 and 5, Lisa Sowle Cahill and D. Stephen Long, respectively, relate political theology to these two discourses.

The decades surrounding the turn of the century have seen both a continuation of the three original streams of political theology as well as significant shifts that have changed the agenda for other political

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theologians. We understand three movements in particular as both the inheritors of the work of the first generation of political theologians in the three streams, as well as key critics of some aspects of that generation's assumptions and agendas: postliberalism, Radical Orthodoxy, and post-colonialism. In Chapter 6, Daniel Bell argues that Radical Orthodoxy is a postliberal political theology. In Chapter 7, Susan Abraham outlines the challenges faced by theologies that attempt to display and reflect on freedom after European colonialism.

There are some questions that cut across all these distinctions between schools of thought, movements of particular moments, and overlapping discourses. We address three types of questions in Part II. First, there are the questions of how contemporary political theologies relate to the traditional sources of the Christian tradition. Primary amongst these is, of course, Christian scripture. In Chapter 8, Christopher Rowland explores the retrieval of the political in biblical studies, focusing especially on eschatology and politics in the New Testament. Outside of scripture, the two most influential, critiqued, and debated sources are the works of Augustine and Aquinas. In fact, many have argued or assumed that there are two basic forms of Christian political theology: Augustinian and Thomistic. In Chapter 9, Eric Gregory and Joseph Clair argue instead that there are important and neglected resonances between the political theologies of Augustine and Aquinas, and propose a contemporary Augustinian-Thomism.

Second, there are the questions raised by the pressing issues of contemporary politics. We address only three of what could be a much more extensive list in a longer volume, which would certainly include contemporary issues related to the environment, race, violence, sexuality, and gender, to name only a few. In Chapter 10, Craig Hovey investigates the theological case for versions of democracy, especially in light of its contemporary liberal forms. In Chapter 11, Philip Goodchild considers the relevance of Christian political teachings to contemporary capitalism and the global economy. And in Chapter 12, William Cavanaugh considers the perspectives of those who consider political theology to be a dangerous threat.

Finally, we argue that political theology must be assessed in terms not only of its diverse approaches and the various issues that it approaches, but in terms of its ends. In Chapter 13, Peter Leithart considers the political *telos* of good rule and the obligations of political sovereignty to use power in service to public rather than private goods. And in the final chapter, Elizabeth Phillips argues for the interrelatedness of eschatology, apocalyptic, and creation in Christian theopolitics.