



Abstract from Article

SAMUEL RUTHERFORD AND PURITAN POLITICAL THEORY

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Abstract

In the course of his lifetime, Samuel Rutherford, like many Puritan divines, was a prolific writer. The Volume entitled *Lex Rex* or *The Law and the Prince* is one of the more substantial volumes, and certainly one of the most comprehensive expressions of Calvinistic political theory. It is also one of the keystones in the development of modern political theory. Understandably, it has been studiously avoided by secular political philosophers, for it is unabashedly Christian and Calvinistic. Less understandably, however, it has also been avoided or overlooked by many of the neo-Puritan movement of our own day. The intention of this article is to represent Rutherford's *Lex Rex* to those interested in Calvinistic reformation, in the hope that we can profit from the wisdom of our forefathers in the area of political theology. We are all captives, to a greater or lesser extent, of the age in which we live. This is just as true of Rutherford as it is of us. But Rutherford's age was a Christian age; ours is not. He wrote in an age when Calvinistic political theory was reaching its zenith; from the time of Rutherford onwards, a secularizing trend set in which effectively emasculated the political theology of Reformation. We now live in an age where humanistic political consensus of our day has come to full flower and has imprisoned the minds of even God's children. Most Calvinists in our day tend to be conservative in their political and economic outlook. But they have no theology to underpin their conservatism. They have either a world and life view which is nebulously connected to the Scriptures, or one which is encrusted in meaningless slogans. The result is that the doctrines of either the Left or the Humanistic Right (depending on one's personal proclivities) are poured into Calvinistic political theology. Fortunately there seems to be a growing number of Calvinists, at least in the United States, who would prefer, if they have to deal with humanism, to have it "straight" rather than served up in pseudo-Christian garb. Then there are those Calvinists who spurn political and economic theology, preferring to hold that the Scriptures do not speak clearly or authoritatively in these areas, and that one should look to "common grace" in developing these fields. Such men argue that it is the better part of wisdom to keep quiet in such matters, at least in public. Both popular "Calvinistic" alternatives – the "common grace" approach and the "gut reaction" approach – have resulted in a thorough Babylonian captivity of the church organic in the absolutely vital areas of politics and economics. Fortunately our puritan forefathers were more jealous for the honor of god, and they were determined to be more faithful to the Scriptures. This article, then, attempts to present puritan political theory through the mouthpiece of one of its leading exponents – Samuel Rutherford.