

assessment sums up the argument of this book, which stands as a fitting tribute to the pioneering work of Professor David F. Wright, to whose memory it is dedicated.

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Sin and Politics: Issues in Reformed Theology, Jeong Kii Min, New York: Peter Lang, 2009, pp. 266, ISBN 9781433103728. £49.60

The making of this book illustrates well the spread of Reformed theology. The Korean author wrote this as a doctoral dissertation at Fuller Seminary in California, using primarily Dutch theological sources. Seeing political theology as the church's response to the increased politicization of society, Jeong Kii Min places the need for this book in the context of the twentieth century, which saw 'political theology' originate primarily in European Catholic and Lutheran sources, and become further developed through American Evangelical political action. Into this theological discipline Jeong Kii Min offers this work as a Reformed 'systematic political theology' (p. 7): one based in a methodical exploration of doctrinal themes of creation, *imago Dei*, sin, evil, angelology, ecclesiology, eschatology, Christology, and the Trinity.

The main intellectual debts of this work are to Abraham Kuyper, Herman Bavinck, and Herman Dooyeweerd, and the heirs to this Dutch Reformed tradition in Europe and America. Scottish theologians are not considered. The book is broken into three sections, reflecting the Reformed narrative structure of history: "Politics Without Sin", "Politics Within Sin", and "Politics Beyond Sin". This displays the creational nature of politics, the distortion of politics by sin, and its final redemption in Christ.

Part One examines the Reformed teaching on the origins of politics. Here Jeong Kii Min shows that Reformed theology views

politics as an order of creation, as based in the so-called ‘cultural mandate’ of Genesis 1:28. This teaches that even if there had been no Fall, politics would still have developed, except without sin. Jeong Kii Min moves beyond the older Reformed theologians at certain points, such as Kuyper’s arguments that pre-lapsarian politics would have developed in a patriarchal fashion. However, the state, although ‘culturally mandated’, has become part of the order of sin. Because of this it displays its paradoxical nature, being both a remedy for sin, and a manifestation of evil.

Part Two looks at the post-lapsarian nature of politics. In dealing with the doctrines of Fall and sin, Jeong Kii Min argues that politics is not a result of the Fall, but that sin affects politics, resulting in its perversion. Following Calvinist anthropology, politics becomes depraved through the taint of sin, and in the process loses its true end. This can be seen clearly in modernity’s claim concerning the autonomous nature of politics. Accordingly, a repudiation of politics is one attempt to solve what Jeong Kii Min calls “The Ethical Paradox of the State”, which is that the state can promote goodness and civilization, but has also become evil. However, the author argues that this ‘paradox’ in no way justifies such a rejection of politics.

As an alternative, Jeong Kii Min advocates a balanced view of the state as existing in the tension between anarchism and absolutism. This balance is resourced by limiting the scope of the state in three ways (pp. 132–3). Firstly, the state should concern itself with ‘public justice’. Secondly, Jeong Kii Min uses Kuyper’s notion of ‘sphere sovereignty’ to restrict the state to its own realm. Finally, the state is constrained by an ethical limitation, in that it is not the state’s prerogative to promote Christian morality. This is a confusing and somewhat arbitrary triad of principles, since the definitions of ‘justice’, ‘sphere’, and ethics, can all be moulded to suit the will of the state, while disregarding the teachings of theology. And meanwhile, the state ends up looking very similar to the Western liberal democratic state.

The final part looks at the politics of Jesus. In this Christologically-centred section, which seeks to balance the divinity and humanity of Christ, Jeong Kii Min is critical of Kuyper’s devaluation of the Incarnation when considering the political relevance of Jesus. He also laments the Reformed perspective of Christ as King lacking any

earthly application (p. 180). In his corrective, he draws upon John Howard Yoder as someone who values the worldly ministry of Christ in developing a Christian politics. Jeong Kii Min puts this Anabaptist view and the Reformed understanding of the three offices of Christ (prophetic, priestly and kingly) into dialogue, moving the Anabaptist and Reformed perspectives closer together in accepting the normativity of Christ's leadership models. In Jeong Kii Min's synthesis, he equates the proclamation of the Word with the *prophetic* message, prayer with the *priestly* function, and political action on behalf of the larger human community with the *kingship* of Christ.

Finally, in his conclusion Jeong Kii Min distinguishes the Anabaptists from the Reformed perspective. After his earlier synthesis, this may appear once again to reinforce the differences, but in fact Jeong Kii Min rightly takes the Anabaptists' view of the fallen nature of politics very seriously indeed. However, he prefers the Reformed view when affirming the potential and actual goodness of political grace, and the expectation of the redemption of all creation, including the political. One criticism of this synthesis might be that Jeong Kii Min does not take history seriously enough when it comes to understanding the split between the Reformed and the Anabaptist understanding of the state. It is a little surprising that he does not follow this thread, given his emphasis on sin as a personal and therefore historical act. However, it would be churlish to make too much out of this, for this is a work of systematic theology and not a work of history; but to complete his project would require such further study.

Accordingly, I remain unconvinced that Jeong Kii Min solves the problem of state corruption as a result of the human will and the will of the powers and principalities. He does have, however, a good introduction to John Howard Yoder's writings on the state and powers. Moreover, it is rare to find a theological account of the politics of the present. This is therefore a real strength of this book, providing as it does a theology through which we can make sense of the *present* corruption of politics, and not just an original perfection or a distant redemption of the political world.

As invaluable as this work in Reformed political theology is, there are, however, a few general things which detract from this work. The text suffers from a lack of proper editorial attention, and unforgivable

spelling errors have crept in. Jeong Kii Min also uses secondary sources when primary sources could have been used to lend added scholarly rigour and credibility. I would have liked to have seen an index of scriptural passages, especially since he uses a wider range of scriptures than many do when writing political theology. However, if you are interested in Reformed political theology this work is indispensable. In a time when there is much theologically-inspired skepticism about mainstream politics, this book helpfully offers a Reformed defence of the importance of the political realm as a sphere of God's ongoing work in Creation.

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