

The Theology of John Calvin

Charles Partee

Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008, xi + 345pp,
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SUMMARY

Partee's *Theology of John Calvin* is a survey of Calvin's *Institutes* that engages with all the main areas of controversy that exist within Calvin studies. After a useful introduction that includes an overview of the work, three introductory conclusions and information on the structure of the *Institutes*, the book is divided in two. Part one is called *God for us* and deals with the first two books of the *Institutes*; part two is entitled *God with us*, where books three and four are explored. The breadth of topics covered, coupled with the range and depth of interaction with other Calvin scholars is impressive. Although sympathetic to Calvin, Partee is not afraid to challenge his theology. He presents Calvin's *Institutes* as a work that confesses the love of God made known in Christ.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Partee's *Theology of John Calvin* bietet einen Überblick über Calvins *Institutio* und setzt sich mit allen kontroversen Hauptgebieten auseinander, die in der Calvinforschung bestehen. Nach einer hilfreichen Einführung, die einen Überblick über das Werk, drei einleitende Schlussfolgerungen sowie Informationen zur Struktur der *Institutio* beinhaltet, wird das Buch in zwei Teile unterteilt. Der erste Teil heißt *Gott für uns* und behandelt die ersten zwei Bücher der *Institutio*. Der zweite Teil heißt *Gott mit uns*; hier werden die Bücher 3 und 4 untersucht. Die Breite der abgedeckten Themen, verbunden mit der Bandbreite und Tiefe der Interaktion mit anderen Calvinforschern, ist beeindruckend. Obwohl er Calvin sympathisch gegenübersteht, hat Partee keine Angst, dessen Theologie herauszufordern. Er präsentiert Calvins *Institutio* als ein Werk, das sich zur Liebe Gottes bekennt, die in Christus bekannt gemacht wurde.

RÉSUMÉ

Cette théologie de Jean Calvin est en fait un survol de *L'Institution chrétienne* qui fait état de tous les débats importants auxquels les études sur Calvin ont donné lieu. L'ouvrage commence par une introduction qui contient un survol de *L'Institution chrétienne*, une présentation de sa structure et trois conclusions préliminaires. Il se compose ensuite de deux parties. La première, intitulée « Dieu pour nous », traite des deux premiers livres de *L'Institution*, la seconde, intitulée « Dieu avec nous », des livres III et IV. L'auteur aborde un large éventail de sujets, et entre en dialogue de manière approfondie avec de nombreux spécialistes de Calvin. Bien qu'il aborde la théologie du réformateur avec un regard positif, Partee n'hésite pas à émettre des critiques à son encontre. Il présente *L'Institution* comme une œuvre qui confesse l'amour de Dieu manifesté en Jésus-Christ.

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Any author wishing to write a book on Calvin in light of the mass of literature already devoted to him needs to evidence good reasons for their contribution. Partee does just that. The Preface clearly illuminates the reader as to what the book is, and is not, about. Partee sets out to engage with the *thought* of Calvin, not his life or influence. He sums up his objective by stating, 'Our purpose is twofold: (1) to survey the full sweep of Calvin's theology and (2) to collect the benefits that accrue' (xi). Convinced of the importance of Calvin, his ability to teach us, the way he has been misrepresented, and the need for him to be understood, Partee aims to study him carefully, sympathetically, correctly and clearly (xii). Even where the reader may disagree with Partee on some issues, he is clear, and his is a book that is enjoyable to interact with because he is not pushing a particular agenda, central dogma theory or system of thought.

Partee's three introductory conclusions provide a brief but well crafted overview of Calvin's opponents, his proponents and what he terms 'misponents' (27), those who misunderstand Calvin. This is a helpful approach, easing the reader into the extent of the divergent opinions that exist within Calvin studies. From the beginning and then throughout, Partee interacts with the major contributors to the study of Calvin's theology and the extent of his wealth of knowledge on the subject is clearly revealed. Following on from this, he highlights some of the themes that have shaped the study of Calvin such as the twofold knowledge of God, the Trinity and union with Christ, as he gives guidance on the structure of the *Institutes* (35-43).

The real meat of the book starts at part one. Partee literally goes through the *Institutes* subject by subject, discussing Calvin's thought at each step of the way. For example, in book one, themes such as Scripture, the Trinity, creation (visible and invisible), providence, and common and special grace are all surveyed over 70 pages. In a positive sense, the whole book acts like an extended dictionary, highlighting the main controversies, contributors and works that have made a significant impact on Calvinistic studies.

The remaining three books of the *Institutes* are treated in a similar fashion to the first, and although every topic retains a level of depth, the flow of the work is maintained by Partee's ability to write in a lucid fashion, with footnotes which not only serve as a bank of information but can also add interest of their own. In footnote 11, page 127, he cites a quote on how prone to hair-splitting the Dutch Calvinists were, 'One Dutchman, a Christian; two Dutchmen, a congregation; three Dutchmen, heresy'!

Given Partee's background, it is no surprise to find him dealing with the many philosophical issues raised within Calvin's theology. In his excursus (299-330) he looks at Calvin's method in theology, and because he believes that Calvin was a theologian, not a philosopher, he also takes into account Calvin's appeals at times

to 'Scripture, reason, history, experience and common sense' (299), none of which should be isolated.

Throughout the book, Partee argues that Calvin does not primarily present a system of doctrine, or principles of logic, or a central dogma; rather, Calvin is a theologian who presents a *confession* of faith. Calvin, unlike those who study him, was content to let logical and philosophical tensions exist while he confessed to the God of Scripture and unearthed the treasures of God's grace he found revealed in them. Partee views the Institutes as a 'systematic confession' (297), a confession of Christ's Lordship where 'in God' and 'union with Christ' (298) are wonderful expressions of God's grace. The only negative comment on this edition of the book is the smallness of the print, but that aside, it is both a useful and enjoyable tool to work with, even when one might be in disagreement with the author.

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Bonhoeffer's Intellectual Formation

Peter Frick (ed.)

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SUMMARY

This volume collects more than a dozen essays that explore Bonhoeffer's intellectual debts to a range of figures in the Western theological and philosophical tradition. Several essays conveniently summarize previous larger-scale studies into the influence of figures such as Barth, Dilthey and the German Idealists; others usefully consider obviously important influences such as Luther, Harnack and Kierkegaard. A final group explore Bonhoeffer's relation to less evidently influential sources, ranging from Augustine to Thomas à Kempis, Niebuhr to Heidegger. Overall, the volume makes a valuable contribution to contemporary efforts to hold Bonhoeffer in his intellectual context.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Dieser Band ist eine Sammlung von über einem Dutzend Artikeln, die Bonhoeffers intellektuelle Anleihen bei einer Reihe von Personen aus der westlichen theologischen und philosophischen Tradition untersuchen. Mehrere Artikel fassen frühere größere Studien über den Einfluss von Personen wie Barth, Dilthey und die deutschen Idealisten bequem zusammen; andere Artikel bedenken offensichtlich wichtige Einflüsse wie Luther, Harnack und Kierkegaard. Eine letzte Gruppe untersucht Bonhoeffers Beziehung zu weniger einflussreichen Quellen, die von Augustinus bis Thomas von Kempen, von Niebuhr bis Heidegger reicht. Alles in allem stellt der Band einen wertvollen Beitrag zu gegenwärtigen Anstrengungen dar, Bonhoeffer in seinem intellektuellen Kontext zu halten.

RÉSUMÉ

Les douze contributions de cet ouvrage sont consacrées à l'étude de la dette intellectuelle de Dietrich Bonhoeffer à l'égard de diverses figures de la tradition théologique et philosophique occidentale. Plusieurs articles résument de manière appropriée des études antérieures plus développées sur l'influence exercée sur Bonhoeffer par Barth, Dilthey et les idéalistes allemand. D'autres considèrent les influences importantes de Luther, Harnack et Kierkegaard. D'autres encore examinent d'autres sources d'influence moins évidentes, comme celles qui vont de St Augustin à Thomas à Kempis, ou de Niebuhr à Heidegger. L'ouvrage est utile pour replacer la pensée de Bonhoeffer dans son contexte intellectuel.

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It is curious that a book of this sort has not been published before now. The volume collects thirteen original essays, each of which explores the influence of a particular theological or philosophical figure or figures on Bonhoeffer's own theology. The editor himself contributes the studies of Thomas à Kempis, Nietzsche, as well as Bultmann and Tillich. Several contributions digest quite helpfully the insights of previous and more expansive studies (so, e.g., Ralf Wüstenberg's essay on Dilthey, Andreas Pangritz on Barth and Wayne Floyd on Kant and Hegel; all offer compressed restatements of views worked out at length in earlier monographs). While many of the figures considered in the remaining essays are obviously to be counted amongst Bonhoeffer's influences – Luther (Wolf Krötke), Kierkegaard (Geffrey Kelly), Harnack and Seeberg (Martin Rumscheidt), and perhaps also Niebuhr (Josiah Young) – others are more surprising, like Augustine and Aquinas (treated together by Barry Harvey), Schleiermacher (Christiane Tietz) and Heidegger (Stephen Plant). Across this range of *personae* the nature, extent and significance of 'influence' upon Bonhoeffer vary widely, and this is reflected in the equally wide variety of approaches pursued by the essayists. Readers interested in exploring the connections between the *Leitmotifs* of Bonhoeffer's theology and the wider theological and philosophical tradition will find much of interest and importance to ponder here. I highlight only a few examples here.

It is unsurprising that of all the pre-modern figures treated, Luther should loom largest, and Krötke's very fine essay demonstrates that and how 'Luther is present more than anyone else at every stage of his path and in every dimension of [Bonhoeffer's] thought' (53). That à Kempis' *Imitatio Christi* was another signal influence upon Bonhoeffer's theology throughout the 1930s is also convincingly maintained by Frick. It is the merit of Harvey's essay to indicate how Bonhoeffer grows in appreciation for Augustine's account of original sin as a result of the exegetical work of *Creation and Fall*, and how his late explorations of the idea of 'the natural' and 'penultimate' are like, and unlike Thomistic accounts of