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Law Philosophy and Political Philosophy of
Luther and Calvin

(Propositions of the PhD Thesis)

Miskolc

2008

I. The Summary and the Main Aims of the Research

The fundamental aim of the research is to compare the ideas of Luther and Calvin on state, power, law and politics.

The impact of the two reformers is unavoidable for the people of the Modern Age. This statement, however, is not true only regarding religion and theology but also the field of politics, state and law. In my dissertation I am going to analyze and introduce the thoughts of the two significant reformers from the latter mentioned point of view.

There are unique connections between Christian thinking and political-public-life belief, not only in a conceptual-contextualist approach, but as the studies of Karl Barth, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Abraham Kuyper, Eivind Berggrav show, in even the dimensions of everyday public behaviour. In the case of Luther and Calvin the above mentioned statement is severely true. It is very important to explore these difficult relations as well as the

introduction of the two reformers' judiciary, political and philosophical ideas since my opinion is that the activity of Luther and Calvin is not well-known even in academic, professional circles.

In our country, this field of study is treated unfavourably by experts dealing with the theory of law or political philosophy. Any summarizing or contrasting writing has not been produced yet. That is exactly why I regard as extremely crucial the creating of my PhD.

My PhD thesis can be divided into three main parts. The first one – the introduction which serves as a background study, too – scrutinizes the given period depicting the two reformers' thoughts along different dimensions like theological, political, etc. so that we understand their ideas better. The second part of my thesis can be seen as the most significant analyzing the views of Luther and Calvin on the basis of eleven points having been created by myself. Actually, the third part of my PhD is a conclusion summing up the bequest of Luther and Calvin along the dimensions in which their importance cannot be denied such as economy, political thinking, communal decision making, constitution.

I would especially emphasize the second part of my research because I have the opinion that it involves several new statements in connection with the theory of law, political philosophy and theology that are relevant for professionals to think further (mainly as for the origin of power, obedience, judiciary approach, relationship between belief and politics, exercise of power).

II. The Methodology and the Sources of the Research

At first, I tried to trace out the structure and the margins whose help I could achieve the best comparison and introduction of the thoughts and views of Luther and Calvin so as to be able to reach my aim drawn in the previous part. As a result of having had long discussions and professional consultations, I have divided my thesis into three parts and I mark eleven dimensions on whose basis the relevant views of the two theologians can be represented and compare very well. I analyzed the ideas of Luther and Calvin from the following perspective:

1. Lordship and its necessity
2. Secular authority – spiritual authority: the two empires' relationship to each other
3. The Christians and the political authority
4. Question of obedience and resistance

5. Right and law, law and gospel
6. Gospel and politics
7. Question of form of state
8. Christ-like ruling: the Christian ruler
9. The Christian state: a dream or a possible reality?
10. Political millenarism
11. Question of neutrality

Accordingly to the parts traced and the dimensions set up, basically three methods condense and alternate in my dissertation. There are certain points where the influences of at least two or even three of the above mentioned can be recognized.

The first part of my dissertation can be viewed as a kind of „background study”, being historical and descriptive in its nature, that serves to comprehend the topic of my thesis better. The four dimensions analyzed in this part (theology, politics, worldorder, humanism) accordingly reflect a „historian perspective”, and ultimately it is exactly that: historical background description that serves as a frame for the second extensive chapter of my analysis.

The second chapter stresses the analytical essay that is connected to problems and notions emphasizing the more theoretical general coherences that go along with concrete examples. At certain points in the third section of my PhD can also be seen the above mentioned logic.

However, considering particularly the thoughts of the analyzing second part, the logic of the comparative method dominates, the analyzing dimension, and in several cases of historical perspectives, containing certainly the method of text analysis and text comparison.

My dissertation is based on my researches collected in Hungary as well as abroad. The materials I have used between 2002 and 2004 can be found in the following institutions in Hungary: Kisfaludy Károly Library of Győr, Evangelical Theological University of Budapest, Library of the Parliament, Information Center of the Deputies, Szabó Ervin Library of Budapest, Central European University. After 2003, I have used the sources also of the Library of the University of Debrecen, particularly its sheltered books (the old judiciary and theological books of 1945 and 1948), and of the Library and Archives of Reformed College.

I have sought in libraries and at universities abroad especially in German, English and French language field.

Owing to a scholarship, I had the chance to do some research in the library of the London School of Economics as well as the library of the Middlesex University. Furthermore, in February 2006, I had the opportunity to spend a month in Maastricht as a scholar instructor where, besides teaching, I have quested among the English files of CCEL, WITTENBERG PROJECT, LQ whose materials can be obtained in Hungary either with difficulty or by spending a huge amount of money for being able to use them.

In July 2007 I have spent two weeks at the Faculty of Arts and Divinity of Marburg University thanks for the so called LLP-Teacher Mobility. I have completely browsed and then used the materials related to my thesis of The Faculty of Divinity and the Faculty of Law (Savigny Haus). I have brought to Hungary more than 1200 pages copied to elaborate during the summer. This latter mentioned opportunity was exceedingly significant for me since the Marburg University represents a real treasury as it is the first Protestant University established in the world having a huge number of sources relevant to my PhD.

In January 2008 I have managed to visit and explore in the libraries of the Catholic University of Leuven, mostly in connection with the ethic of Calvin.

Besides, I must mention the personal conversations and consultations and the importance of them, as well.

From the very beginnings I have paid attention to the conversations because I concern them as crucial as my „scuba-diving” in the real sources. I have endeavored to talk to everyone, who can be linked to my topic, whose origins are quite diverse.

It meant a great deal for me the conversations made with Dr. Reus András and Dr. Szabó Lajos (previous heads of the University of Evangelical Divinity), Dr. Csepregi Zoltán (present head of University of Evangelical Divinity), Zászkaliczky Pál, Bödecs Barnabás, Ittész Gábor. When having talked to these experts, I have invariably put the emphasis on a given subsection of my PhD such as the general connections of public life and ethic, the idea of Luther on dual governing, the circumstances of choosing Charles V as an emperor.

Moreover, there were a great number of Hungarian and foreign theorists, experts, tutors who had a vast influence on me. As for the Hungarian ones, I have to mention the following names: Dr. Csepregi Zoltán (present head of University of Evangelical Divinity), Szeverényi János, Réz-Nagy Zoltán, Dr. Csepregi András and Kóka Csaba. In addition, Dr. Boleratzky Lóránd (superannuated tutor, the accepted expert of the Evangelical church law), Dr. Frivaldszky János (teacher of PPKE), Dr. Balázs Zoltán (teacher of PPKE), and certainly my two supervisors: Dr. Szabó Miklós and Dr. Fazakas Sándor. As far as the foreign experts, who inspired and made me search for more pieces of information to my PhD, are concerned, the next names are worth mentioning: Dr. Thomas Noetzel and Dr.

Wolfgang Briul (professors), the tutors of the University of Marburg, Donald D. Schmelketopf (prominent professor of the American Baylor University).

During these consultations, I have been given incitement, human and professional help (in several cases I have received books and studies having been posted from abroad), and encouragement to my work for which I owe thanks and gratitude posteriorly.

III. The Summary and the Possible Applications of Academic Results

Analyzing the ideas of Luther and Calvin on „political ethic”, state, law, power and obedience we can state the followings.

Regarding the origin of power and the necessity of lordship, Luther and Calvin agree. The secular authority is originated from God, Lordship is necessary. There are, however, differences in the theories of the two reformers. On the one hand, Luther – as opposed to Calvin – embeds his approach in a theoretical frame creating theory of dual governing being problematic even in our days. On the other hand, Calvin – unlike Luther – applied less „middle-age” terminology at that time when having spoken about power, politics and office-holders. What is more, Calvin – though his anthropological basic position is similar to that of Luther’s – when analyzing the civil government and the legislation gives punitive and commendatory functions to the secular lordship: Calvin believes in the power of following law voluntarily, his anthropology permits it. Eventually, I would say that the two reformers might not have divided but at least distinguished the secular and the spiritual power – God’s two kinds of ruling dimensions. This differentiation is indeed invaluable from the point of view of the later European development (the division of state and church, basic rights).

Regarding Christians and political authority, and also Christians and „secular office-holding”, both Luther and Calvin encourage the Christians of their age to be active in the public eye while condemning the „radical” Christians of that age. The two reformers hold the view that the function of lordship gets along with the soul of Lex Christi and Christian love, moreover, as Luther defined lordship actually feeds from the latter two. Calvin himself considers the service in the civil government the most sacred profession. These questions were important and evitable in the age of Reformation.

The analysis of the ideas of Luther and Calvin on obedience and resistance constitutes a substantial part, too. It turns out from these sections that the passive resistance in connection with Luther cannot be regarded as authoritative in certain cases, thus the criticisms of many – accordingly that of Weber’s, either – does not stand their ground.

Luther considers the denial of orders in certain cases possible. It is an interesting lesson that Luther's approaches are not constant. Owing to the change of the circumstances, the emphasis has always been put on different things. I unfold these in my thesis in a very detailed form.

As far as the relationship of politics and the gospel, we can see clearly in my essay that although the gospel has a message to politics, it cannot substitute the role and significance of the „common sense“, under which, as Luther draws, secular governing can be found. The Holy Scripture is not a judiciary or political science-like „reference book“. Considering this – since the two thinkers claim – it has message to the rules of the world. In connection with that I have devoted a separate section to the question of Christian governing, the popular question – let us just think of the work of Erasmus written on King Charles V, *The Education of a Christian Prince* – that can be seen in the education of Luther and Calvin. It can be seen very well that basically both of them had Christian office-holders and society in mind – which is shown well by the expression – though they cast off the possibility of a Christian state (it would be terminological and logical self-contradiction in the case of Luther, whereas Calvin emphasizes the guilt and deficiency of people).

Finally, I have the intention of describing the importance of the ideas written in my PhD on the forms of state and political millenarism. The analysis on them shows that Luther and Calvin had undoubtedly a moderate point of view. Both of them believe in the coming of Christ and the Final Judgement, they also acknowledge the secular authority and the order of law (which is more significant as for the relevance of the latter of my thesis). When talking about the theory on the forms of state, we can see what makes the different between Luther and Calvin. Analyzing this question, Luther remains a theologian, while Calvin gives a detailed assay of it and, although he holds the view that all the forms of state are acceptable for him, he is devoted to the “aristocratic democracy” being driven “by many” and connected to elections.

The most crucial result of the research is – beyond the statements written in the essay – the establishment of such a system of viewpoint by which the thoughts of the two thinkers on state, power, politics, law and obedience can be represented and compared the best. Creating this system took me about a year and a half that I had spent working, reading, researching, consulting and talking to experts.

The results of my research can be used in many fields. On the one hand, the results give a basis and system of viewpoint for those dealing with the ideas of Luther and Calvin (jurists and political philosophers). On the other hand, the dissertation can give a helping

hand for the theologians, historians, religion historians, as well.

Furthermore, the results of the dissertation can create a frame for teaching them in the higher education. I myself have been keeping a class, being titled as The Political-Philosophical Theories of Luther and Calvin, for three years at the Political Science Department at the University of Debrecen integrating the latest researching results into the requirements of the class each and every year.

The benefits of the results of the dissertation can also be seen in the writings having already been published on them as well as the professional lectures having been kept in Hungary and abroad alike. Additionally, the dissertation contains such statements that can help the work of others in a direct way. I have been given a call or a letter in the last few months by several students from other universities, asking my help (especially in connection with the ethic of Calvin), who are going to write their thesis on the topic of my PhD.

IV. Publications related to the topic of the dissertations:

Állam és felsőbbség az Újszövetségben.

In. DOKTORANDUSZOK FÓRUMA – Miskolc, 2002. november 6. Állam- és Jogtudományi Kar Szekciókiadványa. Miskolc. 2003. 58-62 oldalak.

State and Church. Luther's View: The Two Kingdoms.

In. 4th International Conference of PhD Students. University of Miskolc, Hungary. 11-17 August 2003. A Miskolci Egyetem kiadványa (a nemzetközi konferencia konferenciakötete). Miskolc. 2003. 19-20 oldalak.

Luther jogfelfogása.

In. DOKTORANDUSZOK FÓRUMA – Miskolc, 2004. november 4. Állam- és Jogtudományi Kar Szekciókiadványa. Miskolc. 2005. 52-56 oldalak.

The Role of the Churches in the European Union.

In. KLIMA, Ewa: Religion in the Time of Changes. University of Lodz. Lodz. 2005.

A kálvinista dogmafelfogás és az alkotmányeszmé.

In. JURA. A Pécsi Tudományegyetem Állam- és Jogtudományi Karának tudományos lapja. 2005.1.szám. Pécs. 2005. 158-164 oldalak.

Luther államfelfogása.

In. Tavaszi Szél 2005, 2005. május 5-8. Debrecen (Doktoranduszok Országos Szövetsége kiadványa). Budapest. 2005. 36-40 oldalak.

Luther a világi felsőségről és a kormányzásról.

In. MISKOLCI DOKTORANDUSZOK JOGTUDOMÁNYI TANULMÁNYAI 6/1. Bíbor Kiadó. Miskolc. 2005. 79-97 oldalak.

Luther és Kálvin politikai filozófiai nézetei.

Megtalálható: www.mptt.hu (A Magyar Politikatudományi Társaság) honlapján, Vándorgyűlés 2006 előadásai között.

Luther és Kálvin politikai filozófiai nézeteinek összehasonlító elemzése.

In. Társadalom és Politika 2006/2-es száma. Politológiai Párbeszéd Társasága. Budapest. 2006. 83-99 oldalak.