



DAVENANT INSTITUTE

Convivium Irenicum 2023: “Christ and the Nations: A Protestant Theology of Statecraft”

Plenary Speaker: Dr. Eric Gregory

Dr. Eric Gregory is Professor of Religion at Princeton University, where he has taught since 2001. A world-renowned scholar in Christian ethics and political theology, Dr. Gregory is the author of *Politics and the Order of Love: An Augustinian Ethic of Democratic Citizenship*, along with numerous articles and book chapters in religious and philosophical ethics, theology, political theory, law and religion, and the role of religion in public life. Dr. Gregory has long served as a key Reformed voice in the leadership ranks of the Society of Christian Ethics and also currently serves on the editorial board of the *Journal of Religious Ethics*.

Location: Davenant House, 419 Glenolden Dr., Landrum, SC

Date: May 31st-June 3rd, 2023

Protestant political theology today stands at a crossroads, especially in America. For much of the twentieth century, an increasingly vacuous mainline Protestantism transformed into an engine of secular liberalism, using its immense influence in American public life to hollow out the public square and banish faith to the recesses of the heart and the margins of private life. With its largely individualist, proceduralist, and globalist agenda, it left behind much traditional Protestant teaching concerning the role of the nations in God’s purposes and as the contexts for sustaining a vision of the common good.

As mainline liberalism collapsed into secular post-Protestantism, the empty public square has rapidly been filled with new quasi-religious impulse increasingly at war with the very idea of national identity, or the boundaries and limits upon which not only the nation-state, but any traditional vision of statecraft depends. Reactions to this state of affairs have ranged from a resurgent Roman Catholicism with a vision of a statecraft subordinated to the guidance of a universal church, to crude forms of nationalism privileging particular ethnic identities. In the midst of this chaos, the door is wide open for a blast of Christian wisdom from the past, in the form of a magisterial Protestant vision of statecraft.

In the decades spanning and following the Protestant Reformation, Protestant theologians and statesmen began to map out the foundations of an international order made up of independent national Christian states. In the process, they hammered out concepts indispensable to politics as we know it, but increasingly neglected or taken for granted: sovereignty, neutrality, international law, religious toleration, and more. They also thought deeply about the Christian vocation in politics, refining traditional Christian principles on the just use of force, the distinction between political and moral compromise, and the nature of civic virtue. As we seek to chart a path forward today in a morally-fragmented and globally-interconnected world, we urgently need to draw upon this historic wisdom to think responsibly about the relationships between the state and the market, between national, global, and local, and between public good and private conscience.

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At the 10th Annual Davenant Institute Convivium Irenicum, we propose to tackle these questions head-on with a series of papers and panel discussions bringing biblical and historical wisdom to bear on the task of statecraft today. The topic is intentionally broad and interdisciplinary, and we hope to bring together both scholars and practitioners so that historical and theological insights can be refined in light of prudence and experience.

Proposals might address questions such as the following:

- What is the role of the “nation” in a Protestant vision of politics? How should nations be defined? Is the contemporary nation-state a wholesome or harmful development?
- How can we balance our shared identity as members of the global human family, or the more intimate shared identity of the universal church, with the particular identities and obligations of national citizenship? How does this play out with respect to various rubber-meets-the-road issues, such as war, humanitarian intervention, immigration, and hospitality to refugees?
- How was religious establishment integral to the historic Protestant understanding of nationhood? How might the concept of nationhood look different under conditions of religious disestablishment?
- If religion is indeed integral to civic virtue, as our forebears argued, what might it look like to promote right religion under contemporary conditions of political pluralism?
- How have Protestants historically understood the notion of the “common good”? How might this be balanced against concern for individual rights? What ways of talking about “rights” are useful for a faithful Christian politics and what conceptions of “rights” must we resist?
- What is the proper place of “the economy” within a historic Protestant vision of politics? What might it mean to recover an older vision of political economy as “national household management” in an age of sprawling multi-national corporations and the bureaucratic administrative state?

Although most of the questions above are framed in more historical terms, we also welcome papers tackling any and all of these questions from the viewpoint of biblical exegesis—or, papers examining how Protestants in the past sought to read and apply Scripture with reference to such questions.

Although most papers presentations will be lecture-style, proposals may also take the form of a proposed guided discussion/seminar. Abstracts of between 200 and 300 words must be submitted to b.littlejohn@davenantinstitute.org by February 1, 2023 for consideration.