

The Contested Public Square: The Crisis of Christianity and Politics by Greg Foster.
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Political scientists tended to ignore or downplay the force of religion in politics. They forecasted the decline of religion according to the secularization theory that human self-confidence and rational ability would liberate people from religious superstition. But religion did not fade away. It began to explode in both intensity and variety. The world has become massively religious. In the *Contested Public Square*, which is an introduction to Christian political thought, Dr. Greg Forster traces the development of Christian political thought from the beginning of the history of the Church. His main focus is on the political effects of the Reformation and the Enlightenment in Western Europe. It is only in the light of this history, Forster contends, that we should proceed to navigate the ongoing search for freedom and liberal democracy today.

Students and teachers of political theory will be particularly interested in Forster's controversial argument that Augustine and Calvin were natural law thinkers. According to Forster, natural-law doctrine holds that it is the proper source of political action, and that it gives each human society the authority to establish a government by which it will govern itself. The last point means that government is not established directly by God.

The first great Christian political thinker was the church father Augustine of Hippo. His enormous work, *The City of God*, was the first masterpiece of Christian political thought. His analysis of the nature of politics has been very influential in Christian thinking, particularly in the West, in every era from its publication down to the present day. It is probably the most important work of Christian political thought ever produced. John Calvin, in his *Institutes*, also made a lasting contribution to Christian political thought. He insisted on restoring a sharp distinction between the proper roles of church and state. Though he expected them to work cooperatively, he insisted that each had its own distinct authority. Forster claims that by defending natural law with Scripture, Calvin helped to ensure that natural-law doctrine would flourish in Protestant as well as in Catholic political thought during the centuries following the Reformation.

Forster's work is a much needed text for all who seek a thorough knowledge and understanding of the major players and big ideas of Christian political thought.