

The Oxford Encyclopedia of Martin Luther

Reviewed by MARK MATTES

The Oxford Encyclopedia of Martin Luther. Three volumes. Edited by Derek R. Nelson and Paul R. Hinlicky. New York: Oxford University Press, 2017. xxx + 2,145 pp.

It is rare to describe an academic project as breathtaking, but that designation is exactly what should be said of this encyclopedia. Editors Nelson and Hinlicky have assembled 125 entries by 113 international scholars offering cutting edge scholarship on virtually every imaginable avenue of current Luther research. Not only is each entry substantiated with endnotes, but each entry offers an overview of the available literature on any given topic, often with a direction for where new research ought to go. The project appears in two formats, a three-volume print version referenced above, but also an online version, which is poised to be open to revision as new developments arise. For access to the online version, see: http://religion.oxfordre.com/search?f_o=keyword&q_o=Martin%20Luther. No doubt, this encyclopedia will be the first stop for any Luther research by scholars or serious students. Note, however, that this project is weighted more toward the academic community, and less toward pastors and church leaders.

All the standard theological loci such as God, justification, Holy Spirit, church, and so forth are present. Additionally, we find articles on the reception of Luther in select European countries (Britain, Denmark, Finland, Sweden, and Germany) as well as North America, Latin America, and among “world Christianities.” Luther’s biography (volume II) is helpfully divided up into three entries (1483–1516, 1517–1525, 1526–1546), each written by a different expert. Luther’s works are also analyzed based on the type of literature they represent: catechisms, disputations, treatises, sermons, table talk, and pastoral writings.

This encyclopedia is most interesting, however, because it brings up various topics of which we would not conventionally think.

These include articles on “body, desire, and sexuality,” “cosmology,” “emotions and experience,” “gift,” “Luther, Lutheranism, and Post-Christianity,” “magic and occult,” “modern New Testament scholarship,” “Polemicist,” “Portrayals in Print, Stage and Film,” and “relational thinking.”

Topics chosen for inclusion fall under four broad categories: (1) contexts (historical situation of the reformation), (2) genres, (3) theology and ethics, and (4) reception and transformation. The overall portrait of Luther and his reformation which comes through these entries tends to surmount the tendency to make Luther either a hero or a villain, and challenges stereotypes of Luther as either the defender of individualistic conscience or the source of “virulent nationalism” (xxii). Indeed, the project succeeds in its goal to destabilize “fixed images of Martin Luther” (xxiii). But this is only possible because the editors have brought together Luther scholars of such disparate disciplines and perspectives, such as social historians, intellectual historians, economic historians, historians of gender, art historians, theologians belonging to different schools, and ethicists. The overall work is markedly interdisciplinary at every level. So, for example, in the matter of indulgences, the political question of German money flowing into Italy is given as much attention as much as the theological questions about penance and salvation.

A bonus of the *Encyclopedia* is the fact that many topics receive commentary from multiple perspectives. By looking at these multiple perspectives, a fuller portrait of the topic is obtained. So, for example, with the topic of “law,” John Witte examines how the Reformation brought about changes in civil law, Charles Arand presents the relation between law and gospel, Knut Alfsvåg explores Luther on Natural Law theory, and Risto Saarinen and Derek Nelson look at law in the totality of Luther’s corpus. Similarly, with respect to “philosophy” the *Encyclopedia* offers the following angles: (1) Simon D. Podmore describes “Modern European Philosophy,” (2) Pekka Kärkkäinen writes on “Nominalism and the *Via Moderna*,” (3) Dennis Bielfeldt presents “Ontology,” (4) Hans-Peter Grosshans describes the relation between “Reason and Philosophy,” and (5) Albrecht Beutel shows Luther’s influence on the “German Enlightenment.” In such a kaleidoscopic perspective, it is impossible not to receive some awareness

that one did not previously have. My only complaint with respect to the topic of philosophy is that no entry raises up the work of Johan Georg Hamann as a Luther voice at the time of the High Enlightenment, one which took to task the reduction of truth to instrumental “reason” by claiming, with Luther, that reason is possible only as mediated through a word which is already conditioned historically and culturally. Hamann is referenced three times in the entire Encyclopedia; only once in the entry “Modern European Philosophy.” This seems to give too little credit to a thinker whose work enabled confessional renewal in the nineteenth century.

Depending on your interests, these three volumes will have insights on every page. Some matters which I found helpful include the following. Christopher Ocker points out how Luther’s anti-Judaism influenced later anti-Semitism: “Luther’s reputation and writings helped transfer elements of a traditional Christian polemical repertoire to broader sensibilities about social identity in the emerging nation-state of the 19th century and beyond” (I:13). Most interesting is that the concept of “race” as it developed in modernity, permitted even religious skeptics to express enmity towards the Jews in a post-Christian Europe (I:8).

Sibylle Rolf offers, from a Luther-influenced perspective, a critique of the Enlightenment idea of the irreplaceability of the moral subject for which “guilt is such a personal offense that the consequences must be borne by the offender. It does not constitute a ‘transmissible debt’ like a money debt (for which it is the same to the creditor whether the debtor himself or someone else pays for him) that can be transferred to another . . .” (I:62). In response, Rolf notes that for Luther “sin is ‘baked into’ humanity,” meaning that

. . . humanity has become indistinguishable from sin and thus cannot break loose from sin based on its own strength. . . . Renunciation of one’s very life can be the only successful sacrifice for reconciliation. Thus, the sinner must go through death in order to obtain reconciliation—a death which God died for them and granted them in the person of Jesus Christ and which is appropriated by the believer in baptism. (I:63)

Building on her roots in Finnish theologian Tuomo Mannermaa’s theology, Kirsi Stjerna shows that in baptism “Christ is more than a

favor; Christ himself is the gift whose restorative presence in human life is celebrated and proclaimed in the act of baptism” (I:105). Anja Lobenstein-Reichmann notes that Luther’s Bible translation, and its effect on the German language, was influenced by both the language of mysticism and everyday language (I:132). In response to the legacy from Anders Nygren that places *eros* and *agape* in opposition, Jennifer Hockenberry Dragseth claims that “trusting in the grace of God, the lover’s desire is transformed and freed by the agape of God.” And, countering Augustine who “suspected that the lover, in faith in grace, will feel only friendship toward the beloved and, perhaps, a well-ordered and rational desire for reproduction, Luther insists that the lover may well feel sexual passion for the beloved. What justified that passion is not reason, orientation, or order but faith in God’s transforming grace” (I:189).

Pekka Kärkkäinen notes that though Luther’s theory of the emotions employed “traditional terminology” to describe the emotional life of human beings, including such terms as appetite (*appetitus*), affect (*affectus*) and passion (*passio*), he was usually “more interested in describing the various internal acts than theorizing about the powers of the soul” (I:436). This impacts preaching: “people can recognize the primary rhetorician of the Word, God himself. Like a good rhetorician, he can, for example, use the copiousness of words to comfort the fearful soul” (I:439).

Johannes Zachhuber shows that with respect to Luther’s alleged suffering God or theo-paschitism that the communication of the attributes between the divine and the human in Christ does not “require a suffering divinity; on the contrary, the paradoxical character of the Christ event would arguably be lost if the divinity itself was like humanity. Instead, two utterly distinct and different beings, divine and human, became one person in such a way that no separation between them was conceivable, even though each also remained what it was” (II:43).

In spite of the fact that, for the Christian, law no longer defines life, Charles Arand indicates that given Luther’s valuation of the law as instructive, both in catechesis and preaching, one can speak of a “third use of the law” in Luther. This use channels “the new spiritual impulses of the believer,” reminds believers that they don’t have to

fall back on any self-righteous pilgrimage, and so allows believers to live in a God-pleasing way (II:97–98).

Both those who advocate for it [a third use of the law] and those who reject it advocate Christian instruction in ethics and the Christian life. Some call this the third use of the law, while others call it the first use of the law applied to Christians. The concern for those who reject a third use of the law is that the Christian life is not ultimately defined by the law. It does not begin with the law, nor does it end with the law as if the gospel were only a means to an end. Instead, the gospel is the final word. (II:98)

Antti Raunio says that Luther's view of love entails that deification and becoming human "belong together. Real human beings are those who participate in the divine nature through faith and serve their neighbors through love without setting themselves above others" (II:212). Michal Valco presents Luther's quest as the attempt to "Christianize" Christendom which "entailed not so much providing new or utterly absent elements constitutive to Christianity, but rather cleansing the way for the present means of grace to exert influence in peoples' lives." In that quest, "indulgences, saints, pilgrimages, penance, rosaries, and the worship of relics . . . were hindrances to true faith because they were defiled by popular superstition. Luther came to see these practices not just as useless and misleading, but as idolatrous" (II:559).

Sarah Wilson Hinlicky offers a thorough and fascinating article on the interface between Lutheranism and Pentecostalism, including both the Charismatic Movement in the Lutheran Church as well as Pentecostalist attempts to incorporate Lutheran themes in theology. Anna Vind describes Luther's concept of a "new divine language, nova lingua," in which theological words signify "in a new and different way":

The cipher of the new semantics within this language is Christ, and since it both expands and breaks with the old, the linguistic figures play a prominent part. Precisely, the figures are the means by which such a new development or a new creation within hitherto accepted linguistic usage is possible. (III:281)

Franz Posset boldly sees Luther as faithful to an "evangelical Catholicism" throughout his career. From Staupitz Luther learned that "it

is not that we become pleasing to God, but that God becomes pleasant and sweet to us" (III:363).

Full disclosure: the writer of this review has an essay on theological aesthetics in this *Encyclopedia*. But that is not the reason that I am extolling this work. Rather, this three-volume work will serve for many decades as the go-to book on Luther and his role in the Reformation, culture, and world affairs not only for students, but also for professional theologians. It is the gold standard in Luther scholarship.

*Martin Luther: A Christian between
Reforms and Modernity*

Reviewed by MARK MATTES

Martin Luther: A Christian between Reforms and Modernity (1517–2017). Three volumes. Edited by Alberto Melloni et al. Berlin/Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2017. 1720 pp.

The five hundredth anniversary of the Reformation brought not just a flourishing of celebrations and conferences but also numerous books and essays exploring both the religious and secular significance of Luther's reform. These three scholarly volumes join other remarkable Luther reference works, also reviewed nearby, such as *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Martin Luther* and *Dictionary of Luther and the Lutheran Traditions*, and *The Oxford Handbook of Martin Luther's Theology*, reviewed in volume 30.1 of *Lutheran Quarterly*. All these works highlight the historical, ecumenical, and global significance of Luther's impact on the church and the world. What is startling about this project, however, is that it is spearheaded by an Italian scholar who is also a Roman Catholic layman. Alberto Melloni, an expert on the history and theology of the Second Vatican Council, is Professor of the History of Christianity at the University