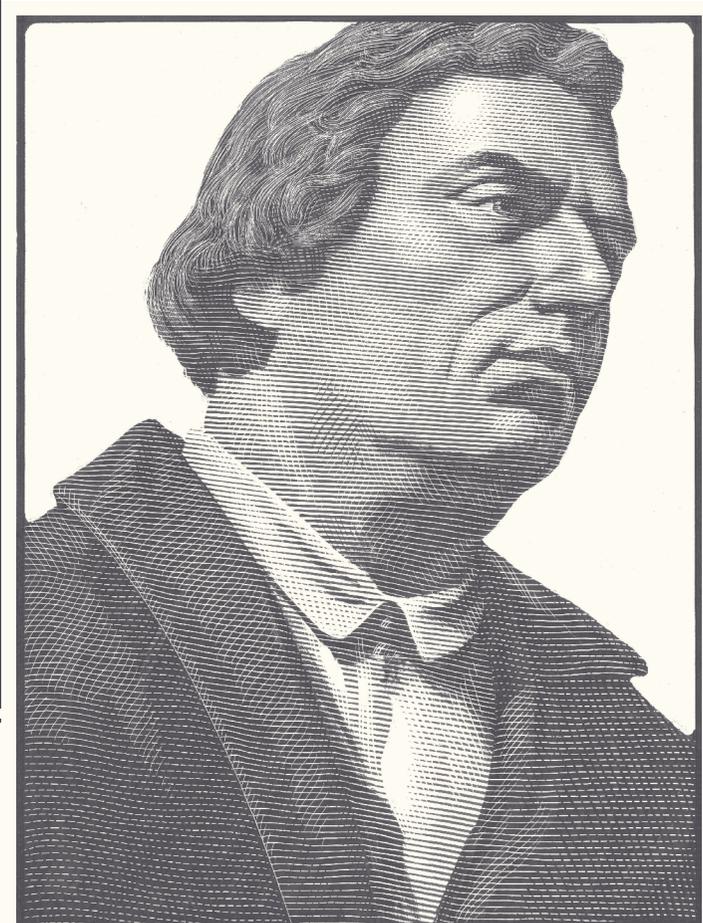


FOREWORD BY ROBERT KOLB

CARL R. TRUEMAN

AFTERWORD BY MARTIN E. MARTY



LUTHER

on the Christian Life

CROSS AND FREEDOM

“If you think you know Luther, read this book. It is a remarkably edifying and illuminating piece of work. Displaying the interests of a pastor and the rigor of a historian, Carl Trueman provides us with an analysis of Luther on the Christian life that is as ‘human’ as the German Reformer himself. Yet it’s far more than Luther on the Christian life. It’s one of the very best summaries of Luther in context.”

Michael Horton, J. Gresham Machen Professor of Systematic Theology and Apologetics, Westminster Seminary California; author, *Calvin on the Christian Life*

“Carl Trueman has pulled off a tremendous feat: he’s not only given us a volume that is scholarly and historically nuanced while still accessible and refreshingly contemporary; he’s also managed to capture the brilliance and boldness of Martin Luther in a relatively short space. Trueman is to be commended for presenting a Luther who is unlike us in so many ways, and yet a Luther from whom we can learn so much.”

Kevin DeYoung, Senior Pastor, University Reformed Church, East Lansing, Michigan

“This book illustrates again why Martin Luther remains a nearly inexhaustible resource. Trueman explains why Luther can be such a perceptive, encouraging, human, and even humorous guide to the Christian life. Especially important is Trueman’s clear communication of why the cross of Christ grounded Luther’s approach to almost everything and why a ‘theology of the cross’ might powerfully motivate believers today as well.”

Mark A. Noll, Francis A. McAnaney Professor of History, University of Notre Dame

“Trueman gives us not only Luther’s theology, but Luther as a theologian, which in turn connects with us as theologians. We learn from Trueman’s insight into Luther that theology isn’t just what we know about God, or even how we know it, but is intimately connected to who we are. Trueman gives us Luther—constipation, wit, contradictions, and all. We also finally get a theological apologetic for a robust sense of humor.”

Aimee Byrd, author, *Housewife Theologian* and *Theological Fitness*

“It is no easy task to write a small volume summing up the theology and significance for the Christian life of Martin Luther. Yet Trueman has done it superbly with aplomb and verve. Highly recommended as an excellent introduction to a remarkable Christian and human being.”

Michael A. G. Haykin, Professor of Church History and Biblical Spirituality, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

“This book takes us on an engaging, enjoyable tour of the thought of one of Christianity’s most influential theologians. Writing with wisdom and accessible style, Trueman gets to the heart of Luther’s theology, showing how his teachings in areas like law and gospel, justification by grace through faith, and the means of grace connect with the everyday Christian life of believers. Trueman’s insightful scholarship and clear writing give us a wonderful introduction to Luther’s thought. I highly recommend it.”

Justin S. Holcomb, Episcopal Priest; Professor of Christian Thought, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary; author, *On the Grace of God*

“In this compelling book, we encounter an arresting portrait of Luther the pastor, a full-blooded man who knew the spiritual and physical joys and pains of life and the formidable daily challenges of being a Christian in a fallen world. In elegant, bracing prose full of pastoral and theological insight and leavened with his characteristic humor, Trueman both keeps Luther in his time and engages us in conversation about how the German doctor speaks to ours. Trueman’s profound exploration of one of the great writers on the Christian life challenges all of us to cancel our tickets for journeys of self-exploration and self-expression to pursue something more authentic. From a distance of five hundred years, Luther tells us that the story is not about us; it’s about what God has done for us.”

Bruce Gordon, Titus Street Professor of Ecclesiastical History, Yale Divinity School; author, *Calvin*

“This book deftly combines deep historical learning with sage pastoral wisdom to present us with an unaccommodated Luther—one who is sure to surprise as well as offend those only familiar with sanitized portraits of the Wittenberg Reformer. But this is the Luther that we need, for it is the real Luther—not the fictions of hagiographers—who has the most to teach us about the Christian life. Both new and longtime readers of Luther will derive much benefit from Trueman’s book.”

Scott R. Swain, Associate Professor of Systematic Theology and Academic Dean, Reformed Theological Seminary, Orlando, Florida

“Eminently readable, humorous, and always with an eye to the church today, Trueman brings us into Luther’s world, devils and all, and shows us the centrality of the cross and the objective power of God’s Word for Luther’s understanding of the Christian life. Most importantly, we meet Luther on Luther’s terms. His high view of the liturgy and sacraments stands alongside his more familiar views on the authority of Scripture and justification by faith alone. All those interested in Luther or the Reformation need to read this excellent book.”

Carl Beckwith, Associate Professor of History and Doctrine, Beeson Divinity School; author, *Hilary of Poitiers on the Trinity*

LUTHER

on the Christian Life

THEOLOGIANS ON THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

EDITED BY STEPHEN J. NICHOLS AND JUSTIN TAYLOR

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Glorifying and Enjoying God Forever,*
Michael Horton

*Edwards on the Christian Life:
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The Heart Renewed in Love,*
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LUTHER

on the Christian Life

CROSS AND FREEDOM

CARL R. TRUEMAN

FOREWORD BY ROBERT KOLB

AFTERWORD BY MARTIN E. MARTY

 **CROSSWAY**
WHEATON, ILLINOIS

Luther on the Christian Life: Cross and Freedom

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Published by Crossway
1300 Crescent Street
Wheaton, Illinois 60187

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Cover design: Josh Dennis
Cover image: Richard Solomon Artists, Mark Summers
First printing 2015

Printed in the United States of America

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Trade paperback ISBN: 978-1-4335-2502-5
PDF ISBN: 978-1-4335-2504-9
Mobipocket ISBN: 978-1-4335-2506-3
ePub ISBN: 978-1-4335-2510-0

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Trueman, Carl R.
Luther on the Christian life : cross and freedom / Carl R.
Trueman ; foreword by Robert Kolb.
pages cm. — (Theologians on the Christian life)
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978-1-4335-2502-5 (tp)
1. Luther, Martin, 1483–1546. 2. Christian life. 3. Theology of the cross. I. Title.
BR333.3.T78 2015
248.4—dc23 2014020705

Crossway is a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers.

VP 25 24 23 22 21 20 19 18 17 16 15
15 14 13 12 11 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

For Catriona.

*Which is Gaelic for Katherine.
Which rhymes with the Latin word catena.*

Enough said.

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SERIES PREFACE

Some might call us spoiled. We live in an era of significant and substantial resources for Christians on living the Christian life. We have ready access to books, DVD series, online material, seminars—all in the interest of encouraging us in our daily walk with Christ. The laity, the people in the pew, have access to more information than scholars dreamed of having in previous centuries.

Yet for all our abundance of resources, we also lack something. We tend to lack the perspectives from the past, perspectives from a different time and place than our own. To put the matter differently, we have so many riches in our current horizon that we tend not to look to the horizons of the past.

That is unfortunate, especially when it comes to learning about and practicing discipleship. It's like owning a mansion and choosing to live in only one room. This series invites you to explore the other rooms.

As we go exploring, we will visit places and times different from our own. We will see different models, approaches, and emphases. This series does not intend for these models to be copied uncritically, and it certainly does not intend to put these figures from the past high upon a pedestal like some race of super-Christians. This series intends, however, to help us in the present listen to the past. We believe there is wisdom in the past twenty centuries of the church, wisdom for living the Christian life.

Stephen J. Nichols and Justin Taylor

FOREWORD

The little Augustinian friar who could hardly bring his sighs and cries over his lips to God finally found a voice that echoed across all of western Europe in his own day. His words are still addressing the Christian church in all corners of the world today.

Some Lutherans like to make a proprietary claim on Martin Luther as their own possession. Carl Trueman demonstrates that the Reformer from Wittenberg belongs to the whole church of Jesus Christ. When printers teamed Luther with Johannes Gutenberg, they broadcast his conversations with God and with fellow believers through print not only across their time but into ours. Trueman takes advantage of this and passes the conversation on to us, his readers. From his standpoint as a historian committed to the Reformed confession of the faith, he sensitively approaches this figure separated from twenty-first-century Christians by centuries and contrasting cultures. Nonetheless, he interprets this thinker with whom he does not always agree as a worthy, engaging, and lively conversation partner. Trueman here illuminates for both Lutherans and Christians of other traditions how Luther engaged Holy Scripture and lived out its message of God's creative and re-creative power and profound mercy.

From a perspective outside the tradition that claims Luther's name (and has sometimes even taken his message seriously), Trueman leads the reader into the twists and turns of Luther's career. He explains how the context of German Occamist thought and monastic piety interacted with the biblical texts that Luther pledged to interpret for the benefit of the people of God when he took his oath as a doctor of Bible, a teacher of the Word of God. This study perceptively traces the interaction of Luther's turbulent and tender conscience with the writers of the Scriptures and with a wide

variety of religious sensibilities of his peasant relatives and his princely rulers alike. Trueman's judiciously chosen quotations from Luther's own pen enliven his account.

Luther found in Scripture that God is not pleased with external sacrifices, with mere ritual performance of religious duty. God is a God of conversation and community, a God whose words create and constitute reality. Luther finally was plunged into conversation with this God, who had come into human existence to die on a cross and reclaim life for his people. We often think of Luther as a theologian so fixated on Jesus Christ and his cross that he could not pay much attention to the fruits of faith and the life of new obedience to the Creator's plans for human living. In fact, Trueman elucidates the fact that as the professor preached to the Wittenberg congregation and wrote for the instruction of readers across the German lands, Luther emphasized living as the reborn children of God. His strong doctrine of Creation led him to enjoy the Creator's gifts of both material blessings and the relationships woven into the very essence of human life in community. Therefore, he spoke to human need and human desires within the warp and woof of daily life, with all its temptations and all its divine callings to serve as God's masks in his creation. In all Luther's struggles with his own conscience, with stubborn peasants and arrogant princes, with powers of Satan ranged against him and ready to burn him at the stake, Trueman finds "one of us" (p. 55), from whom we can learn much, whether we agree with him at all points or not.

Thus, this volume presents us with a conversation of another "one of us" who has over the years watched Luther closely, listened carefully, and now shares more than only nuggets of insight. This book lays out a plan for living the godly life on the basis of God's address to his human creatures as a Word made flesh, a Word that delivers a promise in oral, written, and sacramental forms. It concretizes wisdom from another era that fits our own because it is mined from the Word of God. In this study Trueman facilitates a rewarding conversation across the ages and leads the reader into eavesdropping on Luther as he listened to and talked with his Lord and the Lord's faithful people.

Robert Kolb
Concordia Seminary, Saint Louis
Herzog August Bibliothek, Wolfenbüttel

PREFACE

I have loved Luther almost since the moment I first grasped the gospel. Along with Augustine, Aquinas, Owen, Warfield, Lloyd-Jones, and Packer, he has been one of my private theological companions. And he has made me laugh far more frequently than any of those other auspicious names. Thus, to be asked to write on him for this Crossway series was both an honor and a delight. I am, nonetheless, tempted to suggest you cast this book aside and read Luther for yourself, for who would want to look at a photograph of the Grand Canyon or Mount Everest when they have the chance to see it for themselves? But for those who want an introduction to the great, flawed genius of the Wittenberg Reformation, I trust this book will serve its purpose and indeed whet their appetite for the real thing.

I would like to thank Steve Nichols and Justin Taylor for inviting me to write this book and then being exceptionally patient as I missed deadline after deadline. They took a risk in asking someone outside the Lutheran tradition to do it, but I hope the final product passes muster even among the true Lutherans out there. And as always, I would like to thank the other staff at Crossway who helped to pilot the book from manuscript to publication.

I would also like to express my deep gratitude to Robert Kolb for taking the time to read the manuscript and write a delightful and kind foreword. Bob is a great Lutheran churchman and scholar. He has taught me through his writings how to love and understand Luther, and it is a privilege to have his imprimatur on this Reformed churchman's labors. In a similar vein, I am also grateful, delighted, and honored that Martin Marty provided such a kind afterword.

Some of the ideas in this book were tested out at the Southern Baptist

Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, where I was honored to give the Gheens Lectures in the fall of 2012 on the topic of Luther as theological pastor. Thus, I am grateful to President Mohler and (then) Dean Russell Moore for the kind invitation to spend time with their students.

I am also grateful to the trustees and faculty of Westminster Theological Seminary for granting me study leave in the spring of 2014 to finish this book; and also to Ben, Charles, Cris, Dick, Sandy, and Tom. As members of the session of Cornerstone Presbyterian Church (OPC), Ambler, Pennsylvania, along with the congregation, they have provided a happy spiritual home where my family and I have been regularly fed with the Word and sacrament for over a decade now, even if in a way that Dr. Martin would not wholly approve.

Thanks are also due to friends who have taught me much about the Christian life, especially the place of laughter, so central to Dr. Martin himself: Todd, Aimee, Matt, Max, Paul, and Alicia. Keep the jokes coming! Finally, I dedicate this work to my own "Lord Katie." As I wrote in the last book I dedicated to her some sixteen years ago: *sine qua non*. That is even truer today than it was back then.

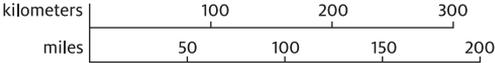
ABBREVIATIONS

Sources abbreviated *LW*, followed by volume numbers, are from *Luther's Works*, American edition, vols. 1–55, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg and Fortress; St. Louis: Concordia, 1955–). Titles of volumes cited are included in this list:

- BC* *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, ed. Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Mühlenberg, 1959).
- LW*, 1 *Lectures on Genesis, Chapters 1–5*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, 1958.
- LW*, 11 *First Lectures on the Psalms II, 76–126*, ed. Hilton C. Oswald, 1976.
- LW*, 14 *Selected Psalms III*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, 1958.
- LW*, 18 *Lectures on the Minor Prophets I: Hosea–Malachi*, ed. Hilton C. Oswald, 1975.
- LW*, 21 *The Sermon on the Mount (Sermons) and the Magnificat*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, 1956.
- LW*, 26 *Lectures on Galatians, 1535, Chapters 1–4*, ed. Walter A. Hansen, 1963.
- LW*, 27 *Lectures on Galatians, 1535, Chapters 5–6; Lectures on Galatians, 1519, Chapters 1–6*, ed. Walter A. Hansen, 1964.
- LW*, 31 *Career of the Reformer I*, ed. Harold J. Grimm, 1957.
- LW*, 32 *Career of the Reformer II*, ed. George W. Forell, 1958.
- LW*, 33 *Career of the Reformer III*, ed. Philip S. Watson, 1972.
- LW*, 34 *Career of the Reformer IV*, ed. Lewis W. Spitz, 1960.
- LW*, 35 *Word and Sacrament I*, ed. E. Theodore Bachman, 1960.

- LW, 36 *Word and Sacrament II*, ed. Abdel Ross Wentz, 1959.
- LW, 38 *Word and Sacrament IV*, ed. Martin E. Lehmann, 1971.
- LW, 40 *Church and Ministry II*, ed. Conrad Bergendoff, 1958.
- LW, 41 *Church and Ministry III*, ed. Eric W. Gritsch, 1966.
- LW, 42 *Devotional Writings I*, ed. Martin O. Dietrich, 1969.
- LW, 43 *Devotional Writings II*, ed. Gustav K. Wiencke, 1968.
- LW, 44 *The Christian in Society I*, ed. James Atkinson, 1966.
- LW, 45 *The Christian in Society II*, ed. Walther I. Brandt, 1962.
- LW, 46 *The Christian in Society III*, ed. Robert C. Schultz, 1967.
- LW, 47 *The Christian in Society IV*, ed. Franklin Sherman, 1971.
- LW, 49 *Letters II*, ed. and trans. Gottfried G. Krodel, 1972.
- LW, 50 *Letters III*, ed. and trans. Gottfried G. Krodel, 1975.
- LW, 51 *Sermons I*, ed. and trans. John W. Doberstein, 1959.
- LW, 53 *Liturgy and Hymns*, ed. Ulrich S. Leupold, 1965.
- LW, 54 *Table Talk*, ed. and trans. Theodore G. Tappert, 1967.

Cited cities in the life of Luther
on a map of modern Germany



INTRODUCTION

WHAT HAS GENEVA TO DO WITH WITTENBERG?

*It was long ago and it was far away,
and it was so much better than it is today.*

MEATLOAF, "PARADISE BY THE DASHBOARD LIGHT"¹

It is traditional to start a book such as this by asking, why write a book on Luther on the Christian life? But in the case of the Reformer of Wittenberg, that would seem pointless. After Augustine, no single churchman-theologian has influenced the Western church more than Luther over the centuries. Not only did his pastoral protest in the sixteenth century precipitate the shattering of the medieval church, but many of his own particular concerns—the clarity of Scripture, the centrality of the preached Word, justification by grace through faith, and the Lord's Supper—helped to define Protestantism in relation to Roman Catholicism and to determine how different Protestant communions came to understand themselves in relation to each other. In short, an understanding of Luther's approach to the Christian life is fundamental to understanding the varieties of practical Western Christianity over the last five hundred years.

Yet, readers of Luther should be aware of a number of problems from the start. The first is that his theology lends itself to dramatic sound bites. Many who have never read Luther in any great depth will be familiar with various phrases that he used or that are popularly ascribed to him: "theologian of glory," "theologian of the cross," "justification by grace through

¹ Lyrics by James "Jim" Steinman.

faith alone,” “the hidden God and the revealed God,” “the bondage of the will,” “the epistle of straw.” No Christian with an interest in theology can fail to be intrigued by such vocabulary; but being intrigued by or familiar with these phrases is not the same as understanding exactly what they mean, still less how they fit into a comprehensive view of the Christian life.

This problem is particularly acute when we take into account the evangelical propensity to reinvent heroes of the past as modern-day evangelicals. Numerous characters have been subjected to this over the years, Dietrich Bonhoeffer and C. S. Lewis, to name but two of the most obvious. Why this should be the case is not immediately obvious, but perhaps it has something to do with the current reluctance in American culture to relate positively to anyone with whom one has serious ideological differences. Sadly, this often means that one cannot learn from others: if we always re-create others in our own image, we can never be truly challenged by the ways in which they differ from us.

Luther was not a modern American evangelical. Indeed, neither his thought world nor his physical world were those of American evangelicalism. For many modern evangelicals, for example, private Bible study is central to their understanding of the Christian life, while sacraments are peripheral. The tradition, in some Baptist circles, of allowing repeated baptisms for those who keep repenting and being unsure of whether their earlier baptism truly followed a real profession of faith shows just how low a view of baptism evangelicals can have. And few, if any, evangelicals regard the Lord’s Supper as anything other than a mere symbolic display.

For Luther, however, the idea that private Bible study might be a universal staple of the Christian life would have been bizarre: after all, few of his parishioners would have been able to read, even if they could afford a book. As to sacraments, Luther’s understanding of justification is driven in large part by his changing view of baptism; “I have been baptized” was his chosen defense against the temptations that the Devil whispered in his ear; and he was adamant that Huldrych Zwingli was of a “different spirit,” thus calling into question his Christianity, precisely because the Swiss theologian argued that the Lord’s Supper was symbolic. In short, Luther would not have recognized typical evangelical piety or attitudes about baptism; and if consistent with his rhetoric against Zwingli, he would actually have dismissed all evangelicals, Prayer Book Anglicans, and Presbyterians as “of another spirit” because of their failure to agree with him on the Supper. Of

course, Luther was often bombastic, and we should not always take him at his word. But even if he would not have denied the Christianity of all those who differed with him on the Supper, he would nonetheless have regarded them as seriously deficient in their understanding of the Christian faith.

In fact, Luther and his world are deeply alien to the sensibilities of modern evangelicalism. Luther's piety was rooted in the gathering of the church, in the Word preached more than the Word read, and in the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper. Further, his world was one where the Devil walked abroad, where the supernatural permeated the natural, where the battle in the human breast between the old man and the new was also paralleled by the larger cosmic struggle between God and the Devil over the fate of the soul of every individual. Luther the familiar hero of evangelical mythology needs to be set aside if we are to learn about Luther the theologian of the Christian life.

This problem of familiarity and quotability is compounded by a second problem in approaching Luther: the common belief that he was not a systematic thinker. There is a sense in which this claim is true: Luther did not write a comprehensive *summa* or systematic theology of the kind produced by Aquinas. In the early Lutheran tradition, that task fell to his brilliant younger colleague Philipp Melancthon (1497–1560), whose *Loci Communes* fulfilled that role from 1521 onward. Yet one should not make the mistake of assuming that because he wrote no system of theology, his thought was not remarkably consistent in both its content and, indeed, its development. Over many decades, Luther wrote a vast amount of theology in a wide variety of genres, from sermons to polemical treatises, to pastoral letters, to hymns, to catechisms. Does he contradict himself at points? Probably. Who would not after writing millions of words on a vast spectrum of topics over nearly forty years? But is the overall content of his thought both consistent and sophisticated? Absolutely, as witnessed to by the large number of syntheses of his thought that have been produced over the years.² The fact that his thought is elaborate and consistent, then, demands that readers of his work—and even more so those who quote his

² See the "Further Reading" section at the end of this introduction. The meaning of Luther's theology was even a source of controversy almost from the moment of his death, when his followers rapidly divided into two broad groups: the Philippists (who read Luther in terms of the concerns of Melancthon) and the Gnesio-Lutherans (or "real Lutherans"). The former tended to be more open to the Reformed on the issue of the Lord's Supper, more Erasmian on the issue of the human will, and more concessive to the Roman Catholics on issues of liturgical aesthetics; the latter maintained a strict opposition to Reformed views of the Lord's Supper and firmly upheld Luther's teaching on the will as expressed in his 1525 treatise *The Bondage of the Will*.

well-known terms and phrases—make sure they set it into the overall context of his theology lest they put it to a purpose Luther himself would have repudiated.

This in turn leads to a third problem, which is generated by the superficial familiarity many of Luther's fans have with his thought: Luther's own personal biography is crucial to understanding the nature and development of his thought. To make the point specifically with regard to the topic of this volume: we cannot understand Luther's view of the Christian life in general without understanding his own Christian life in particular.

One of the interesting things about the reception of Luther in contemporary evangelical Protestant circles is that it is the *early* Reformation Luther—the Luther of the Heidelberg Disputation, of *The Freedom of the Christian Man*, and of *The Bondage of the Will*—who generally provides the quotations, the sound bites, and the clichés. Thus, it is the Luther of 1525 and earlier who receives all the attention. The problem with this approach is that Luther lived for another twenty-one years after his clash with Desiderius Erasmus, years marked not only by the doctrinally defining conflict with Zwingli but also by the institutional and practical consolidation of the Lutheran Reformation at ground level. The Reformation was, after all, a work in progress in Luther's lifetime: his theology shattered old pastoral patterns and transformed the practical and experiential expectations of Christians. Even as it resolved some of the difficult issues generated by late medieval Catholicism, it asked new questions and created new problems, which then had to be addressed. It is not enough to quote Luther's *Heidelberg Disputation* or *The Freedom of the Christian Man* without seeing how the theology of these documents affected the world of their own day and how Luther and his colleagues had to refine their thought and practices in light of this.

To give the reader a little foretaste of what I wish to argue in later chapters, it seems to me that the post-1525 Luther is vital for understanding his view of the Christian life. By that time, he was growing old and feeling the effects of the aging process. He had also suffered chronic bouts of constipation ever since his sedentary sojourn at the Wartburg Castle in 1521. Furthermore, it was becoming increasingly clear to Luther that he was not living on the threshold of Christ's return, that the mere preaching of the Word would not guarantee the progress of the kingdom and the good order of the church. In 1522, Luther could lightheartedly explain the success of the Reformation by commenting that he just sat around in the pub drink-

ing beer with Amsdorf and Melanchthon while God's Word was out doing all the work;³ the years after 1525 taught Luther that it was a whole lot more difficult than that. The Peasants' War of 1525 and the dispute with Zwingli throughout the latter half of the 1520s demonstrated how illusory was the Protestant consensus and how socially dangerous were the times. The rising antinomianism in the parishes showed how the preaching of the Word needed to be set within a more disciplined pastoral and ecclesiastical framework. The failure of the emperor to subscribe to the Augsburg Confession, of the pope to acknowledge the correctness of Luther's stand, and of the Jews to convert to Christianity all indicated that the Reformation was going to be a long haul.

If the young Luther had, like the British soldiers of 1914, assumed that the conflict would all be over by Christmas, the later Luther knew that the struggle was actually going to last until the end of time—and that that was much further into the future than he had ever imagined in even his worst nightmares. In the interim, moral imperatives, coherent pedagogy, and church structures had to reenter the picture in order to guarantee the preservation of the gospel for future generations.

Given all of the caveats necessary when the modern reader approaches Luther, what is unique about this man that makes him particularly useful as a dialogue partner on the Christian life today? Obviously, as noted above, he defined many of the terms of Protestant debates about Christianity in general. Yet there is much more to him than this. As a theologian who was also a pastor, he was continually wrestling with how his theological insights connected to the lives and experiences of the people under his care. This gave much of his writing a distinctly pastoral dimension. Further, he was (for a theologian) unusually forthcoming about his own life and experiences. There was a personal passion to Luther that finds no obvious counterpart in the writings of other significant Reformers. Calvin's letters contain insights into his private life, but his lectures, commentaries, and treatises offer little or no light on the inner life of the man himself. John Owen outlived all eleven of his children, yet he never once mentioned the personal devastation that this must have brought to his world. Luther was different: he lived his inner life as a public drama. Unlike many today on chat shows and Twitter and personal blogs, he did not do so in a way that boosted his own prestige; he did it with irony, humor, and occasional

³LW, 51:77.

pathos. But he did it nonetheless, and this makes him a fascinating case study in self-reflection on the Christian life.

In the eight chapters that follow, I offer an account of Luther's understanding of the Christian life that takes as its cue the fact that he himself lived a dramatic Christian life. Too often theologians are treated as if they were simply abstract collections of ideas. Luther was a man of real flesh and blood; he was a son, a priest, a pastor, a preacher, a politician, a controversialist, a professor, a husband, a father, a drinking companion, a humorist, a depressive, a man who was to stand more than once at the grave of one of his beloved children. He baptized babies, performed marriages, heard confessions, presided at funerals. All of these things shaped his theology. Indeed, he wrote theology from the position of being immersed in the mucky reality of everyday life.

It is perhaps helpful to mention, at this point, what I do not do in this work. First, I do not interact extensively with the vast and ever-growing scholarship on Luther. My purpose is to expound Luther in a way that introduces his thinking on the Christian life to a thoughtful Christian audience. Thus, debates over contested points of interpretation of his work do not generally fall within my purview. The one exception is perhaps his view of holiness in the Christian life, but that is driven more by contemporary debates in the church than by the dynamics of Luther scholarship.

Second, I do not offer significant critique of Luther. I could have spent time offering an analysis of those points where Lutherans and Presbyterians disagree and used the opportunity to promote my own confessional position. I have tried hard to avoid that temptation. What I have done is offered an exposition of Luther's theology on its own terms. Yes, I have significant disagreements with Luther on matters such as baptism and the Lord's Supper, but they do not feature in the following chapters.

At the end of each chapter, I have included a brief section in which I offer some reflections on how the subject matter of the chapter might apply to the church and to Christians today. There is always the possibility of anachronism here. As in the quotation from Meatloaf at the head of this introduction, there can be a tendency to idealize the past and simply use studies like this one as an excuse for nostalgia and lamenting the loss of a bygone golden age. That is pointless and historically fallacious: the past was not that good, after all. Nevertheless, as Christians we have the responsibility, indeed the privilege and the imperative, of dialoguing con-

structively with the saints of the past in a way that can help us to think clearly in the present. Given Luther's seminal importance for Protestantism, engaging with his thought is vital. I trust that these sections of reflection will provide both challenge and encouragement.

As far as the overall content of the chapters is concerned, in chapter 1 I describe Luther's life in terms of its many dramatic episodes. This chapter is very lightly footnoted, as the reader should really turn to the works by Bainton, Marty, and, above all, Brecht listed at the end of this introduction for the full details on Luther's life. Nevertheless, some knowledge of his biography is necessary for understanding his theology. Luther's own wrestling with God shaped his understanding of God's Word in profound ways. Further, an understanding of both his strengths and his terrible flaws will help the reader have a realistic understanding of the man, warts and all.

In chapter 2, I examine some of the foundational theological concepts in Luther's thinking. Taking the Heidelberg Disputation as my starting point, I explore the key distinction between the theologian of glory and the theologian of the cross. Those basic categories shape all of Luther's understanding of life as it is lived before God. Then, I outline his understanding of justification, as well as his understanding of human beings as simultaneously both righteous and sinners, before looking at his notion of the priesthood and kingship of all believers. Weakness is strength—this is the overall message of God in Christ, a powerful antidote to the Nietzschean excesses of our current world.

In chapter 3, I focus on the Word preached. Luther had a profoundly theological understanding of God's Word. It shaped his views of creation, of God's action in general, and of his specific action in salvation. There is real value in reflecting upon Luther's insights here, for they remind the preacher that his task rests not in his own strength or eloquence but in the power of the God who speaks through him.

In chapter 4, we see how, for Luther, the Christian life had a strongly liturgical aspect to it. The basics of the Christian life were routine and ordinary: learning the Decalogue, the Apostles' Creed, and the Lord's Prayer. Luther designed liturgies and catechisms to do this. We may live in an age when everything has to be "radical" and "revolutionary." For Luther the most radical thing one could do was to learn the basics of the faith with the simple trust of a little child.

In chapter 5, I examine how the Word works in the lives of individuals. Central to this is Luther's idea that hearing God's Word involves speech, meditation, and "trials" (or, to use the German, *Anfechtungen*). The Word addresses us at the core of our being; learning it is never a purely cerebral or rote exercise. It grips our souls, drives us to despair and lifts us up to the very portals of heaven.

In chapter 6, we come to the area where modern evangelicals will have least sympathy with Luther: the sacraments. Yet here we can learn from him even as we differ. The great objectivity of God's gift to us in Christ undergirds Luther's thinking, as does his absolute conviction that the incarnation means that God deals with broken sinners in tangible, weak forms that are despised by the theologians of glory.

In chapter 7, I address the tricky set of issues surrounding Luther's thinking on actual, intrinsic righteousness. Here I make the case to which I alluded above, that the popular Luther canon of a select few pre-1525 works is not a sufficient evidential base for drawing wider conclusions about his mature theology.

Finally, in chapter 8, I look at Luther and real life: life in the public sphere, earthly callings, marriage, and family. Luther, perhaps more than anyone else in the sixteenth century, revolutionized thinking on all these matters and thus deserves attention.

As I draw this introduction to a close, it is perhaps time to mention why I myself find Luther such a worthy subject of personal study. I am not exactly promising Luther territory: a Reformed Presbyterian who holds a view of the Lord's Supper, and correlative christology, that Luther would have decried as positively unchristian. Indeed, as I noted above, when I survey the series of which this volume is a part, it seems that I am the only author who might say that he stands clearly outside the broad tradition that his chosen subject represents. Further, I have rarely if ever used any of Luther's commentaries or lectures in order to help clarify an exegetical point. Frankly, he lacks the precision and sensitivity to the biblical text that one finds in Calvin. So why is it that, despite many attempts over the years to move on from studying Luther, I find myself drawn back to him again and again? And why have I been teaching his thought every year now for over two decades to classes of undergraduate and graduate students on both sides of the Atlantic?

First, I was profoundly influenced as a student by a comment made to me by my own doctoral supervisor, the Zwingli scholar Peter Stephens. Peter is a highly sacramental Arminian Methodist with little personal sympathy for Zwingli. Yet he told me that he considered it an appropriate challenge for a Christian to see if he could write with fairness and enthusiasm about someone with whom he radically disagreed. That way, he said, he could be sure his analysis and conclusions were not driven by special pleading.

I have always valued that comment as sage advice and now have an opportunity to see if I am worthy of standing in the tradition of my own academic mentor's approach. I would not say that I am in *radical* disagreement with much of Luther, other than his view of the sacraments (though that would be enough to render me a Radical in Luther's eyes). But he is not my tradition, even as I find him useful. Thus, I agreed to write the book out of a certain methodological contrarianism.

Second, I find Luther to be one of the most human theologians there is, certainly among Protestants. His humor alone endears him to me. His last written words—"We are beggars: this is true"—set all human pretensions to greatness and divinity in tragicomic perspective. A theologian who ultimately helps us to remember that we are of no lasting earthly importance whatsoever has crucial importance in an era obsessed with numbers of Twitter followers and Facebook friends.

Third, I find Luther to address some of the most basic questions of human existence: despair, illness, sex, love, bereavement, children, enemies, danger, death. Luther touches on them all, and always with an unusual anecdote, an insightful comment, a human touch. There is no false, desiccated, tedious piety about the man. He lived his Christian life to the full, red in tooth and claw.

Fourth, I find Luther to be fun. Who else would describe how a woman scared the Devil away by breaking wind in his face, but then caution his listeners not to do the same as it could prove lethal? Any theologian with advice like that has to be worth reading.

Finally, I love Luther because it was his highest ambition to let God be God. And in doing so he realized that the love of God does not find but creates that which is lovely to it.

And with that thought, to which we shall return, let us turn to Luther's life.

Further Reading

Two useful selections of Luther's major writings are

Dillenberger, John, ed. *Martin Luther: Selections from His Writings*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1961.

Lull, Timothy F., ed. *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989.

Throughout this book, I cite the standard multivolume English translation, *Luther's Works*, which was initially produced under the general editorship of Jaroslav Pelikan and is now published by Concordia (for specific volume titles, see the table of abbreviations, above).

The best introductory biographies in English are

Bainton, Roland H. *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther*. London: Forgotten Books, 2012.

Marty, Martin E. *Martin Luther: A Life*. New York: Penguin, 2004.

For the really serious Luther aficionado, however, the best biography in English is

Brecht, Martin. *Martin Luther*. 3 vols. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1985–1993.

Summaries of Luther's theology abound. Among the best are

Kolb, Robert. *Martin Luther: Confessor of the Faith*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.

Lohse, Bernhard. *Martin Luther's Theology: Its Historical and Systematic Development*. Translated and edited by Roy A. Harrisville. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999.

Finally, for anyone interested in how Luther's theology can be used to inform church life today, see

Kolb, Robert, and Charles P. Arand. *The Genius of Luther's Theology: A Wittenberg Way of Thinking for the Contemporary Church*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008.

Martin Luther's historical significance can hardly be overstated. Known as the father of the Protestant Reformation, Luther has had an enormous impact on Western Christianity and culture. In *Luther on the Christian Life*, historian Carl Trueman introduces readers to the lively Reformer, taking them on a tour of his historical context, theological system, and approach to the Christian life. Whether exploring Luther's theology of protest, ever-present sense of humor, or misunderstood view of sanctification, this book will help modern readers go deeper in their spiritual walk by learning from one of the great teachers of the faith.

"This book illustrates again why Martin Luther remains a nearly inexhaustible resource. Trueman explains why Luther can be such a perceptive, encouraging, human, and even humorous guide to the Christian life."

MARK A. NOLL, Francis A. McAnaney Professor of History, University of Notre Dame

"Carl Trueman has pulled off a tremendous feat: he's not only given us a volume that is scholarly and historically nuanced while still accessible and refreshingly contemporary; he's also managed to capture the brilliance and boldness of Martin Luther in a relatively short space."

KEVIN DEYOUNG, Senior Pastor, University Reformed Church, East Lansing, Michigan

"If you think you know Luther, read this book. It is a remarkably edifying and illuminating piece of work. Displaying the interests of a pastor and the rigor of a historian, Trueman provides us with an analysis of Luther on the Christian life that is as 'human' as the German Reformer himself."

MICHAEL HORTON, J. Gresham Machen Professor of Systematic Theology and Apologetics, Westminster Seminary California

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