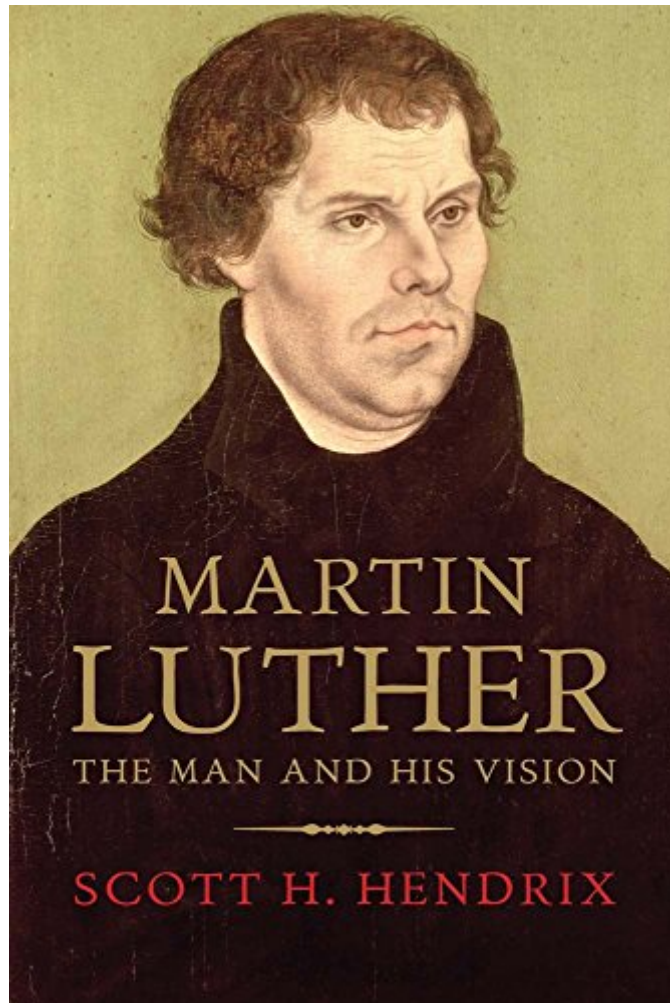




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# Martin Luther: Visionary Reformer



## Synopsis

The sixteenth-century German friar whose public conflict with the medieval Roman Church triggered the Protestant Reformation, Martin Luther was neither an unblemished saint nor a single-minded religious zealot according to this provocative new biography by Scott Hendrix. The author presents Luther as a man of his time: a highly educated scholar and teacher and a gifted yet flawed human being driven by an optimistic yet ultimately unrealized vision of a true religion. • This bold, insightful account of the life of Martin Luther provides a new perspective on one of the most important religious figures in history, focusing on Luther's entire life, his personal relationships and political motivations, rather than on his theology alone. Relying on the latest research and quoting extensively from Luther's correspondence, Hendrix paints a richly detailed portrait of an extraordinary man who, while devout and courageous, had a dark side as well. No recent biography in English explores as fully the life and work of Martin Luther long before and far beyond the controversial posting of his 95 Theses in 1517, an event that will soon be celebrated as the 500th anniversary of the Reformation.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Excellent bio, just the right amount of Luther and the right amount of theology. The only jarring note for me was some odd editorial decisions (by his editor, I presume). Did a buyer of this book really need to be told who Aristotle was, or that Romans, etc. are "books of the Bible" or, EVERY time a distance was mentioned, have to have it converted into kms? But these are minor quibbles, this is the best Luther bio I've read.

It is not unreasonable for a potential reader to ask, "Is there anything to say about Luther that hasn't already been said?" Biographical study of Luther is a field that has been plowed and harvested many times over. The classic work *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther* by Roland Bainton remains a model of historical biography. Bainton was followed by Erik Erikson's pioneering psychological study, *Young Man Luther*, Heiko Oberman's book *Luther: Man between God and the Devil* and many other biographies. But Scott Hendrix carefully tills and cultivates the well-plowed field of Luther research to offer a distinct take on Luther. Hendrix offers fresh insight into Luther's life and work in three particular areas—his close examination of Luther's collegial relationships, the extraordinary variety of roles Luther had to assume during the course of the Reformation and the sensitive exploration of Luther's life and work as an older man. The title of Bainton's biography, *Here I Stand* implies a certain heroic stance portraying Luther as an individual pioneer. While not ignoring Luther's published writings, Hendrix has immersed himself in Luther's correspondence and this yields a new perspective on Luther. Hendrix portrays Luther surrounded by comrades who were equally inspired by the new freedom opened up through the gospel. Life in community brought great joy and great heartache for Luther. Luther's translation of the New Testament will always be tied to his time of exile in the Wartburg castle. But work on the German Bible did not end with Luther's first efforts. Hendrix gives us a wonderful description of the translation team of Melanchthon, Bugenhagen, Jonas and Aurogallus who along with Luther met around 70 times between 1540-1541 to revise and complete "our Bible" as Luther called it. Luther knew that for the reformation to endure, leadership had to be shared. Yet at times this was hard to square with Luther's conviction that he had a unique calling by God to renew German Christianity. It was especially taxing for Luther when he was unable to personally participate in important events like the Diet of Augsburg and had to leave decision making to others.

Luther practically overwhelmed his friend Melanchthon with sulky correspondence and increasingly desperate pleas for updates. As they worked through what was possible to concede and what had to be held fast, Melanchthon, perhaps in exasperation wrote to Luther that he was "subject to Luther's authority". Luther bristled, "If this is not simultaneously and in the same way your cause, then I do not want it to be called mine and imposed upon you. If it is my cause alone then I will handle it myself." Hendrix does an exceptional job of portraying the emotional depth of Luther's friendships. Luther related to his mentor in the monastery John Staupitz like a son anxious for approval and affirmation. As he aged, Luther struggled to relate to even his closest colleagues when they had disagreements, as witnessed by painful broken relationships with Andrew Karlstadt and John Agricola. I came away from this book awed at the scope of responsibilities Luther was called to take on during his lifetime. He was a scholar and an academic administrator in Wittenberg. He filled in as parish pastor when his friend John Bugenhagen was absent. As German cities adopted the reformation, he became for all practical purposes a bishop "overseeing the replacement of clergy, how protestant parishes funded themselves, and the reform of religious practice. Luther was often called upon to mediate disputes, particularly divorce cases of noteworthy persons. The list goes on. No one person could be good at all these different roles. Luther's health undoubtedly buckled under the strain. "I am swamped by letters from every direction. They all presume that only Luther can expedite their affairs." Hendrix's portrait of Luther as an older man was especially poignant. As an idealist with a sweeping vision, Luther was a prime candidate for disillusionment. The petty sins and disagreements of the Wittenberg populace, the death of a daughter, trouble with a son, ongoing controversy with the Catholic Church, conflicts with Anabaptists and Zwinglians, poor health and the never ending demands of his followers wore on Luther. Some of Luther's most scathing writings come from this period including *The Jews and their Lies*. Hendrix takes an unblinking look at these writings, neither excusing Luther nor disregarding their historical context. Luther's last years reveal how difficult it is for any person to clearly see the sum of their own life. But even while he suffered attacks of disillusionment, Luther could occasionally step back and see his own amazing pilgrimage with some insight. "I myself am deeply indebted to my papists that through the devil's raging they have beaten, oppressed, and distressed me so much. That is to say: they have made a fairly good theologian of me, which I otherwise would not have become." This review was originally posted on my blog "Radiant & Resplendent" [...]

Even if you don't read this book about Martin Luther, you should read a book about Martin Luther. At

the beginning of this book the author describes Martin Luther as one of the people who has had the biggest impact on the world, notably religion, but I think it is more than religion. Yes, it is because of Martin Luther that you and I can make a religious choice. Martin Luther did not separate Church and State, but he planted the seeds that resulted in the separation. This is a freedom we take for granted in many countries today, but this wasn't always how it was. It was a long a difficult transition, and this book makes that abundantly clear. But, Martin Luther did not just affect how religious services were conducted or argue about some details of theology, he affected the basic fabric of how human society conducts itself. He encouraged people to take responsibility for their own relationship with God, rather than relying on the Church to do it for them. This led the way for people to think for themselves in many ways, and eventually broke down centuries old hierarchies in the society. Thank you Martin! As far as this book goes, it is scholarly and has lots of good details. I would call it more of a History of the Early Reformation, than a Biography of Martin Luther. There were only a few details about Martin's early years (likely little is known). On the other hand, there were lots of details about the events of the Reformation, including many protagonists other than Martin Luther. The book was easy to read, and I got a good feel for the chain of events, but there is no way I will remember all of the characters. Fortunately, there is a good index if one wants to review something later.

Learned so much about this man - much of what I believed about him was wrong, and his biography does a lot of help understand this period of history.

This is an excellent, well researched and written biography of Luther. It would be an excellent book for churches to use during this 500th anniversary of the Reformation. It is very readable by members of the laity, as well as being a good resource for theologians.

Of all the Luther books coming out for the 500th anniversary, this is by far the best. Excellent for Luther fans, but also a really well-told story, a biography that stands up well to biographies that weren't written by professors! Hendrix has written the best out there.

Was written well and easy to read and understand.

Lots of good information; for me, it really illuminated the religious-political milieu of the time and its influence on the development of the "Reformation". I will probably read it again in preparation for the

500th anniversary.

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