

5-1-1987

# Martin Luther: An Introduction to His Life and Work

Robert A. Kelly

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholars.wlu.ca/consensus>

---

### Recommended Citation

Kelly, Robert A. (1987) "Martin Luther: An Introduction to His Life and Work," *Consensus*: Vol. 13 : Iss. 1 , Article 12.  
Available at: <http://scholars.wlu.ca/consensus/vol13/iss1/12>

This Book Reviews is brought to you for free and open access by Scholars Commons @ Laurier. It has been accepted for inclusion in Consensus by an authorized editor of Scholars Commons @ Laurier. For more information, please contact [scholarscommons@wlu.ca](mailto:scholarscommons@wlu.ca).

in early Lutheran orthodoxy. In addition, the author of this section, Alister McGrath, manifests a distinct lack of acquaintance with the sources: he notes, for example, that the *locus* method prevented Lutheranism from adopting any single doctrine as a systematizing principle and then comments that the Reformed used predestination as a central dogma—without recognizing that the Reformed, also, had a heavy investment in the *locus* method and the rather loose organization of system that it produced.

We must be content with one final point of critique. The volume is concerned with theological method and the development of the theological discipline, but it studiously avoids discussion of documents and sections of documents in which theologians typically discuss such issues in their own theology. There is no discussion of the prolegomena to theological systems anywhere in the book—despite the fact that the rise of prolegomena after Alan of Lille in the middle ages and after Calvin in the sixteenth century mark the rise of interest in theology as a discipline. This problem carries over into the modern section of the book where no mention is made of the nineteenth century development of “theological encyclopedia” as a methodological analysis of theology and its sub-disciplines— and there is no analysis either of Schleiermacher’s *Brief Outline* or of the prolegomena of Barth’s *Church Dogmatics*. Thus, both at the level of secondary works on the subject of the history of the theological enterprise and at the level of the primary sources that bear most directly on this discussion, *The Science of Theology* is startlingly silent. If this new series hopes to survive, the succeeding volumes will have to be far more attentive to the state of scholarship in their chosen fields and far more aware of the parameters and implications of the topic chosen for analysis and exposition.

Richard A. Muller  
Fuller Theological Seminary  
Pasadena, California

**Martin Luther: An Introduction to His Life and Work**  
Bernhard Lohse  
Translated by Robert C. Schultz  
Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986  
\$23.75 paperback

The field of Luther studies has become so vast that even those who devote the whole of a scholarly career to it cannot keep up. There are now so many and such thorough specialized studies of aspects of Luther’s context, life, and thought that for some years no one seemed willing to take up the task of providing a useful introduction to the picture of Luther presented by recent research. That changed in 1981 when Bernhard Lohse

published *Martin Luther—Eine Einfuehrung in sein Leben und sein Werk* (Munich: Verlag C.H. Beck). With Robert Schultz' translation of Lohse's work there is now a book that one can recommend to the person who wants to learn the essentials about Luther without making it a life work.

One of the problems which the student of Luther faces is the continuing struggle for the Luther of reality against the Luther of legend. All too many writers have opted for the legends or have made Luther a mirror for their own projections. Even works long considered classics use data that is now known to be false or is questioned. Lohse's contribution is to make the results of Luther research available to any educated person who cares to read. As in any book which covers so much material in a compact space, there are small points that one wishes had been nuanced more carefully or covered differently. Some might question Lohse's principle of organization. For the book as a whole, though, it is difficult for this reviewer to offer anything but praise. This really is the best one-volume introduction to Luther in English. The picture of Luther that emerges from this book is as accurate as any now available.

Robert C. Schultz' translation is readable and faithful. Like Luther, Schultz seems to translate for meaning rather than literally. This is to be applauded, but it does sometimes raise questions of interpretation. For example, does "ordained ministry" really carry the same weight in English that *geistliche Amt* does in German? Such a problem is perhaps inevitable, for "spiritual office" would have no meaning at all to North Americans. At this one almost despairs of translating anything, so even though the nuances and contexts are different, "ordained ministry" is probably the best available translation.

There is a sense in which *Martin Luther* participates in the flaw of so much German scholarship which spends more time on the history of interpretation rather than on meaning itself. In the case of Luther scholarship this is not altogether bad, for Luther has too often been used for another's ends rather than allowed to speak for himself. From Melanchthon to ourselves Luther is made over in our own image. Lohse's work reminds us where and how this has happened in the past. If there is anything the Lutheran churches need today, it is a Luther who speaks as critically to us as he spoke in the sixteenth century. We need to listen to Luther, not force him to speak our words.

Robert A. Kelly  
Waterloo Lutheran Seminary