

Martin Luther: Visionary Reformer. Scott H. Hendrix.
New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015. xxiv + 342 pp. \$35.

For sixty-five years Roland Bainton's *Here I Stand* has dominated the field of English-language Luther biographies. Scholarly and written in a style accessible to the beginner, Bainton reflected the best scholarship up to the mid-twentieth century while telling the story in an unencumbered way. Hendrix has finally replaced Bainton. He combines a thorough command of what his colleagues' research has provided in new material from different perspectives with his own extensive reading in both the sources and the secondary literature. His keen ear for the right anecdotes and his sharp eye for the contextual connections offer a detailed account of Luther's life within a helpful assessment of his significance for his time and ours. The little-known incidents that Hendrix relates sketch vivid pictures of the man, his emotions, his relationships, and the personal, political, social, and cultural context in which his thought took form.

Beginning with a retrospective chapter written from comments Luther made in 1546, the year of his death, Hendrix traces his life through seventeen stages, treating certain themes that reoccur several times, so that readers feel the world whirling around the Reformer and sense the jagged development of his thinking on the questions imposed upon him by his study of scripture, colleagues and supporters, foes, and governmental and intellectual leaders who sought his counsel. Hendrix succinctly leads readers into scholarly debates, e.g., on the Reformer's "reformation discovery," arguing against any

fixed dating, for a gradual, ragged progress toward his new insights (49–54). Crisp analyses of events and ideas, such as the issues raised by the Ninety-Five Theses and their publication and distribution, provide clear insight even to those with little background. His personality and pace of life take concrete shape as Hendrix tells, for example, of his frantic request for material on Saint Bartholomew because he was preaching on him at noon the same day. Hendrix also revisits the rocky relationship between Luther and Karlstadt, the unfolding story of their intertwined lives, as two quite different personalities with fundamentally different understandings of scripture clashed over the necessary course of reform. Readers visualize the vital role Katharina von Bora and their children played in Luther's life as Hendrix recounts the father's horror at touching baby Margarete's mouth with unwashed hands (241); Katharina emerges as a personality who functioned as wife and counselor, mother and manager, companion also to the wives of Luther's colleagues. The deep sorrow Luther experienced at the death of his parents and two of his daughters reveals his intense dedication to family that paralleled his concern for ill friends, such as Melancthon and Spalatin.

Presenting the life of a "visionary reformer" inevitably cannot dwell on all the details that reviewers would have liked to explore with the author. Hendrix certainly draws from recent scholarship illuminating the crucible of Scholastic theology and monastic piety that shaped Luther's early experiences in university and monastery; I would have liked even more. Every reviewer also views certain aspects of such a life from another perspective. In addition to Hendrix's suggesting that love had simply turned to hate or that Luther could not tolerate disagreement, which might have influenced Luther's fierce reaction to Johann Agricola's view of God's law, it might be that the student's perceived stubborn ignoring of just how the teacher thought that law and Gospel were to be distinguished, as the key to proper pastoral care and proclamation, brought Luther's temper to a white heat after months of patient exchanges on the heart of his theological method.

This volume combines rich detail and sharply drawn analyses to engage readers with a living individual, his fiery temperament, his passionate concern for the comfort of consciences, his impatience with those who did not see the world as he did, and his tenderness toward family, friends, colleagues, and students. With a remarkable, admirable degree of precision and lucidity, Hendrix illuminates the life of one who has influenced five centuries of thought and action in the Western world and beyond, adding to his already significant contributions to Reformation scholarship.

Robert Kolb, *Concordia Seminary*