

Robert Kolb. *Luther and the Stories of God: Biblical Narratives as a Foundation for Christian Living*.

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In his *Hilfsbuch zum Lutherstudium*, Kurt Aland numbered nearly 2,100 sermons by Martin Luther. To this, one ought to add another hundred or so postils that were not counted as part of the sermons. A cursory scan of Buchwald and Kawerau's *Luther-Kalendarium*, which gives an almost day-by-day record of what Luther was doing from the late 1510s to his death, reveals just how often Luther took to the pulpit. Nearly every month, one finds numerous listings for P (for Predigten). Despite this volume of work, Luther as a preacher has received relatively little attention from Luther scholars or those interested in the history of preaching. The most famous volume in English is Fred Meuser's *Luther as Preacher* (1983). And yet scholarly attention to the act of preaching generally has undergone a relative revival in the last thirty years. So too has an understanding of narrative and metanarrative. It is into this gap between research on narrative and preaching and the lack of study of Luther that Robert Kolb steps.

In 1503, Johann Sturgant published his *Manuale Curatorum*. It went through numerous reprints throughout the early sixteenth century. In that book, Sturgant argues that the preacher ought to first explain scripture, then explain to his hearers

why it matters in their lives. The Luther that emerges from the pages of Kolb's work very much fits into this model of late medieval preaching. According to Kolb, Luther used stories "in order that his hearers and readers might trust God well, view suffering well and put their sinful desires to death well . . . this [book] is the story of a preacher and teacher who believed that the Holy Spirit was aiding him as he strove to tell God's story" (xx).

Kolb begins to tell his own story by discussing Luther's approach to preaching in light of recent research on metanarrative. Kolb explores the metanarrative constructions that guided Luther's proclamation. Here Kolb demonstrates the relative consistency Luther the preacher exhibited when compared to Luther the academic theologian. This was not always the case with others. In more than one theologian, the constructs of the systematic theology seemed cast to the wind when they took up the pulpit. Not so with Luther. Common themes in his treatises and other works — the theology of the Cross, the distinction between law and Gospel, the imputation of righteousness, the two realms, and an distinct eschatological edge: all emerge in Luther's sermons.

Chapter 2 may be the most ambitious and interesting chapter in the volume. Here Kolb begins by sketching out the late medieval preaching tradition, and he explains where he sees Luther fitting within that tradition. Then he turns to contemporary scholarship on the role of narrative within religions generally (via Ninian Smart), within Christianity (via Frei and Lindbeck), and within western literature (via Auerbach). Kolb uses the late medieval context and contemporary narrative studies to examine the ways in which Luther used, developed, and recounted narratives. Luther, it turns out, is both evolutionary and revolutionary in his use of narrative.

The chapters that follow turn from metanarrative discussions to Luther's use of narrative to explain to his hearers the content of scripture — Luther would have said the Gospel — and why it matters to them. Here the relationship between God and humanity is explored, as is the content of repentance and faith, the life of the godly both within the church and outside its walls, and finally the dying in the faith.

This is an interesting small book. It could fit equally well in a class on the history of preaching as it could in a class on the culture of persuasion in the Reformation in that what we see in Luther's preaching is an attempt to bring what he understood as the core aspects of the Reformation to nonelite members of his society. Kolb has also provided an excellent apparatus to the book that will make it beneficial to both the student and the scholar. Though there is still much to be uncovered in Luther's preaching, Kolb has provided an excellent roadmap to ways in which one might further explore Luther's preaching legacy.

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