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BOOK REVIEW AND NOTE

Martin Luther and the Arts: Music, Images, and Drama to Promote the Reformation. By **Andreas Loewe** and **Katherine Firth**. Studies in Medieval and Reformation Tradition 236. Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2023. 281 pp. US$ 139.00. Hardback.

While theologians focus on doctrine as significant motor of the Protestant reformation, early modern historians correlate this religious movement with the many dimensions of human experience. In their book, historians Andreas Loewe and Katherine Firth delightfully focus on the artistic aspects and implications of Luther's reformation. They describe a multi-sensorial and embodied shift in experience prompted by Luther's theological ideas. They focus on three artistic areas – music, images, and drama, as the title of their book identifies. While on one level, they explain how these areas were vehicles disseminating reformation ideas to the laity, on another level, in my opinion, the study invites us to consider the reformation in terms of embodied participation in artistic expression. As such the reformation generated new experiences, such as congregational hymn singing in the vernacular that stamped a particular embodied identity onto subsequent tradition. Some Protestant denominations – Lutherans and Methodists, for example – are known for singing every verse of a many-versed hymn and enjoying this communal vehicle of divine worship. Art – whether musical, visual, or dramatic – offers possibilities for particular bodily expression and appreciation. Doctrine is intertwined with affect, motor memory, visual cues, and bodies moving in relation to each other. The reformation, in other words, is a re-formation of the body, in intimate relation to mind of course, but more so, in instigating new possibilities for embodied interaction.

When surveying Luther's ideas about music, Loewe and Firth choose to situate Luther on the early modern side of the late medieval/early modern divide (or continuum). From this vantage point, the authors appreciate the affective aspects of Luther's musicology. They trace the affective emphasis into early modern Lutheran hymn singing. Three chapters are devoted to music, with the first of these chapters offering a detailed description of Luther's theory of music, a second chapter on Lutheran hymn singing, and the third on Luther's famous "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God," a hymn traditionally sung on Reformation Day, Oct. 31 of every year in the Lutheran liturgical calendar. These chapters will be of particular interest to those who want to fill in the trajectory from Luther to Bach. Loewe and Firth orient Luther's musicology to affect theory, offering a beautiful correlation between Matthäus Herbenus's work *De natura cantus ac miraculis vocis* (c. 1496) and Luther's distinctions between various types of music (*musica naturalis*; *mundana*; *humana*; *caelestis*; *artificialis*, pp. 25–37), thereby showing how Bach's heartfelt Jesus piety emerges from this particular tradition. This orientation allows the authors to connect music theory to rhetoric, one of the three parts of the *trivium* (alongside grammar and dialectic), as Herbenus had done. Yet the authors also insist on Luther's recognition that music is one of the four parts of the *quadrivium* – that aspect of the medieval liberal arts treating numbers. Music is "sounding number," as my father and musicologist Paul Helmer explains in his essay "The

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Catholic Luther and Worship Music" (pp. 151–172) in a volume I edited (*The Global Luther: Theologian for Modern Times* [Fortress Press 2009]). A telling sentence for situating Luther's musicology in the *quadrivium* is found on p. 14. "We contend that even though Luther had already significantly departed from late-medieval philosophy in many of his theological writings, in his writings on music he remained strongly indebted to a late-medieval understanding of music as a quadrivial art, and therefore continued to draw on essential elements of scholastic philosophy throughout his life." While it is the case, as the authors convincingly argue in their book, that Luther's understanding of music must be viewed in continuity with late-medieval thought, it is also consensus in Luther scholarship that Luther's theology must also be analyzed in relation to medieval philosophy and theology. Luther remained indebted to scholastic and nominalist questions, concepts, and philosophical discussions throughout his life, and significantly in his later years, as my edited volume, *The Medieval Luther* (Mohr Siebeck 2022) shows.

One significant contribution of Lowe and Firth's book is the central role they assign to Luther's anti-Judaism (and his antisemitism). Such treatment should indeed become a consensus in Luther scholarship, whether considering his theology, biblical interpretation, or thinking vis-à-vis art. Luther's anti-Judaism (and antisemitism) is a dominant thread that runs through his entire corpus, from the earliest commentary on the Psalms (1513) to the sermons he held a few days before his death in 1546. Loewe and Firth demonstrate how a responsible account of Luther must identify the centrality of this theme in both Luther and in reception history. Chapter 6 on "A Mighty Fortress" demonstrates in detail how the Nazis twisted this hymn into a praise of German nationalism. The chapters on images draw detailed attention to the hateful vitriol that reformation propaganda directed against Jews, for example, the horrific *Judensau* located on one high corner of the St. Mary Church in Wittenberg, that Luther used as inspiration for one of his lengthy violent treatises against Jews (*Vom Schem Hamphoras* from 1543).

Chapter 4 offers an extended description of Cranach's "Law and Grace" painting from 1530. This image, as the authors explain, was central to the dissemination of reformation ideas. Their treatment will be helpful to any teacher of the visual dimension of the reformation, as is also Joseph Leo Koerner's detailed look at Cranach the Elder's (and Younger's) Wittenberg altarpiece from 1547 in his *The Reformation of The Image* (The University of Chicago Press, 2008). I found Loewe and Firth's reference to Augustine's *imago dei* (96) theologically disorienting. While the authors claim that this term connotes the Christological likeness between Father and Son, this term is more accurately situated in theological anthropology, namely the idea that humans are made in the likeness of divinity (cf. Gen 1:16).

Chapter 6 on drama offers a new area of reformation study. The authors claim that while Luther rejected outrageous performances of passion plays because of theological obfuscation of the gospel, they show that the reformer was not consistently hostile to dramaturgy that had a clear tropological message. They study contributions by playwrights Joachim Greff and Meistersänger Hans Sachs and thereby show that the Lutheran tradition not only influenced the history of music and art, but also drama. A fruitful avenue for future scholarship would be to situate the Lutheran tradition on dramaturgy with the more well-known Jesuit one.

Loewe and Firth offer a multi-faceted study of different arts inspired by Luther's reformation. The arts – visual, auditory, embodied – help construct a multi-sensorial world based on freedom in Christ. As such, the arts not only communicate the "tangible

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word of promise," Luther's theological insight, but contribute to a new era of embodied perception and practice.

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