



Here I Stand: A Life Of Martin Luther

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This early work on Martin Luther is both expensive and hard to find in its first edition. It details the life of the monk responsible for translating the Bible from Latin into German and for inspiring the Lutheran movement. This is a fascinating work and is thoroughly recommended for anyone interested in the history of European religion.

This book is about the life of Martin Luther and his continuing impact on the world. Luther is raised in a conservative and disciplined home and goes on to become a monk without his father's initial blessing. Luther does everything a monk should do. He is committed to prayer, fasting, vigils, preaching, and teaching to the point of exhaustion. He continues his education and goes on to become a leader in the Catholic Church.

Here I Stand: A Life Of Martin Luther Details

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From Reader Review Here I Stand: A Life Of Martin Luther for online ebook

Petra X says

It's funny to think that the Protestant religion - today, at least, a moderate and forward-looking religion - is based on the writings of this man, one of the vilest human beings that ever lived. He was also the acknowledged inspiration for the Nazi party which should tell you plenty of his sentiments on race and the value of life. Not only did he advocate violence, including arson and looting, against Jews but was behind the Peasants' War where thousands died. All because he felt that men should not ape their betters nor expect to improve their station in life but accept whatever lowly status they may be born into and serve their betters cheerfully.

This is not exactly a Christian sentiment, more one of the Eastern religions concept of dharma. Luther was, needless to say, in the pay of the aristocratic class he so felt he belonged to. Naturally this book is not required reading for Protestants in Sunday school.

In 1521 Henry VIII published a book about Luther, referring to him as a "a venomous serpent, a pernicious plague, infernal wolf, an infectious soul, a detestable trumpeter of pride, calumnies and schism." The Church was mightily pleased. But a few years later was not minded to give Henry a divorce. I think the hated Luther was where he got his ideas of reform from though.

The good men do live after them. The evil is forgotten (when expedient). That certainly describes Luther.

Nathan Moore says

Briskly paced, exciting read. The scope of Luther's life is staggering. Should he not be considered the most influential figure of the last two millennia? I find it truly fantastic that God used a single man to up-end the religious, economic, social, and even artistic, climates of Europe. What remained untouched?

This is a good read. Though the first Lutheran biography I've read, I'm a little surprised at how highly this work is praised. Many other biographies that I've read are styled and narrated better. Perhaps this is because to understand Luther you must understand the development of Luther's thought worldview before you consider any of his life's consequences. Luther is ever quotable and thankfully Bainton doesn't shy away from a modest number of quotes including excerpts from sermons and Table Talk. The biography is generally balanced considering its only a 400 page book. Luther was a complex man, mostly balanced but not without contradiction. This biography takes on the same sense of proportion. Like most biographers, Bainton seems eager to praise and quick to move past shortcomings.

"Here I Stand" highlights the man's theology and his passion for truth yet Bainton doesn't show the reader the trailheads of all that the Reformation brought about. At the end of the book the reader is treated to brief sections on Luther's preaching, his hymns, his prayers and his depression.

At times, I found Bainton's writing style a bit bland. Lutheran quotations provided frequent relief. In the hardback Hendrickson edition, more than 50 illustrations are included and serve to compliment rather than distract from the author's ideas.

The Reformation is nothing less than a rediscovery of the Bible and the Gospel. Luther is nothing less than the Father of the Reformation. This is a good book of a great man.

Wayne says

As a young Catholic monk, I and several other students were sent off to Adelaide University. I chose English and History.

And the first unit of History was the Reformation.

When I came to read about Martin Luther, (I can recall the book, the library, the sunlight AND the dawning that I totally agreed with him), my own Reformation had already begun but now I found I had allies I never expected.

And later when I heard my new mate labelled as "a Wolf in Sheep's clothing" by one of our priests (my former Novice Master as it happened) in his Sunday Sermon to a trusting and ignorant congregation, I was furious as only passionate youth can be. (Suitably, as I was in the Passionists, a religious order originating in Italy in the 18th Century and whose founder used to throw himself into thorny bushes when he felt a temptation of the flesh coming on! Those Italians...so Passionate.) Luther, however, was far more pragmatic, being a German - he just married a nun!!!

He wasn't perfect by any means, and I'm not referring to either the nun or the marriage. He was anti-semitic, but everyone was, and he sided with the Nobility against the Peasant Revolt. But even today the "lower" classes are scorned.

I just had D.H. Lawrence preaching it in his "Kangaroo." Idiot.

Times haven't changed much.

But Luther DID change things.

And THIS is a Great and Wonderful read by Roland Bainton.

Valerie Kyriosity says

Simply wonderful. This missing fifth star is an indictment of me, not of Bainton or Luther. The chapters on politics and economics were just brutally dull to my dull mind, and my interest was lost for months on end. As for the rest, I love Luther and I love this recounting of his life and influence. I wish I had better reading habits, especially that of keeping a pen handy to mark and underline, because this volume was replete with gems. We owe so much to Brother Martin, and I was grateful for the reminder to be grateful. I will read this again, skipping certain chapters, if need be, to get this story deeper into my bones.

Oh, one more thing: if I do read this again, I want to find another edition. The illustrations were printed so small and blurry that it was nigh unto impossible to make them out.

Jack Neary says

As a staunch and long-standing RC, I, of course, knew absolutely nothing about Martin Luther beyond the notion that he messed up everything for us back in the 1500's and made way for all those churches where you could still believe in Jesus and not have to get up for Mass on Sunday. I experienced Bainton's book via the Audible route, as I am wont to do these days for a lot of non-fiction, and though the minutiae of a good deal

of ML's idiosyncratic takes on religion became, at times, more overwhelming than I had the ears for, still, I have to say that his basic premises made sense, and despite what was probably a pretty annoying way of going about things (no doubt necessarily, given that the Popes were distracted by selling all those indulgences), the guy stuck to his guns, made his points, and jump started a Reformation. Four stars for content (and for the Audible reader), maybe minus a star for minutiae.

Dan says

After reading *The Unquenchable Flame*, I had to re-read this biography of Luther. This is regarded as the classic biography on the life of Martin Luther and it certainly holds up to this standard. I appreciate Bainton's effort to be honest about Luther's strengths and weaknesses. The weaknesses only help us see better the greatness of the God Luther served instead of glorifying the man. On the other hand stands Luther's prodigious life work which among other things includes a translation of the Scripture in German, over 2,000 hymns, catechism and books for liturgy and prayer along with the regular preaching and teaching which at one point included preaching around 197 messages in 145 days. Whew! Reading this can't help but to encourage our appreciation for doctrine and the truth of Scripture. My one criticism is that some historical details are assumed and it would have been helpful to provide more background context for some of the people and events mentioned in the book.

Bill says

This book is more than fifty years old but still accessible and full of insight into Martin Luther's life and times. Early on, it is evident Bainton admires Luther very much – maybe a bit too much to take an honest and well-rounded approach to Luther, the man, in toto. My first significant exposure to Martin Luther was in Will Durant's volume, "The Reformation", (From his magnum opus, "The Story of Civilization") a comprehensive look into the religious and secular conflicts that occurred during Luther's time as well as before and after. From about 1376, when John Wycliffe – The so-called 'Morningstar of the Reformation' – posited his 18 theses urging the church to renounce temporal dominion: Rigid control of doctrinal issues, as dictated by the Pope and his bishops, over the populace to the point of absurdity. Wycliffe went on to translate the Vulgate Bible into English. All this was happening even as the Roman Catholic Church had two popes; one in Rome and one (antipope) in Avignon (The Western Schism, 1378-1418). As in Luther's time, Wycliffe's complaints led to a peasant's revolt which Wycliffe strongly opposed. This all happened more than 130 years before Luther posted his 95 theses on the castle church door in Wittenberg. Wycliffe died before he could be tried and convicted but the Roman church fathers were not happy with his work; he and his body of work were eventually condemned by the church, post-mortem. While Wycliffe was a scholar, Luther was just a smart and stubborn monk. Beginning about 1402 – nearly 20 years after Wycliffe's death, John Hus, a Czech clergyman, began to denounce church abuses and hubris. Unlike Wycliffe, Hus was tried, convicted and burned at the stake in 1415. His followers continued the fight by way of the Hussite wars and by the time Martin Luther came onto the scene, more than one hundred years later, up to 90% of the Czech populace were already de facto Protestants. October 31, 1517 is a popular starting point for many Protestant Christians as the beginning of the Reformation. Wycliffe was, arguably, the first serious threat to Roman Catholic supremacy in Europe; although the Cathars began to break away from Catholic rule in the 12th century. The Roman Catholic Church annihilated the Cathars. Tens, perhaps hundreds, of thousands of men, women and children were slaughtered by French troops at the direction of the Vatican. The Cathars weren't really Protestants, per se, they were more of a breakaway church tending to a more Manichean-style dualist

sect.

Bainton does a fair job of describing Luther and his trials but he leaves a lot out – or he downplays Luther’s negatives. To be completely honest, Martin Luther hated the Jews. He despised them with such fervor that, in 1543, he wrote a book, “The Jews and Their Lies”, excoriating ALL Jews and strongly suggesting they all be deported from greater Germany and that their homes and properties be burned or otherwise destroyed – not a very forgiving kind of sentiment: “They should be shown no mercy or kindness, afforded no legal protection, and these ‘poisonous envenomed worms’ should be drafted into forced labor or expelled for all time. He also seems to advocate their murder, writing ‘[w]e are at fault in not slaying them’.

A key Renaissance figure, Desiderius Erasmus (a Dutch Humanist), was an on-again, off-again admirer of Luther but the two of them argued – primarily by way of correspondence – incessantly. Their arguments led Luther to come to despise Reason. His diatribes against Reason are shocking to 21st century thinkers:

“Whoever wants to be a Christian should tear the eyes out of his reason”. In another statement, Luther is unintentionally ironic: “This fool [Copernicus] wishes to reverse the entire science of astronomy; but sacred scripture tells us that Joshua commanded the sun to stand still, and not the earth”. So, Martin Luther, the great reformer, was also a foremost denier of science – not atypical of churchmen in his time. His blind adherence to literal interpretation of scripture completely clouded his innate ability to cogitate and evaluate secular ideas and theories. He was an unflinchingly hidebound theologian. Only John Calvin, who murdered more than two dozen people during his reign in Geneva, was more brutally rigid.

Most of the bios of Martin Luther (the ones I have read) seem to skip over Luther’s powerful prejudices and adherence to faith to the exclusion of anything and everything else. I think this is intentional; most of these books are written by theologians or Christian authors for Christian audiences. Yes, Luther stuck his neck out – he truly expected he would be killed by the Roman church (they didn’t do the actual killing, they farmed it out to the local authorities). He changed our world, no doubt. Any damage done by his hatred of Jews or science very likely had little impact on his world. Whether his writings impacted Nazi Germany, as Julius Streicher claimed, is arguable. And yet he was what he was. I think it’s only fair that Luther and Calvin be shown for what they are, warts and all. I don’t think it will have a deleterious effect on the faith of the Christian masses or seminarians.

I rated this book 3 of 5 possible stars. The takeaways were: Too much focus on doctrinal issues and arguments and not enough focus on Luther, the man, as a loving husband and father as well as a bigoted and intolerant cleric. I am reminded of a song by “The Who”, “Won’t get fooled again”. The lyric goes like this: “Meet the new boss
Same as the old boss”

Corinne Wilson says

Luther's medieval life has had major influences on our modern world, and he is both unfairly praised and maligned frequently, especially when his statements are taken out of context. This even-handed and readable biography was quite helpful in understanding the backdrop of the reformation and the man who became the father of Protestantism.

??v?? cαvα says

One of the best biographies I've ever read about Martin Luther. I gave it my two thumbs up! Great perspective, good presentation and accurate data about this figure in history.

Max Nova says

Full review and highlights at <https://books.max-nova.com/here-i-stand>

Halloween 2017 is the 500th anniversary of a turning point in Western history. Although few actions have changed the world as much as Martin Luther nailing his 95 theses to the church door at Wittenberg, it was barely mentioned in my formal education. Bainton's "Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther" filled an important gap in my understanding of the world. Bainton introduced me to the complex issues of religion, politics, and history needed to comprehend the daring and the significance of Luther's rebellion against the Catholic Church. Before reading this book, I had a completely inadequate appreciation for the unfathomable bravery and conviction Luther must have had to stand alone against the enormous power of the Church. But German being German, there's a word for this:

The word he used was *Anfechtung*, for which there is no English equivalent. It may be a trial sent by God to test man, or an assault by the Devil to destroy man.

The story of Luther is at heart a religious and intellectual one. As Bainton writes, "Luther was above all else a man of religion. The great outward crises of his life which bedazzle the eyes of dramatic biographers were to Luther himself trivial in comparison with the inner upheavals of his questing after God." The book explains how the early 1500's saw the primacy of Christianity contending with the challenge of Erasmian Humanism and the birth of nationalism. I was surprised to learn that Luther and Erasmus were correspondents and enjoyed Bainton's exploration of their perspectives on rationality and religion. Luther's religious fundamentalism and unshakeable faith was core to everything about him - simultaneously admirable and a bit disturbing. How are we to judge Luther in our modern age of religious fundamentalism? And yet, Luther was clearly not one to blindly trust in authority - his disposition was ferociously rational as he pointed out the hypocrisies in the Church. Bainton helped me wrap my mind about this seeming contradiction between Luther's faith and his rationality:

The reason why faith is so hard and reason so inadequate is a problem far deeper than logic. Luther often railed at reason, and he has been portrayed in consequence as a complete irrationalist in religion. This is quite to mistake his meaning. Reason in the sense of logic he employed to the uttermost limits.

Luther himself is a fascinating personality. Even more than his famous defense of himself at the Diet of Worms, what really struck me about Luther is what he didn't do. He never advocated for violence and although his Protestant theology got caught up in the waves of religious/nationalist wars that roiled Europe thereafter, he himself was completely nonviolent. I was astounded by his willingness to risk his life - completely defenseless - in the service of his ideas - even while enduring the constant refrain, "Are you alone wise and all the ages in error?"

And while the serious side of Luther's life gets a full treatment, Bainton doesn't neglect his lighter side either. I particularly enjoyed the sections about Luther's marriage and his influence on German domestic life. His humor shines through in such passage as:

When Luther looked at his family in 1538, he remarked, "Christ said we must become as little children to enter the kingdom of heaven. Dear God, this is too much. Have we got to become such idiots?"

Bainton's book filled a major gap in my understanding of the Western history of ideas. He made me feel the inner struggle of Luther as he wrestled with Scripture - carefully explaining the subtle points of doctrine and enlivening the issues with historical context and Luther's own pointed commentary. Given Luther's enormous impact, Bainton's book deserves a read by anyone seeking to understand how the West thinks about religion, authority, and faith.

Nathan Schneider says

The greatness of a book is in large part due to its writing. This book was a very well written biography of a very well lived man. Enjoyable to read, Here I Stand is an accessible and enjoyable read on someone that we, as Christians, owe much to.

Andrew Huish says

A fascinating and well-written biography of one of the most influential men in church history. The account of Luther's emergence from within the Roman Catholic Church to become a prominent religious dissenter and champion of justification "sola fide" occupies the majority of this work. This portion of the work almost mandates a second or third reading due to the sheer number of characters which interplay in the complicated ecclesiastical and governmental milieu of Luther's day. The latter portion of the book contains a comparatively brief, but helpful, overview of Luther's Bible, his reform of the liturgy and music (especially congregational song!), and his often criticized (and perhaps somewhat misunderstood) anti-Semitic sentiments. A must-read for anyone interested in Reformation history.

Chris Hall says

A very readable biography that's gives a broad view of the life & ministry of Martin Luther. It's a fun read that's fast-moving and keeps you interested until the end. I would love another biography that provides more depth regarding his teaching, battle with the Roman Church, and inward struggle amidst the Reformation.

Lawrence says

This is a nice beginning biography of one of the world's most remarkable men. It is an older book that hails from the early 1950's. It is a really good overview of Luther's life and his encounters with the outside world, especially up till about 1525. It seems aimed at a believing Christian readership. That is, Mr. Bainton, the author, seems to be a believer who appreciates very much Luther's lifetime spiritual struggle and his scriptural resolution of it in the doctrine of justification by faith. I think this is to be appreciated because Luther was primarily a man of religion and insights into his spiritual life are therefore important.

However, the book also outlines Luther's organizational work after he "began" the Reformation --- much to his surprise. It provides a balanced overview of Luther the preacher, the talker and teacher, the translator, and the writer. Although Mr. Bainton focuses on Luther's actual warmth and high intelligence, he does not minimize or hide Luther's darker acts (e.g., the agreement to outlawing the Anabaptists). On the whole,

though, I think that Mr. Bainton's program is to relate and preserve the good in Luther's life and legacy.

Although Mr. Bainton is interested in presenting the man Luther, the book is a little thin on how the outside world such as England, the Netherlands, etc., reacted to Lutheran ideas, especially post-1530. Plus, ensuing bloodshed and martyrdoms need attention.

The book has generous excerpts from sermons on Jonah, the Nativity, and the Sacrifice of Isaac. These and other quotes show Luther as witty and profound. My edition had reproductions of wonderful woodcuts from the period.

This is a good biography, but it encourages me to read another.

Demetrius Rogers says

It's hard to imagine a historical figure more significant than Luther. This was an excellent biography to gain a familiarity with the man and his times.

I was a bit frustrated with it though. Bainton seemed to try so hard to present an objective narrative that I felt he failed to speak to his reader. I wanted to hear from Bainton. Tell me why, Bainton, I should be reading about Luther. What do you like about him? Is there anything you find unsavory? Yes, as an historian, I should think you'd want to get out of the way and just present your material. But, history is never truly told that way. Everyone has their perspective. Everyone has their opinion. And when they don't disclose it, I spend my time wondering what it is. I wanted to hear from Bainton. But, don't feel like I ever did. His objectivity, bordered on dispassionate. And it made the thoroughness of his account a bit cold and sterile.

Please don't just inform me; move me. And I felt an account of this magnitude should've moved me a bit more.
