The Life and Theology of Martin Luther

Instructor: Carl R. Trueman

The Devil’s Bagpipes!
A theologian of glory calls evil good and good evil. A theologian of the cross calls the thing what it actually is.

Martin Luther, Heidelberg, 1518.

**Instructor:** Carl R Trueman. Email: trueaner@gcc.edu

**Course Description:** This course examines the life and thought of Martin Luther in context. Adopting a broadly chronological/biographical framework, it will assess Luther’s relationship to the medieval Catholic Church, his role in the controversies of the time, and his ongoing significance for the Protestant church. Particular topics to be discussed include: Luther and late medieval theology; the crisis over indulgences; the Heidelberg Disputation; church authority; scripture; justification by faith; the Christian’s calling; Luther’s marriage; Luther as pastor; the conflicts with Erasmus and Zwingli; the Augsburg Confession and the Schmalkaldic League; the Jews; Luther’s later years; the struggle over his ecclesiastical legacy; and his changing reputation after his death.

By the end of the course the student should:

- Know the major events and personalities of Luther’s life.
- Understand the theological significance of his work for the sixteenth century church.
- Understand the contextual factors which shaped his life and ministry.
- Be able to make connections between Luther’s theological contribution in his time and the shape and state of the Protestant church today.

**Class Schedule:**

The following is a provisional schedule which may be modified depending on time taken for class discussion etc.:

Day 1: Medieval Background; Lectures on Romans; Ninety Five Theses; The Heidelberg Disputation
Day 2: The Leipzig Disputation; Issues of Authority; The Treatises of 1520
Day 3: Diet of Worms; Radicals; Sacramental Thought
Day 4: Bondage of the Will; Catechetics; Later Years
Day 5: Retrospective

**Textbooks:**

All students will be expected to purchase and bring to class the following book of primary texts which should be read in advance:

Basic biographies:

Roland H. Bainton, *Here I Stand* (Lion)
Martin E. Marty, *Martin Luther: A Life* (Penguin)

Students must also read and write a book report on one of the following:

Lindal Roper, *Martin Luther: Renegade and Prophet* (Oxford)
Scott Hendrix, *Martin Luther: Visionary Reformer* (Yale)

**Supplementary Reading:**

The standard critical edition of Luther’s works is the *Weimarer Ausgabe*.

Many of Luther’s writings are available in English translation in the so-called Philadelphia edition of Luther’s writings, edited by Jaroslav Pelikan.

Of special interest in the matter of Luther as pastor is:

Theodore G. Tappert, *Luther: Letters of Spiritual Counsel* (Westminster)

Two advanced biographical studies well-worth consulting are:

Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther*, 3 vols. (Fortress)
Heiko Oberman, *Luther: Man Between God and Devil* (Yale). A fascinating blend of social, cultural, and psychological analysis.

Summaries of Luther’s theology:


Bernard Lohse, *The Theology of Martin Luther* (T. and T. Clark). The best modern introduction. See also his briefer *Martin Luther’s Theology* (Augsburg Fortress)

Robert Kolb, *Martin Luther: Confessor of the Faith* (Oxford). I am a huge fan of Kolb. Anything he writes is worth reading. See also his *Luther and the Stories of God* (Baker).


On the relationship between Lutheran and Reformed theology:

Two good collections of recent articles are:

Timothy J. Wengert (ed.), *Harvesting Martin Luther’s Reflections on Theology, Ethics, and the Church* (Eerdmans)
Idem, *The Pastoral Luther* (Eerdmans)
Robert Kolb, Irene Dingel, L’Ubomir Batka (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Martin Luther’s Theology* (Oxford).

Many volumes on individual aspects of Luther’s theology have been written. The following are among the most helpful:

On Luther’s theology and its general theological background:

Berndt Hamm, *The Early Luther: Stages in a Reformation Reorientation* (Eerdmans).
Heiko A. Oberman, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology* (Labyrinth)
David C. Steinmetz, *Luther in Context* (Baker)
Carl R. Trueman, *Luther on the Christian Life: Cross and Freedom* (Crossway)

On the theology of the cross:

Walter von Lowenich, *Luther’s Theology of the Cross* (Augsburg)
Alister E. McGrath, *Luther’s Theology of the Cross* (Blackwell)
Gerhard Forde, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross: Reflections on Luther's Heidelberg Disputation, 1518* (Eerdmans)

On the conflict with Erasmus:

The introduction to J.I. Packer and O. R. Johnston, *The Bondage of the Will* (James Clarke) is still useful.

Robert Kolb, *Bound Choice, Election, And Wittenberg Theological Method: From Martin Luther To The Formula Of Concord* (Eerdmans)

On Luther’s ethics, see:

Paul Althaus, *The Ethics of Martin Luther* (Fortress)
Heinrich Bornkamm, *Luther and the Old Testament* (Fortress)

On the matter of Luther’s reputation in his own lifetime and in the century following his death, see:
Robert Kolb, *Martin Luther as Prophet, Teacher, and Hero: Images of the Reformer, 1520-1620* (Baker)

A brief, but entertaining and thought-provoking monograph on Luther is:

Eric W. Gritsch, *The Wit of Martin Luther* (Fortress)

On the general background to Luther and the Reformation, I would recommend students consult at least one of the following:

Euan Cameron, *The Sixteenth Century* (Oxford)
Euan Cameron, *The European Reformation* (Oxford)
Rudolph Heinze, *Reform and Conflict*
Carter Lindberg, *The European Reformations* (Blackwell)
Diarmuid MacCulloch, *The Reformation* (Viking)

Central to the Reformation, both Protestant and Catholic, is the process of confessionalisation. Students should spend some time looking at the great confession that were produced during this time. A good primer is Mark Noll’s *Confessions and Catechisms of the Reformation*, which also includes helpful selections from Catholic documents. Philip Schaff’s *The Creeds of Christendom*, volume 3, also has an extensive selection of Protestant confessional documents.

Central documents for Lutheranism in this regard are found in *The Book of Concord*. This is available in several editions, the most notable being those edited by Theodore G. Tappert, and, most recently, by Timothy J. Wengert and Robert Kolb.

**Assessment**

Assessment will consist of the following:

A book report on either the biography by Lindal Roper or that by Scott Hendrix.

One 8-10 page papers on a Luther-based topic of the student’s choice. Deadline: 6 weeks from the final day of the course.
### MDiv* Student Learning Outcomes

In order to measure the success of the MDiv curriculum, RTS has defined the following as the intended outcomes of the student learning process. Each course contributes to these overall outcomes. This rubric shows the contribution of this course to the MDiv outcomes.

*As the MDiv is the core degree at RTS, the MDiv rubric will be used in this syllabus.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Articulation (oral &amp; written)</th>
<th>Scripture</th>
<th>Reformed Theology</th>
<th>Sanctification</th>
<th>Worldview</th>
<th>Winsomely Reformed</th>
<th>Pastoral Ministry</th>
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<td>Broadly understands and articulates knowledge, both oral and written, of essential biblical, theological, historical, and cultural/global information, including details, concepts, and frameworks. Also includes ability to preach and teach the meaning of Scripture to both heart and mind with clarity and enthusiasm.</td>
<td>Significant knowledge of the original meaning of Scripture. Also, the concepts for and skill to research further into the original meaning of Scripture and to apply Scripture to a variety of modern circumstances. (Includes appropriate use of original languages and hermeneutics; and integrates theological, historical, and cultural/global perspectives.)</td>
<td>Significant knowledge of Reformed theology and practice, with emphasis on the Westminster Standards.</td>
<td>Demonstrates a love for the Triune God that aids the student’s sanctification.</td>
<td>Burning desire to conform all of life to the Word of God. Includes ability to interact within a denominational context, within the broader worldwide church, and with significant public issues.</td>
<td>Embraces a winsomely Reformed ethos. (Includes an appropriate ecumenical spirit with other Christians, especially Evangelicals; a concern to present the Gospel in a God-honoring manner to non-Christians; and a truth-in-love attitude in disagreements.)</td>
<td>Ability to minister the Word of God to hearts and lives of both churched and unchurched, to include preaching, teaching, leading in worship, leading and shepherding the local congregation, aiding in spiritual maturity, concern for non-Christians.</td>
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<th>Rubric</th>
<th>Mini-Justification</th>
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<tr>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Paper, book report, class participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Aspects of the course address Luther’s exegesis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>The course will involve comparisons with Reformed theology</td>
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<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>This is an existential issue hard to address in a one week course where I don’t know the students well.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>The course will look at Luther’s view of calling.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>My natural winsomeness will inevitably rub off on the students and make them better people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Class attention to Luther’s pastoral theology.</td>
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