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. Tel: 215-935-3886. Email: ctrueman@wts.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.:

Monday: Late Medieval Background; Luther’s Childhood and Early Education
Tuesday: From the Ninety-Five Theses to the Leipzig Disputation
Wednesday: From the Diet of Worms to the Conflict with Erasmus
Thursday: The Conflict with Zwingli; the Augsburg Confession
Friday: Luther’s Later Years and Posthumous Reputation

Textbooks:

All students will be expected to purchase and bring to class the following book of primary texts:

Timothy F. Lull, Martin Luther’s Basic Theological Writings (Fortress Press).
All students will be expected to have read at least one of the following:

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

All students will be expected to bring a copy of the following book to class:

Gerhard Forde, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross: Reflections on Luther's Heidelberg Disputation, 1518* (Eerdmans)

**Supplementary Reading:**

Many of Luther’s writings are available 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.

A different, hostile account is:


The best summaries of Luther’s theology are:


Two good collections of recent articles are:

Timothy J. Wengert (ed.), *Harvesting Martin Luther’s Reflections on Theology, Ethics, and the Church* (Eerdmans)
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:

Heiko A. Oberman, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology* (Labyrinth)
David C. Steinmetz, *Luther in Context* (Baker)

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)

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 the Lord’s Supper, see:

Thomas J. Davis, *This is my Body* (Baker)

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)
Diarmaid 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.

**Useful Websites**

Project Wittenberg: [http://www.ctsfw.edu/etext/](http://www.ctsfw.edu/etext/)
Good links page: [http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/sbook1y.html](http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/sbook1y.html)

**Assessment**

Assessment will consist of the following (due March 6):

One 5 to 6 page paper on a topic of the student’s choice.

One 90 minute examination.