



Martin Luther: A Life (Penguin Lives)

By Martin E. Marty

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Called ?The most influential interpreter of American religion? by Bill Moyers, renowned historian and Lutheran pastor Martin Marty portrays the religious reformer Martin Luther as a man of conscience and courage who risked death to ignite the historic reformation of the Church. Luther?s arguments, including his ?95 theses,? changed the destiny of Christendom, the shape of Christianity, and gave rise to new freedoms in church and state. Marty explores the records left by Luther of his inner struggles and his conflicts with the Holy Roman Empire to find a man engaged in a lifelong passionate search for not only the grace of God, but also for the assurance that it was directed toward each individual.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Marty, professor emeritus at the University of Chicago and winner of the National Book Award for *Righteous Empire*, offers a sterling biography of history's irascible reformer. In concise, accessible style, Marty outlines Luther's life and times, gauging why this man changed the face of Europe and Western Christianity. Marty excels in distilling debates that were matters of life and death 500 years ago but seem obscure to Christians today. Although the celibacy of the clergy is a controversy that no contemporary reader will need explained, other issues such as infant baptism, communion in both kinds (the laity receiving both the bread and the wine) and justification by grace through faith are made accessible by Marty's skillful narration. He depicts Luther as a "man of extremes," bound up in contradictions. Marty wryly notes that Luther's biographer is doomed to qualify any statement about him with the phrase "at the same time." The theologian was tender, yet at the same time blustery and arrogant; he could be a superbly cogent thinker, yet near the end of his life he published a horrific attack on Jews that unthinkingly drew upon "traditional Christian rumors" and "whispered claims" about alleged Jewish atrocities. Even his beliefs seemed rife with contradiction: Christians were simultaneously justified and sinners; they were perfectly free but bound in service to all; God was both revealed and inscrutable. Marty is sensitive to Luther's deep, lifelong quest for theological assurance and his struggles with doubt. This is the best brief biography of Luther ever penned.

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From Booklist

Renowned historian of religion (and Lutheran minister) Marty, author of multivolume studies, here gives us a short, vivid biography. His portrait confirms Luther's stubborn integrity; he was serious about Scripture as the sole authority for Christian practice, and that led him to repudiate clerical hierarchy and priestly celibacy, and to declare the priesthood of all believers and the goodness of God's gift of the body. He was, however, humanly contradictory, "a man of conservative outlook," Marty says, "but also a person of radical expression." He identified and sympathized with the common people yet so feared disorder that he sided with the abusive barons during the Peasants' War of 1524-25 rather than possibly overturn secular authority, even when it flouted Christian morals. Of course, he had his further reasons: utopian firebrand Thomas Muntzer was inciting the peasants to murderous class warfare, which Luther couldn't tolerate. Anti-Semitic in old age, he disgusted even his right-hand man, Philip Melanthon. Warts and all, however, Luther remains intrinsically admirable, a bulwark of conscience as well as faith. *Ray Olson*

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Review

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