

# The Medieval Luther

Edited by  
CHRISTINE HELMER

*Spätmittelalter, Humanismus,  
Reformation*



**Mohr Siebeck**

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*for Marilyn McCord Adams (1943–2017)*  
*teacher, mentor, friend*



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Over her long and productive career, Marilyn McCord Adams (1943–2017) made a number of signal and foundational contributions to situating Luther’s thought in relation to the late medieval nominalists. Her two-volume work on William Ockham from 1987 inspired medievalists to analyze philosophical and theological questions of the era they study in view of key thinkers with whom Luther was familiar. Her work is an indispensable resource for anyone studying Luther’s intellectual continuity with Ockham. Marilyn’s scholarship on medieval and late medieval doctrines of Christ, Trinity, and Eucharist are indispensable to Luther scholars interested in connecting lines of reception through the Middle Ages into the Reformation. To my delight, she participated in the conference, which I organized, that was the occasion for this volume. The conference, “Beyond Oberman: Luther and the Middle Ages” was held on November 2–4, 2016 at Northwestern University. All the contributors in this volume have benefited greatly from conversations with her. The “medieval Luther” very much bears her imprint.

Marilyn died on March 22, 2017, after a brief illness. A scholar who valued rigorous thinking, she inspired the many graduate students she mentored to strive for intellectual excellence and conceptual precision. She was committed to the proposition that truth, and the words that articulate it, are important in scholarship as well as in life. And she always had time (and cookies!) for anyone who wanted to learn from her and with her. This volume is dedicated to her in the deepest gratitude for her work and friendship.

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of Richard Cross's book, *Communicatio Idiomatum. Reformation Christological Debates* (Changing Paradigms in Historical and Systematic Theology; Oxford 2019). I thank the editor of Mohr Siebeck, Dr. Martina Kayser, for our work together in compiling the volume and the editors of the SMHR Series (Spätmittelalter, Humanismus, Reformation/Studies in the Late Middle Ages, Humanism, and the Reformation), particularly Volker Leppin and Amy Nelson Burnett, for generously including this volume in the Mohr family.

Evanston, Dec. 31, 2019

*Christine Helmer*

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## Source Abbreviations

- AL MARTIN LUTHER, *The Annotated Luther*, 6 vols., TIMOTHY J. WENGERT/KIRSI I. STJERNA/PAUL W. ROBINSON/MARY JANE HAEMIG/HANS J. HILLERBRAND/EUAN K. CAMERON (eds.), Minneapolis, MN 2015–2017.
- CR PHILIPP MELANCHTHON, *Opera Quae Supersunt Omnia*, 28 vols., KARL GOTTLIEB BRETSCHNEIDER/HEINRICH ERNST BINDSEIL (eds.), *Corpus Reformatorum* 1–28, Halle 1834–1860.  
JOHN CALVIN, *Calvini Opera Quae Supersunt Omnia*, 59 vols., GUILIELMUS BAUM/EDUARDUS CUNITZ/EDUARDUS REUSS (eds.), *Corpus Reformatorum* 29–87, Brunswick 1863–1900.  
HULDRYCH ZWINGLI, *Huldreich Zwinglis Sämtliche Werke*, 14 vols. (to date), EMIL EGLI ET AL. (eds.), *Corpus Reformatorum* 88–101, Berlin/Leipzig/Zürich 1892–.
- LW MARTIN LUTHER, *Luther's Works. American Edition*, 79 vols. (projected), JAROSLAV PELIKAN/HELMUT T. LEHMANN/CHRISTOPHER BOYD BROWN (eds.), St. Louis, MO/Philadelphia, PA 1955–2020.
- NRSV New Revised Standard Version, *Oxford Annotated Bible with Apocrypha*, BRUCE M. METZGER ET AL. (eds.), New York 1991.
- OPh GUILLELMI DE OCKHAM, *Opera Philosophica*, 7 vols., GEDEON GÁL, O. F. M. ET AL. (eds.), St. Bonaventure, NY 1974–1988.
- OTh GUILLELMI DE OCKHAM, *Opera Theologica*, 10 vols., GEDEON GÁL, O. F. M. ET AL. (eds.), St. Bonaventure, NY 1967–1986.
- SBOp BERNARD OF CLAIRVAUX, *Sancti Bernardi Opera*, 8 vols., JEAN LECLERCQ ET AL. (eds.), Rome 1957–1977.
- StA MARTIN LUTHER, *Studienausgabe*, 8 vols. (projected), HANS-ULRICH DELIUS (ed.), Berlin 1979–.
- STh THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae*, online at <http://www.corpusthomisticum.org/iopera.html>.
- WA MARTIN LUTHER, *D. Martin Luthers Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, 73 vols., J. K. F. KNAAKE ET AL. (eds.), Weimar 1883–2009.
- WA.B MARTIN LUTHER, *D. Martin Luthers Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe. Briefwechsel*, 18 vols., OTTO CLEMENS ET AL. (eds.), Weimar 1930–2002.
- WA.TR MARTIN LUTHER, *D. Martin Luthers Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe. Tischreden*, 6 vols., KARL DRESCHER ET AL. (ed.), Weimar 1912–1921.



## Chapter 1

### Introduction

#### The Search for the Medieval Luther

CHRISTINE HELMER

Martin Luther's name has come to be associated with more than his reform of religion. His idea of freedom was formative for modern society and politics. His emphasis on the human person as the beneficiary of divine grace set the stage for modern individualism. By speaking truth to the powers of pope and emperor, Luther became the quintessential symbol for those struggling for their rights and freedoms in the modern world.

He is also a divisive figure. Protestants identify Luther as the reformer who founded Protestantism, seeing in him the theologian who set Christians free from a Catholic clericalism that burdened consciences with the threat of excommunication. Luther countered the abuse of clerical and papal power with his new idea of the priesthood of all believers. He insisted on the Bible's primacy and affirmed the individual Christian's responsibility to study the word of God in Scripture against the Catholic magisterium that reserved truth to itself. The theological ideas of freedom in Christ, the common priesthood, and "sola scriptura" (by Scripture alone) are markers of Protestant identity, and as many Protestants see it, of Protestant superiority to Roman Catholicism.

But Roman Catholics also have their image of Luther. He was a heretic, excommunicated by Pope Leo X in early 1521 and banned by Emperor Charles V later that year. He was a sexual deviant, as his Dominican biographer Heinrich Suso Denifle asserted in the first decade of the twentieth century.<sup>1</sup> According to a contemporary Catholic historian working in the United States, Luther stands at the origin of a slippery slope into modern relativism and pluralism; he is identified with the loss of doctrinal and ethical norms.<sup>2</sup> The sixteenth century Council of Trent settled on a reform policy that was explicitly set against Luther, as a

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<sup>1</sup> HEINRICH SUSO DENIFLE, *Luther und Luthertum in der ersten Entwicklung quellenmäßig dargestellt*, 2 vols. (vol. 1/2: expanded and ed. ALBERT MARIA WEISS; vol. 2: with ALBERT MARIA WEISS), Mainz 1904–1909; English translation: HEINRICH SUSO DENIFLE, *Luther and Lutherdom, From Original Sources*, RAYMUND VOLZ (trans. from 2nd rev. edn.), Somerset, OH 1917.

<sup>2</sup> BRAD S. GREGORY, *The Unintended Reformation. How a Religious Revolution Secularized Society*, Cambridge, MA 2012.

new work on Luther by Roman Catholic theologian Peter Folan, S. J. explains.<sup>3</sup> At Trent, the Roman Catholic Church took up reforms on its own terms, without giving credit to the reprobate Protestant.

Any study of Luther must acknowledge the conceptual stakes at play. On the one hand, Luther is the emblem of the modern, and as modern, the marker of Protestant identity. On the other hand, Luther the Catholic is still the heretic whom Roman Catholic theologians must not read. There are, of course, exceptions. One of Luther's ideas, namely his high estimation of the common priesthood, found its way into the Second Vatican Council's *Lumen Gentium*. Peter Folan recommends that contemporary Roman Catholic theology take Luther's appreciation for biblical interpretation more generously to heart. But for the most part, confessional lines bisect Luther. He is either Protestant or Roman Catholic, modern or medieval. Can any study of Luther bridge this intractable division, this tendentious bisection?

Recently some historians of early modernity have assayed to do so. Casting aside the historiographical interests at stake in periodizing the fraught end to the Middle Ages, they have written histories that trace instead lines of continuity. Historian Dean Phillip Bell, for example, approaches the history of Jews in Germany by erasing the clear boundary between the late Middle Ages and the early modern world.<sup>4</sup> Stephen G. Burnett discusses the Christian Hebraists working in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century without hypostasizing an artificial distinction between the two centuries.<sup>5</sup> Volker Leppin tells Luther's biography by situating him at the end of the Middle Ages without emphasizing an alleged breakthrough into modernity.<sup>6</sup> These historians demonstrate that the development of medieval society into the early modern era is more fluid and continuous than one marked by rupture.

The volume takes up this new historiography and makes it central to key theological issues. What if an investigation into Luther's theology presupposes a conceptual continuity between the late Middle Ages and early modernity? The common approach to Luther specifies his reformation breakthrough as an innovation in the doctrine of justification. What if Luther's approach to justification were studied instead as a body of questions posed in the context of late medieval philosophy and theology? This volume's goal is to explicitly situate Luther's doctrines of Christ, salvation, and the priesthood in continuity with medieval

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<sup>3</sup> PETER FOLAN, S. J., *Matters of Interpretation. Biblical Methodology in the Lutheran-Catholic Dialogue on the Doctrine of Justification*, Ph.D. Diss., Boston College, Chestnut Hill, MA 2019.

<sup>4</sup> DEAN PHILLIP BELL, *Jews in the Early Modern World*, Lanham, MD 2008.

<sup>5</sup> STEPHEN G. BURNETT, *Christian Hebraism in the Reformation Era (1500–1660)*. Authors, Books, and the Transmission of Jewish Learning (Library of the Written Word), Leiden 2012.

<sup>6</sup> VOLKER LEPPIN, *Martin Luther. A Late Medieval Life*, RHYS BEZZANT/KAREN ROE (trans.), Grand Rapids, MI 2017.

and late medieval ideas. The selection of these particular doctrines is intentional. Above all others, these three have commonly been identified as Luther's "breakthrough" ideas; these are the ideas that separated him, and by extension Protestantism, from Rome. The conceptual and confessional stakes with respect to these doctrines are high. If Luther's work on these doctrines is viewed as doctrinally and historically continuous with medieval ideas, as this volume's authors do, then the historiographical and confessional identity markers predicated on disjunction are called into question, and with them the whole confident idea of the Protestant origins of modernity. Furthermore, if it can be shown that Luther deployed late medieval resources to articulate Christian doctrines with philosophical care and precision, then future study of Luther will require familiarity with medieval philosophy. The essays in this volume represent Luther from this perspective, namely as a late medieval Catholic theologian who musters philosophical acumen for theological reflection and reform.

How has it come about that Luther is usually studied as the breakthrough figure at the origins of modernity? How have scholars recently challenged this portrait of Luther the Protestant reformer? In order to answer these questions, in what follows, I sketch a trajectory of research on Luther in the twentieth century in order to clear the path to viewing Luther according to the medieval philosophical and theological terms of this volume. In the first section I describe the legacy of the Luther Renaissance, the early twentieth century group of German Luther scholars who cast Luther as decisively Protestant and modern. In the second, I discuss recent work on the "Catholic Luther," the subject of ecumenical interest after Vatican II. I conclude with the "medieval Luther," the subject matter of this volume.

## 1. The Search for the Protestant Luther

The Luther Renaissance was the organized scholarly effort at the beginning of the twentieth century to investigate Martin Luther as an object of critical, historical, and theological study.<sup>7</sup> History had become the reigning academic science (*Wissenschaft*) in the German university alongside the emerging social sciences of sociology, anthropology, and economics. Theologians too were interested in bringing their discipline into the academic discussion. Friedrich Schleiermacher had first integrated the historical paradigm into his new plan for theology as a modern field of study in 1811. A century later, Lutheran theologians took up his recommendation. By this time, their colleagues in the humanities were deploying

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<sup>7</sup> For a detailed description of proponents of the Luther Renaissance, their questions and methodologies, see CHRISTINE HELMER, *How Luther Became the Reformer*, Louisville, KY 2019.



historical methods to measure change amid continuity, relating human agency to social formations, and inquiring into how economic and modern forces took shape under particular historical conditions. Theologians were eager to include these questions in their purview. Luther became their test case.

Until the Luther Renaissance, Lutheran theologians had approached their hero as a systematic theologian, taking systematic theology as the genre best suited for accumulating and ordering theological knowledge. Theologians represented theological knowledge as *knowledge* by presenting claims in a system. Lutheran theologians, too, used this form to represent Luther's ideas. While they acknowledged the dialectical core to Luther's thought, they found constructive ways to systematize its contradictions. Theodosius Harnack, for example, organized Luther's theology systematically on the basis of the structural distinction between the God outside of Christ and the God in Christ.<sup>8</sup>

All this changed in 1883 with the four-hundredth anniversary of Luther's birth, when scholars began investigating Luther as the central figure of the reformation. His theology was of interest only in so far as it broke away from medieval structures and inaugurated modernity. Church historians and theologians focused their attention on particular texts that yielded the reformation breakthrough. They were especially interested in Luther's exegetical works, specifically his 1515–1516 Lectures on Romans: they wanted to show that Luther, like Paul, preached a gospel of justification by faith without works. These theologians were fascinated with Luther's biography, particularly around the years of 1517, when it was said that Luther was converted to the truth of Christ, like the Apostle Paul and Saint Augustine before him.

The church historian credited with initiating the Luther Renaissance was Karl Holl. Holl had initially studied the early church and Calvin before turning to Luther during the Great War that coincided in 1917 with the four-hundredth anniversary of the Protestant reformation. Holl's work on Luther, which he published in two editions – the first in 1917 and the second after the war in 1921 – is acknowledged as the origin of the modern study of Luther. In *What did Luther Understand by Religion?*, Holl documented a dramatic shift in Luther's religious experience,<sup>9</sup> distinguishing Luther's "religion of conscience" into two parts: the conscience's awareness of its inability to fulfill the demands of the divine will and the divine demand that the human will's unity with the divine will would be the soul's justification. Holl showed how Luther's understanding of justification

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<sup>8</sup> THEODOSIUS HARNACK, *Luthers Theologie. Mit besonderer Beziehung auf seine Veröhnungs- und Erlösungslehre*, 2 vols., Erlangen <sup>1</sup>1862–1866; Munich <sup>2</sup>1927; reprint in one volume, Amsterdam 1969.

<sup>9</sup> KARL HOLL, "Was Verstand Luther unter Religion?," in: KARL HOLL, *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Kirchengeschichte*, vol. 1: Luther, Tübingen <sup>2+3</sup>1923, 1–110; English translation: KARL HOLL, *What Did Luther Understand by Religion?*, JAMES LUTHER ADAMS/WALTER F. BENSE (eds.), FRED W. MEUSER/WALTER R. WIETZKE (trans.), Philadelphia, PA 1977.

was a paradox. The human would have to resign the personal will to the consequences of divine wrath in order to reach a point at which it could be united with the divine will. Only at that point of self-renunciation could divine grace be bestowed. In the second edition of his book on Luther, Holl introduced the idea of the “resignation to hell” (*resignatio ad infernum*) in order to underscore the self’s experience of God.<sup>10</sup> He found the idea in Luther’s interpretation of Romans 9:3 in which Paul admits that he would gladly be “accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my own people, my kindred according to the flesh” (NRSV). According to Holl, Luther followed Paul by resigning his will to hell in order to fulfill the demands of the divine justice. The paradox of Holl’s depiction of Luther’s experience of justification is that only at the point of self-renunciation does God effect the sinner’s justification.

Holl’s achievement was to lay out the historical and religious categories that Luther scholars would use for the rest of the twentieth century to address Luther’s “reformation breakthrough.” Following Holl, biographers conceptualized Luther’s religious experience as a conversion from an “old” paradigm of fear of the divine wrath to a “new” paradigm of justification by faith through grace. Holl’s foundational work set the parameters for viewing Luther’s reformation as this dramatic shift from works to grace, from wrath to love, from sin to justification. Concepts such as conscience and paradox, *Anfechtung* and justification became the essential vocabulary for Luther studies. The story of Luther that Holl told was one who had made the conversion from Catholic to Protestant.

Much more than Luther’s biography is at stake in these reorientations. Holl, like many contemporary biographers of Luther, was interested in the question of how Germany could be identified as a modern nation. Max Weber had initially related Protestantism to modernity in his 1904–1905 work, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*.<sup>11</sup> Holl took up this impetus and connected Luther’s reformation to the birth of modernity in his *The Cultural Significance of the Protestant Reformation*.<sup>12</sup> This promotion of Luther as the progenitor of modernity continues in contemporary identifications of Luther, most recently in biographies by Michael Massing, Brad S. Gregory, and Andrew Pettegree.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>10</sup> See specifically HELMER, *How Luther Became the Reformer* (as note 7), 31–36.

<sup>11</sup> For the critical edition of this work, see MAX WEBER, *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 1/18: *Die protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus. Die protestantischen Sekten und der Geist des Kapitalismus. Schriften 1904–1920*, WOLFGANG SCHLUCHTER/in collaboration with URSULA BUBE (eds.), Tübingen 2016; English translation: MAX WEBER, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, 3rd Oxford edn./expanded 1920 version, STEPHEN KALBERG (trans.), New York/Oxford 2002.

<sup>12</sup> KARL HOLL, “Die Kulturbedeutung der Reformation,” in: KARL HOLL, *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Kirchengeschichte*, vol. 1: *Luther*, Tübingen <sup>4+5</sup>1927, 468–543; English translation: KARL HOLL, *The Cultural Significance of the Protestant Reformation* (Living Age Books), KARL HERTZ/BARBARA HERTZ (trans.), New York 1959.

<sup>13</sup> MICHAEL MASSING, *Fatal Discord. Erasmus, Luther, and the Fight for the Western Mind*, New York 2018; BRAD S. GREGORY, *Rebel in the Ranks. Martin Luther, the Reforma-*

In the tradition of Holl, according to these authors, at stake in Luther's biography are broader cultural-historical questions concerning the rupture between the Middle Ages and modernity. Luther stands with his banner of freedom at modernity's origins.

The achievement of the Luther Renaissance was the production of Luther as modern Protestant. Luther the Reformer initiated the break with Rome and embarked on an entirely new religious course. He polemized against religious superstition, advocated the Bible as source and norm for theological truth, stripped the liturgy of its incense, saints, and vestments, and wrote catechisms for religious education in the home. According to Holl's followers, he rejected philosophy as tool for theology and insisted on a new language that had its truth criterion in Christ. He left Catholicism behind in the Middle Ages and opened the gateway to modernity.

## 2. The Search for the Catholic Luther

The Protestant Luther dominated scholarship until the 1960s. Vatican II changed this course. Called by Pope John XXIII in 1959, the Second Vatican Council, which met in four sessions between 1962 and 1965, heralded a new vision for western Christianity, one inspired by reform. It was, maybe, the council longed for by Luther for his own rehabilitation! One of its documents, *Lumen Gentium*, can be said to bear Luther's imprint.<sup>14</sup> While the question of the Lutheran "heresy" was not addressed at Vatican II, Protestant theologians were invited to attend as observers. American Lutheran theologian, George A. Lindbeck, who attended the council, went on to construct a theological paradigm facilitating the ecumenical dialogues between Lutherans and Roman Catholics, precisely on the topic that had divided these confessions for five hundred years, the doctrine of justification.<sup>15</sup>

Ecumenism was in the air as Roman Catholic theologians asked the significant question of how the Church might embrace modern values while holding fast to doctrine. This double commitment to modernity and tradition inspired mainline Protestant theologians who lamented the loss within their tradition of

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tion, and the Conflicts That Continue to Shape Our World, New York 2017; ANDREW PETEGREE, *Brand Luther. How an Unheralded Monk Turned His Small Town into a Center of Publishing, Made Himself the Most Famous Man in Europe – and Started the Protestant Reformation*, New York 2016.

<sup>14</sup> Of note is the placing of the section "On the People of God" before the section on the ordained priesthood, "On the Hierarchical Structure of the Church and In Particular On the Episcopate"; online at: [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19641121\\_lumen-gentium\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html) (accessed July 8, 2019).

<sup>15</sup> For this work, see GEORGE A. LINDBECK, *The Nature of Doctrine. Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age*, 25th anniversary edn., Louisville, KY 2009.

liturgical decorum and the Catholic intellectual inheritance. Some Protestant theologians and liturgists spearheaded another kind of rapprochement. They insisted on recovering the Catholic liturgical tradition for their worship services and both the ecumenical councils and the theological works of Catholic luminaries for their theological reflection. The liturgical movement, as it came to be called, appropriated the Catholic liturgy and integrated some of its rituals into Protestant services. Incense and hyssop returned to feast days; liturgical colors decorated vestments and adorned Protestant altars; and the Easter Vigil was celebrated again. The evangelical catholic intellectual movement dug deep into the common Catholic tradition and emerged armed with new theological resources. After five centuries of preaching the pure word of God, Protestants recovered their senses and opened their minds to the catholicity at the root of their tradition.

These efforts at ecumenical rapprochement swept Luther up on both sides of the confessional divide. The Dutch church historian Heiko Oberman took a lead in connecting Luther to his late medieval predecessor, Gabriel Biel. Biel had been a member of the Brethren of the Common Life, a religious community in which Luther (and Erasmus of Rotterdam) had been schooled in his youth. Biel's work on the Canon of the Mass was the standard text on the Roman Mass for late medieval theology students, like Luther. Oberman published *The Harvest of Medieval Theology* in 1963, and showed how Luther had inherited Biel's philosophical position, namely nominalism, and late medieval theological doctrines.<sup>16</sup>

Two German Catholic theologians generated excitement among Luther scholars with their work on the "Catholic Luther." Peter Manns first coined the term, the "Catholic Luther" in the 1960s.<sup>17</sup> Dominican friar, Otto Hermann Pesch, compared Aquinas and Luther on the doctrine of justification and concluded that the two Catholics were not as far apart theologically as their respective traditions deemed.<sup>18</sup> Pesch's comparison inspired Lindbeck. Trained as a medieval theologian, Lindbeck taught that in order to appreciate Luther as a reformer, scholars would have to situate his innovations in the theology of the late medievals. In order to understand how Luther came to new insights concerning the doctrine of justification, one would have to learn the late medieval penitential system and sacramental theology. In his classes at Yale, Lindbeck insisted on the significance of medieval theology for Protestant seminaries that had for too

<sup>16</sup> HEIKO A. OBERMAN, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology. Gabriel Biel and Late Medieval Nominalism*, Cambridge, MA 1963; reprint, Grand Rapids, MI 2000.

<sup>17</sup> See the edited volume celebrating Manns's contributions: MARIANO DELGADO/VOLKER LEPPIN (eds.), *Luther. Zankapfel zwischen den Konfessionen und "Vater im Glauben"?*. Historische, systematische und ökumenische Zugänge (Studien zur christlichen Religions- und Kulturgeschichte 21), Freiburg, Switzerland/Stuttgart 2016.

<sup>18</sup> OTTO HERMANN PESCH, *Theologie der Rechtfertigung bei Martin Luther und Thomas von Aquin. Versuch eines systematisch-theologischen Dialogs* (Walberger Studien/Theologische Reihe 4), Mainz 1967.

long restricted their study of medieval theologians to the singular Augustine. Oberman and Lindbeck set new terms for studying the history of Christianity in Protestant institutions. The Middle Ages was now required reading; its proponents were to be regarded as “forerunners of the reformation.”<sup>19</sup>

Study of the Catholic Luther soon demanded that Luther scholars become familiar with medieval philosophy. The position that Luther had consistently denigrated Aristotle and rejected any intrusions of philosophy into theology was no longer tenable after Oberman’s work. Luther was a Catholic theologian, trained in the seven liberal arts, which included the philosophical disciplines of dialectic and logic. English theologian and mathematician Graham White led the way in convincing Luther scholars that Luther had applied philosophical tools to the investigation of the Trinity and Christ.<sup>20</sup> White showed that Luther appealed to semantics and logic in order to prove medieval trinitarian syllogisms on theological grounds. Luther’s theological method resembled that of other late medieval theologians, such as Robert Holcot and Pierre d’Ailly. White’s work from 1994 was soon followed by other published works on Luther’s use of philosophy in Christian doctrine. My own *Trinity and Martin Luther* focused on Luther’s appropriation of William of Ockham in his trinitarian theology.<sup>21</sup> German theologian and ecumenist Theodor Dieter studied Luther’s use of Aristotle in the early disputations of 1517–1518.<sup>22</sup> Historian of Christianity, Volker Leppin published a book on William of Ockham.<sup>23</sup> Danish theologian Else Marie Wiberg Pedersen and German historian Theo Bell recovered Bernard of Clairvaux as crucial resource for Luther’s theology of grace.<sup>24</sup> Finnish theologian and ecumenist Risto Saarinen studied Luther’s medieval inheritances regarding the human will.<sup>25</sup> David J. Luy, Candace L. Kohli, and Aaron Moldenhauer have recently written works on Luther’s medieval inheritances, focusing specifically on Christology and ethics.<sup>26</sup> These studies take Luther’s deep familiarity with philosophy seri-

<sup>19</sup> To allude to the title of a book by HEIKO A. OBERMAN, *Forerunners of the Reformation. The Shape of Late Medieval Thought*, New York 1966; reprint, Cambridge 2002.

<sup>20</sup> GRAHAM WHITE, *Luther as Nominalist. A Study of the Logical Methods Used in Martin Luther’s Disputations in the Light of Their Medieval Background* (Schriften der Luther-Agriicola-Gesellschaft 30), Helsinki 1994.

<sup>21</sup> CHRISTINE HELMER, *The Trinity and Martin Luther* (Studies in Historical and Systematic Theology), Bellingham, WA 2017.

<sup>22</sup> THEODOR DIETER, *Der junge Luther und Aristoteles. Eine historisch-systematische Untersuchung zum Verhältnis von Theologie und Philosophie* (TBT 105), Berlin/New York 2001.

<sup>23</sup> VOLKER LEPPIN, *Wilhelm von Ockham. Gelehrter, Streiter, Bettelmönch*, Darmstadt 2003.

<sup>24</sup> ELSE MARIE WIBERG PEDERSEN, *Bernard af Clairvaux. Teolog eller mystiker [Bernard of Clairvaux. Theologian or Mystic?]*, Copenhagen 2008; THEO BELL, *Divus Bernhardus. Bernhard von Clairvaux in Martin Luthers Schriften* (VIEG Abteilung Religionsgeschichte 148), Mainz 1993.

<sup>25</sup> RISTO SAARINEN, *Weakness of Will in Renaissance and Reformation Thought*, Oxford 2011.

<sup>26</sup> DAVID J. LUY, *Dominus Mortis. Martin Luther on the Incorruptibility of God in Christ*,

ously as formative for his theological work. What had begun as an interest in the Catholic Luther for ecumenical purposes had become a full-fledged research program.

The research on the Catholic Luther proved significant for the important ecumenical dialogues between Roman Catholics and Lutherans in the 1990s. The dialogues focused inevitably on justification, the doctrine “by which the church stands or falls.” The positions Lutheran theologians took on ecumenism were based on their attitudes towards the Catholic Luther. While Nordic and American scholarship was aligned with the philosophically astute Catholic Luther, German scholarship continued to favor the anti-philosophical, word-oriented Luther of the law/gospel dialectic. A controversy played out between German Lutherans and the Lutheran World Federation prior to the signing of the Joint Declaration on Justification on October 31, 1999. German Lutherans Gerhard Ebeling and Eberhard Jüngel had led over one hundred and sixty-five of their German colleagues to protest the Joint Declaration.<sup>27</sup> Theodor Dieter, Risto Saarinen, and American Lutheran theologian Michael Root (who subsequently converted to Roman Catholicism), who were affiliated with the Ecumenical Institute in Strasbourg at the time, defended the Joint Declaration and facilitated its signing.

The Joint Declaration put an end to the long-standing mutual condemnations between Roman Catholics and Lutherans. Yet the scholarly divide remains. Many Lutheran theologians in Germany and North America still favor an approach to Luther that underscores forensic justification, the primacy of the word, and a “relational” ontology between Christ and the believer. It continues to be the work of primarily Nordic and North American scholars of Luther to study Luther’s use of medieval philosophy and his appropriation of late medieval concepts and theological questions

### 3. The Search for the Medieval Luther

With the five-hundredth anniversary of the Protestant reformation finally behind us, opportunities for orienting Luther scholarship in new directions have opened up. It is now time to build on the legacy of the searches for the Protestant Luther and the Catholic Luther and to study how Luther explicitly deploys philosophy for articulating Christian doctrine.

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Minneapolis, MN 2014; CANDACE L. KOHLI, *Help for the Good. Martin Luther’s Understanding of Human Agency (1530–1545)*, Ph.D. Diss., Northwestern University, Evanston, IL 2017; AARON MOLDENHAUER, *Luther’s Doctrine of Christ. Language, Metaphysics, Logic*, Ph.D. Diss., Northwestern University, Evanston, IL 2019.

<sup>27</sup> RICHARD NYBERG, “Germany. Protestant Theologians Object to Lutheran-Catholic Accord,” in: *Christianity Today* (June 15, 1998); online at <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/1998/june15/8t7012.html> (accessed July 8, 2019).

The search for the medieval Luther follows the lead that Graham White has taken in creating a dialogue between the field of medieval philosophy and Luther's theology. The contributions in this volume represent this interdisciplinary endeavor. On the one hand, scholars of the Middle Ages, philosophers and historians, reach into their toolkits in order to stretch their historical and conceptual purview into Luther studies. They approach Luther as a medieval theologian from their disciplinary perspective. On the other hand, Luther scholars, theologians and historians use their analytical tools to move Luther back across the threshold of modernity and situate him in continuity with the medieval world. By reaching forward to early modernity, on the one hand, and back to the Middle Ages, on the other hand, the two scholarly perspectives meet in the middle, negotiating new ways of approaching Luther's theology.

How might Luther studies be recast to comprehend the medieval Luther? An important preliminary task concerns knowledge of the Middle Ages, which tends to be a weak spot among Protestant historians and theologians. Protestant treatments of Luther usually place him in conceptual proximity to the church fathers and to Augustine, dismissing the period from Peter Lombard to Gabriel Biel on the grounds of Luther's alleged antipathy to philosophy. Once Luther scholars admit that Luther himself acknowledged his indebtedness to his medieval predecessors, they can then more empirically attend to his references to many medieval philosophers and theologians. Luther learned nominalism from his Erfurt teachers, Jodocus Trutfetter and Bartholomäus Arnoldi von Usingen. He often cites nominalist thinkers William Ockham and Gabriel Biel. Luther connects his own work to the positions of Duns Scotus, Robert Holcott, Pierre d'Ailly, Peter Lombard, and Joachim of Fiore. If Luther scholars are to indeed acknowledge these references in Luther's works, they must become more familiar with these names and their philosophical and theological positions.

To be sure, Luther is famous for inveighing against the scholastics and their obfuscation of theological truth. Yet these claims must be taken with a grain of salt. Luther's rhetoric hides a deep commitment to philosophy as indispensable for theology; the disputations are key texts in demonstrating Luther's constructive use of philosophy. The academic disputation was, alongside the lecture, the primary medieval genre for teaching and, in the ecclesial context, for accusing a heretic. Luther participated in many different disputations over the course of his entire career about various topics. The procedures regulating disputation were strict. Respondent and opponent engaged in the debate with the opponent assaying to force the respondent into a logical error. Luther, a formidable disputator, was familiar with the formalities as well as with the dialectical tools necessary for a winning outcome.

This volume aims to change the way Luther is perceived. The contributions demonstrate how Luther may be approached as a late medieval figure who was intimately familiar with philosophy and who deployed philosophical reason to

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