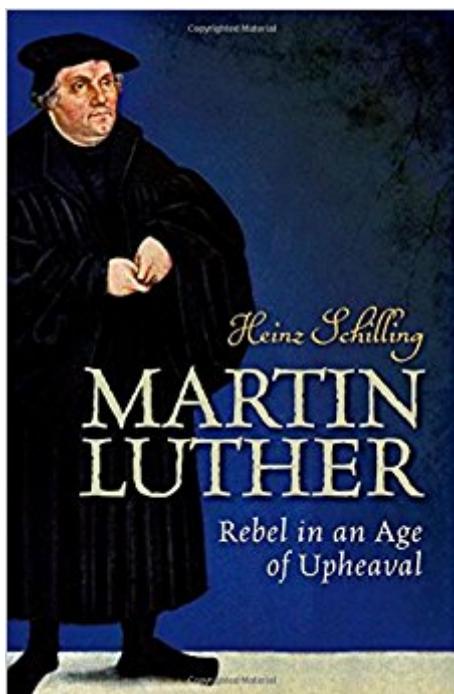


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Martin Luther: Rebel In An Age Of Upheaval



Synopsis

No other German has shaped the history of early-modern Europe more than Martin Luther. In this comprehensive and balanced biography we see Luther as a rebel, but not as a lone hero; as a soldier in a mighty struggle for the universal reform of Christianity and its role in the world. The foundation of Protestantism changed the religious landscape of Europe, and subsequently the world, but the author chooses to show Luther not simply as a reformer, but as an individual. In his study of the Wittenberg monk, Heinz Schilling - one of Germany's leading social and political historians - gives the reader a rounded view of a difficult, contradictory character, who changed the world by virtue of his immense will.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"Heinz Schilling's major new biography of Luther ... gives the most balanced account of Luther's life to date. Unlike so many biographers of Luther, Schilling is not a theologian or even a church historian by training. He is one of the leading German experts on late medieval and sixteenth-century German history, and he places Luther firmly in the context of his time: a rebel in an age of upheaval ... [review of German edition]" --Joachim Whaley, TLS

Heinz Schilling was Professor of Early Modern History at the Humboldt University, Berlin until his retirement in 2010. His main areas of research are in early modern European history, including studies in religion, politics, migration studies, foreign policy, and social and cultural history.

Heinz Schilling’s 2013 critical analysis (translated 2017 Rona Johnston) is not a narrative. There is thankfully no retelling of the Luther story. There is a good 2017 narrative by Andrew Pettegree “Brand Luther” which I find memorable for its defence of Tetzel, while Schilling glosses over the indulgence controversy. Like Lyndal Roper’s 2017 MARTIN LUTHER Renegade and Prophet, Schilling’s references are mostly to binary alphabets like LW, WB, WT, WW, i.e. original sources. Heinz Schilling assumes that the reader has read all the Luther lore, and he then disabuses the reader of some embellished clichés. The retrospective anecdote of being thrown off a horse near Stotternheim may be balanced against Schilling’s observation that “As was usual, Luder’s return journey was undertaken largely or completely on foot.” (57) Heinz Schilling has instructed translator Rona Johnston to dumb down this version for English readers (Translator’s Introduction). But not many will need German references or a 24 page bibliography of German publications: if you can read German, buy the 1983 original edition. Schilling carefully examines the context and significance of each event. It is unconventional to start a book on Martin Luther by drawing in Goethe’s enthusiasm for “ages ruled by faith”; Max Weber; slavery, Dominican monks Antonio de Montesinos and Bartolome de Las Casas; reformation by archbishops Hernando de Talavera, Pascual de Ampudia and Francisco Jiminez de Cisneros. Conquistadors, traders, Ottoman Turks; Charles VIII the French King crossing the Alps, Immanuel Wallenstein’s “Atlantic World Economy”; Tacitus; Erik H. Erikson; and there is a nod to Luther’s probable baptismal parish priest Bartholomäus Rinnebecher (9), appropriately opposing Luther’s insistence that he was born in the year 1484 (10). Schilling’s commentary then follows roughly chronological landmarks. Extracted short narratives set the stage for unexpected observations. “Here I stand, I cannot act otherwise, God help me” were as appropriate for Charles V as for Luther (188), Charles V was also prepared to live and to die according to his faith. Luther and Muntzer were both bloodthirsty. The notorious “stab, smite, slay” anticipated Muntzer’s words that the peasants were fighting for their own cause and not for the divine cause (261), thus the two rival modes of church renewal (265) mirrored each other, both blaming the peasants’ self interests. Occasionally, Schilling is informative. Luder changed to Luther by incorporating the Greek “Eluetheros” “the free one, the liberator, in Luther’s early signatures in his letters to John Lang and Melanchthon

(139).Schilling explains the out of joint timing of Luther’s marriage with the weirdest reason anybody gave to get married. As agents of the devil, the peasant armies had taken up arms against the rediscovered Gospel, and therefore Luther had to get married to "vex and spite the devil" (271) Luther initially fancied Eva von Schonfeld. Katherina considered in succession Hieronymus Baumgartner, Caspar Glatz, and Nicholaus von Amsdorff (270). The wedding was a quiet clinically cool affair, with few in attendance: Bugenhagen, Lucas (sic) Cranach and wife, Justus Jonas and jurist Johannes Apel. James Reston Jr informs us in his epilogue of "Luther's Fortress" [2015] that the organisers of the 2017 festivities will have this marriage re-enactment as a new item. From Schilling’s account, the organisers will have to embellish the re-enactment liberally. The central part of the volume deals with the development of the Church. It is difficult to review Schilling’s volume: Schilling’s is a critical review of published material, and comparing them with the original sources, with his own take. A finely tuned sense of humour will find it a refreshing read. The volume continues into Confessionalism. Schilling was Thomas A Brady Jr’s go to man on Confessional Europe in Volume 2 of "Handbook of European History, 1400-1600, (1995)". In the final part of the volume, Schilling observes that "Charles’s restraint at Luther’s grave was politically astute. The Emperor’s principal concern was to ensure that his victory brought lasting peace to Germany." Schilling wryly suggests that "From Luther to Hitler" might make a suitable chapter heading for an academic text (471). There is a constellation of characters in Schilling’s book, but Schilling helpfully tells you who they are with every mention, even familiar characters like Konrad Peutinger, Augsburg envoy (181), and in case you started reading on page 191, Dr Peutinger is still titled "Augsburg envoy of Augsburg". The constant pairing of names/items with their descriptions *et passim* is an endearing style of Schilling’s writing. This pairing of description to its term is endearing as no memory is perfect. The following is a quiz to check how good your memory is: Levin von Emden: syndic in Magdeburg (496) Michael Coelius: Mansfield castle preacher (494) Sebastian Munster: cosmographer in Basel (483) Tola: rightfully hanged highwayman, i.e. Jesus, (477) Elizabeth von Rochlitz: sister of Philip of Hesse (427) Hans von Metzch: bailiff and town captain (304) Winand von Diedenhofen: prior at Erfurt (66) Johann von der Ecken: official of Electoral Trier (181) [frequently confused with Eck] Richard von Greiffenklau: archbishop of Trier (190) Maximilian von Zevenbergen: Austrian Habsburg chancellor

(191) Johannes Aurifaber: Luther & his last secretary (289) Gerhard Westerburg: radical spiritualist (343) Villach: winter retreat of Charles V in 1552 (521) I received this pre-ordered book after I sat for my university paper on Church History. Bummer. This was a blessing as this book is clearly not for undergraduates who just want to achieve a pass grade. An excellent read is not necessarily a help in answering basic exam questions. Schilling's work is totally non-partisan. Diarmaid MacCulloch's comment, about Eamon Duffy being a Catholic historian and not a historian who happens to be Catholic, comes to mind. I spent some time looking up whether Heinz Schilling was Protestant or Catholic. I met with no success. Schilling does not take sides, and he can be read comfortably by both sides.

Very good

This is a somewhat wooden translation of a magisterial work originally published in German in 2012. Casual readers will be put off by its length and its attention to the details of church organization and administrative work that occupied much of the great reformer's time. English-speaking readers will probably be better served by Heiko Oberman's classic *Luther: Man Between God and the Devil* (1989). Schilling gives a balanced assessment of the troubling question of Luther's influence on the anti-semitism that poisoned modern German history. Readers interested in this question will want to read Thomas Kaufmann's *Luther's Jews: A Journey into Anti-Semitism* (2017). Kaufmann concludes that Luther's writings "were certainly a factor in making the Holocaust possible, for they helped create an attitude of mind that paralyzed any kind of civil courage on the part of the [German] Lutheran population." (p.143) On the question of Luther's overall influence on German society today, German-speaking readers should consult a popular work written for a general audience: Christine Eichel, *Deutschland, Lutherland: Warum Uns die Reformation bis Heute Praegt* (2015).

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