

BOOK REVIEWS

Luther For Everyone: Who He Was & Why He Still Matters. By Hans Schwarz. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2024. 210 pp. + xv.

Hans Schwarz concludes his presentation of Martin Luther, originally commissioned by the Roman Catholic publisher Schöningh specifically as a book for non-Lutherans, with this description: Luther “was a Christian who stood in the tradition of Paul and Augustine, and in this tradition made the loving care of God, who is the Creator of the whole universe, to us humans shine anew. . . . [Luther] belongs first of all to us Christians and also to all those who are still inspired by his understanding of life being lived in service to others” (210). I first heard Schwarz fifty years ago at regional American Academy of Religion conferences, where he delivered the most worthwhile of the presentations, perhaps because his assessment of a variety of topics arose out of his deep commitment to Luther’s way of thinking. Teaching in Columbus and then Regensburg, Schwarz has shaped a cadre of Luther-minded theologians around the globe. Therefore, he knows how to introduce the Wittenberg Reformer to those outside our tradition in a winsome way, admitting his faults but highlighting his biblical exposition as the proclamation of forgiveness and new life in Christ and the life that flows from it. In six chapters Schwarz explains the pillars of Luther’s interpretation of the biblical message, and in eight additional chapters he assesses Luther’s gifts and insights into aspects of human life and the impact they have made in church and society to this day.

The volume first explains to readers why other Christians should find Luther’s thinking important for the entire church. It then surveys the sixteenth-century outreach of this German professor’s witness, especially to northern and eastern Europe. Schwarz continues with insightful expositions of Luther’s theology in terms of his definitions of grace and faith in Christ, who is the focal point of his thinking; his distinction of the Hidden God and the Revealed God; his distinction of law and gospel; and his distinction of the two

realms of human life that form the battleground between God and Satan. These chapters introduce readers to the underlying structure and the dynamic *modus operandi* of Luther's delivery of the biblical message. Schwarz then grounds his survey of Luther's concept of Christian living in his transformation of the concept of vocation. Subsequent chapters assess Luther's view of and contributions to education; marriage and family life; our use of language, especially in his translation of the Bible; economic life, especially in his sharp critiques of greed and "predatory capitalism;" the natural sciences, with special focus on his contempt for astrology; and music in the church's life.

Particularly in navigating the shoals of distinguishing law and gospel in ways that highlight the pastoral dimensions of Luther's way of thinking, Schwarz pierces to the heart of his teaching. He ties together God's liberation of his people from sin through Christ's death and resurrection with their life of gratitude expressed in living out God's design for human life. "Luther had no interest in a speculative theology but only in a theology spawned by the practical issues of human beings. . . . If we have realized who God is, a gracious and caring God, then for us Christians there are consequences in works of thankfulness. All understanding of God results from God's self-disclosure in Jesus Christ and has immediate practical consequences for our lives" (54).

Lutheran readers can look through Schwarz's eyes at those elements where they should be coming into dialogue with Roman Catholic and Reformed neighbors. His sensitive, engaging explanations of disputed issues, from justification by faith to the sacraments and the structures of daily life, provide guidance for readers engaged in their own conversations with non-Lutheran friends and neighbors. These explanations help bridge the gaps between Lutherans and other Christian traditions. Schwarz refreshes our understanding of why differences arose and why they still matter for the faithful proclamation of God's Word and the cultivation of pastoral sensitivity for ministry in our day. Readers will not just read this book once but will also return to it often.

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