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BOOK REVIEW AND COMMENTARY

Brand Luther: 1517, Printing, and the Making of the Reformation

by Andrew Pettegree (New York: Penguin, 2015)

by Adam Koontz

THE FLOOD OF WORDS in books and articles, on blogs, and at conferences commemorating, discussing, and making hay of 1517 is already here. One Andrew Pettegree's insights presented in his new book on Luther and the media of his day is that this flood is nothing new. The German printing market boomed in the first quarter of the sixteenth century in large part thanks to Luther's very modern ability to write about theology in clear, brief, and convincing vernacular language. Fortunes were made printing and publishing in the German world where each printer could, without hindrance, reprint the Luther texts from Wittenberg that would sell by the hundreds and thousands. Pettegree marshals a detailed knowledge of that particular story into line with the larger stories of the Reformation and Luther's life and career.

Pettegree does not write for the specialist. He uses the word "Reformation" with a capital R and without any discussion of a variety of "reformations," including a Catholic one. Although the book covers the period from roughly 1480 to 1580, the word "confessionalization" does not appear once even when he is talking about the clarification of confession and political status at events like the Diet of Speyer in 1529 or the publication of the Book of Concord in 1580. Commendably, he makes the outline of the history of the Reformation, the biography of Luther, and the role of printing in them comprehensible to someone neither pursuing a degree in nor making a living from the subject.

The narrative heart of the book is the biography of Luther, traced from his father's investment in copper

mines to Luther's death at Eisleben seeking to reconcile feuding brothers. Someone without much or any clear knowledge of Luther's life story will gain it from this book. Into the bargain, Pettegree draws Luther without enlisting him as the herald or hero of something much larger than himself. Pettegree's Luther is not the harbinger of modern freedom of conscience, the German nation, or even of all the Lutheranism that followed him. He was a man of singularly great intellect and facility of expression

who was courageously tenacious or foolishly obtuse, depending on one's sympathies. He was mighty at Worms in defending a conscience captive to the word of God, uniquely instrumental in the history of the German nation and the German language, and the theological progenitor of what Pettegree calls a new way of being a Christian community instantly recognizable to modern Lutherans in its devotion to Scripture and the primacy of congregational song. Yet

Amid a flood already begun and perhaps now itself 500 years old of Lutheriana, this new book retells the story you may already know with accuracy, fresh facts, and insights.

Pettegree is careful never to make Luther merely the sum of everything or everyone he influenced, a cipher we fill in for ourselves in commemoration of the great man.

This is most clear when Pettegree narrates Luther's two major absences from Wittenberg between 1517 and his death in 1546—his friendly imprisonments at the Wartburg in 1521–1522 and at Coburg Castle in 1530. It was during those times that we have the clearest picture of how much Luther was involved in from day to day as he wrote and agonized about all he could not control. He gave detailed instructions to his wife Katie in 1530 about how a manuscript should be yanked from one printer and given to another, even as the first printer sent a beautiful

final copy of the book to him, arriving after Luther's exhorting instructions were already en route home. As he wrote at a superhuman pace in 1520–1522 and managed and reviewed everything from university curricula to the placement of pastors in rural Saxon parishes to numerous manuscripts at diverse and sundry printers all at once, Luther's energy is astounding and his very human frustrations and dislikes evident.

The "brand" the title identifies is the distinctive appearance of Luther's writings that the reformer promoted after early mishaps with Rhau-Grunenberg, the only printer in Wittenberg when Luther arrived there. There were six other centers of printing in the German world: Leipzig in nearby ducal Saxony with its own university, Augsburg, Nuremberg, Basel, Cologne, and Strasbourg. Wittenberg's sole printer was terribly backward by comparison, and once the thirty-four-year-old hitherto obscure professor of Bible began to make a sensation with the publication of the Ninety-Five Theses, which were quickly reprinted throughout the German world, Luther knew that Wittenberg needed a sophisticated, modern look for its German-language Flugschriften, the very brief, very pungent writings so popular across Germany, for its academic works in Latin, and eventually for the German Bible, issued in parts from the September Testament of 1522 to the first complete Bible printed by Hans Lufft in 1534.

With the aid of Lucas Cranach and the Lotter printing family, Luther put together a look for even the smallest pamphlets that would make both "Luther" and "Wittenberg" famous enough to be used on writings that were not strictly his and certainly had not been printed in Wittenberg. A specialist in the history of books, especially printed books, Pettegree details the nature of early modern printing and why, for instance, a Leipzig printer with Catholic convictions would petition his staunchly Catholic ruler for the right to print Luther's works for sale in his staunchly Catholic territory. The interconnection of Luther with the emerging print media of his time is necessary to understanding his success in view of his early obscurity and later ignominy. Pettegree masterfully demonstrates the interdependence of the writer and his market.

In connection with that central story of Luther and his use of what were then new media in ways before unused by any theologian, Pettegree deftly adds a general sense of the flow of the Reformation (including the humanists like Erasmus and Pirckheimer initially sympathetic to it), political and theological opposition to it (including a

very sympathetic portrait of John Eck), and its eventual theological diversity, introducing at least briefly everyone from the more famous Zwingli, Bucer, and Calvin to the less famous but important Rhegius, Zell, and Müntzer. He is predictably eloquent on the role of printing and its suppression in markets more highly regulated than Germany's, like France, England, or the Low Countries, which meant the suppression of nascent Lutheran sympathies. In a few paragraphs or a few pages, he covers topics as various as Zwingli's progression from parish priest to his battlefield death, the relationship between Duke George of Saxony and Jerome Emser, and the southwestern German origins of the Bundschuh cause leading to the Peasants' War of 1525. He is able to discuss all of this without becoming ponderous or superficial.

There is much to enjoy here, not least the detailed maps of Luther's world and well-chosen illustrations of major figures. There is much Pettegree says that is characteristically concise and precise that we cannot here discuss. Amid a flood already begun and perhaps now itself 500 years old of Lutheriana, this new book retells the story you may already know with accuracy, fresh facts, and insights. Pettegree tells a newer story about Luther's relationship to media that is fruitful for reflection in our own time of massive changes in how people come to see what they see and know what they know and finally to believe what they believe.

BOOK REVIEW AND COMMENTARY

Pauline Hermeneutics: Exploring the “Power of the Gospel”

edited by Eve-Marie Becker and Kenneth Mtata, LWF Studies, 2016/3 (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2017)

by John G. Nordling

P*auline Hermeneutics*, the result of an international conference at Aarhus University, September 24-29, 2015, is the fourth in a series of international conferences convened to prepare for the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. (Earlier conferences focused on the Gospel of John, the Psalms, and the Gospel of Matthew.) The purpose of the Paul conference in particular was to bring together exegetical and theological expertise from all parts of the world to evaluate the Pauline tradition of gospel interpretation in view of current scholarly debates in New Testament studies and Luther’s writings. I shall treat the contribution of each scholar in turn before providing a more general evaluation at the end.

After a pair of introductory essays on hermeneutical implications of the gospel (Kenneth Mtata) and how Paul deals with traditions (Eve-Marie Becker), Oda Wischmeyer explores such principles of Pauline hermeneutics as the Greco-Roman background, Jewish foundations, and Paul’s understanding of the Spirit in 2 Corinthians 3. The Spirit is by no means divorced from the letter, though Paul seems sometimes to “downgrade” Moses (43) to bring to expression the christological *euaggélion* at Corinth. Magnus Zetterholm analyzes Paul’s use of the slave-master metaphor from various perspectives—for example, the ubiquity of slavery in ancient times, Paul’s portrayal of himself as a slave, connections between servility and slavery at Rome, and how Egyptian slavery formed Judaism at core. On the other hand, he might find problematic the possibility that ancient slavery remains pertinent for modern Christians still today—in their coming to terms with the biblical (and Lutheran) understanding of vocation, for example. In Zetterholm’s view, biblical ideologies

and even morality are not acceptable as is but require the church to make such “complicated” texts “relevant” (59).

The next two essays take up spiritual gifts (Rospita Deliana Siahaan) and creation and reconciliation (Roger Marcel Wanke). Siahaan argues that churches should not judge each other in terms of practicing charismata but respect real differences—such as speaking in tongues, or not (71). Reconciliation finally comes down to God’s unconditional forgiveness in Jesus Christ, and so-called “objective reconciliation” (83 n. 39) may involve financial compensation to achieve earthly justice or preserve the environment.

Marianne Bjelland Kartzow advances so-called “intersectional hermeneutics”—which, as she freely admits, is “a further step in the feminist interpretation of the Bible” (85). Hagar, for example, should be recognized *because* she has been excluded (97), a hermeneutic that subverts Paul’s intent and, in my view, prefers darkness to light, wickedness

to goodness, and error to truth (see the examples on p. 95). This way of reading Scripture can be quite difficult to follow, and Kartzow herself acknowledges that her interpretations are necessarily “complex” (93). A more traditional—and useful—essay by Lubomir Batka follows on Paul’s understanding of citizenship in Philippians. Power relations at Philippi could have been replicated in the congregation, opines Batka (106 n. 20), and this contribution surpasses the others in its coming to terms with the original *Sitz im Leben*.

Faustin Mahali argues that Africans are so amenable to Luther’s doctrine of justification by grace through faith that so-called “stringent church discipline” (113, 116, 120) hampers the gospel in Africa. I kept

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wondering what the alternative to “church discipline” might be: Pentecostalism? Ancestor worship? Mahali seems quite open to such phenomena in African Lutheran Christianity. Urmas Nõmmik summarizes Estonian discussions among Lutherans on homosexuality before concluding that the issue cannot be decided from ancient evidence nor the Pauline texts. In Nõmmik’s opinion, Holy Scripture needs constantly to be reevaluated in light of changing sociocultural circumstances (139–40) and the church should heed the reality of personal experience (141). Likewise, Mercedes L. Garcia Bachmann’s essay pondering the difference between “called” and “cold” saints (an obvious pun) does no sufficient justice to the Pauline expression *klētois hagiois* (“to the called saints”) in two letter openings (ROM 1:7; 1 COR 1:2). In fact this is a significant phrase, exegetically speaking: a Christian’s holiness depends on Christ’s righteousness in baptism and in the “calling” of the gospel Christians alone have proximity to in the means of grace (see Nordling, *Philemon* [St. Louis: Concordia, 2004], 202). Bachmann, however, is either unwilling (or incapable?) of conducting more traditional biblical exegesis. Indeed, she admits that she “is not entirely sure” of what she is writing about (145).

Bernd Oberdorfer acknowledges that Luther was a full-blown Paulinist in his doctrine of justification by grace through faith, although ethics certainly mattered both to Paul and Luther. The so-called “new life” in Christ shows continuity with Judaism in such matters as marriage, slavery, and the role of women—although the author cannot understand why it is “self-evident” that homosexuality disrespects the God-given, “natural” order of the created world (162). In the author’s opinion, Christian ethics boils down to self-restraint, mutuality, equality, and solidarity (165)—foundations upon which rest the so-called “gospel” of equality and fairness dogging so many mainline churches nowadays. In a final essay, Hans-Peter Grosshans ponders Christianity’s engagement with culture and hope for the world to come. Christians are no longer citizens of this world but already have one foot in heaven (PHIL 3:20). Those whose “god is the belly” (PHIL 3:19) are, in the author’s opinion, misguided Christians who seek stability in a fallen world (175).

Admittedly, this once-over does scant justice to the level of theological sophistication provided in most of the essays and overlooks many details. However, I find myself disappointed by some obvious problems (for example, blatant feminism, an openness to homosexuality) and failure of many of the authors to arrive at firm,

Christocentric positions that line up with what the word of God has always—and continues—to reveal. While avoiding the Scylla of fundamentalism, they fall prey to the Charybdis of agnosticism—deciding, as many moderns do, that ancient texts have no authoritative meaning for the present day. However, since the word of the Lord “remains forever” (IS 40:8; 1 PET 1:25), the Lutheran church’s task ought be not only to preach Christ faithfully before the heathen, but also to cherish “the finer things” of God’s creation (see PHIL 4:8-9)—such as, for example, good thinking at international conferences of this sort, marriage between a man and a woman, and legal systems that genuinely punish the wicked (as identified by the Decalogue) and reward the good. Portions of essays contained in *Pauline Hermeneutics* contain some good (i.e., theologically sound) material, though also much chaff and straw.

BOOK REVIEW AND COMMENTARY

The Enduring Authority of the Christian Scriptures

edited by D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016)

by John T. Pless

TO SAY THAT THIS VOLUME IS COMPREHENSIVE would be an understatement indeed! Over 1200 pages populated by thirty-seven scholars with proven and often internationally recognized expertise in biblical studies, historical theology, and systematics, this book is a learned and robust affirmation of the authority of Holy Scriptures. The Bible is approached not with a hermeneutic of suspicion but one of confident faith that God himself is speaking in and through the inspired Scriptures and that these writings are utterly reliable.

Under the able editorship of D. A. Carson, one of the most prolific New Testament scholars of our day, topics ranging from the history of interpretation, questions of epistemology, apologetics, contemporary hermeneutics, diversity within the canon, and the relationship of the Bible to the scriptures of major world religions are treated. Carson himself contributes an opening chapter

that surveys the current shape of the current debate over the Scriptures, noting shifts in the reception and, in some cases rejection of, earlier forms of the historical-critical approach to the Bible. For example, Carson narrates the “angry and sweeping” critique of historical-critical exegesis offered by Klaus Berger, emeritus professor at the University of Heidelberg to the more tepid yet pointed critique of Ulrich Wilkens from Hamburg. Carson also engages Roy Harrisville’s *Pandora’s Box Opened: An Examination of the Defense of Historical-Critical Method and its Master Practitioners* and the now nearly classic work of Brevard Childs and N.T. Wright. The old “Battle for the Bible” of the 1960s and 1970s may be over, but

the struggle continues and sometimes with new allies. Not only Carson but nearly all of his authorial team have read widely and are fully conversant with a wide range of not only theological interpreters of the Bible, but also current philosophical and linguistic theory. Carson concludes the volume with a chapter entitled “Summarizing FAQs,” which briefly and coherently demonstrates why the contemporary debates surrounding the character and authority of Scripture do matter for the life and mission of the church.

All in all, this is an outstanding contribution demonstrating the depth and vigor of contemporary conservative and evangelical theology on biblical authority.

Carson’s team contains numerous heavy hitters. Kevin Vanhoozer takes up the relationship of the Scriptures to doctrine in an essay entitled “May We Go Beyond What is Written After All? The Problem of Theological Authority and the Problem of Doctrinal Development.” Vanhoozer argues that preaching and pastoral care do call us to go beyond what is written but never “against the grain” of the text; instead theologians and preach-

ers proceed “along the grain of the text, following the way the words go” (792). Simon Gathercole takes up the question of apostolic unity in early Christian literature challenging Walter Bauer’s thesis arguing the priority of heresy over orthodoxy in the early church. Contemporary Roman Catholic views of scriptural authority are examined and assessed by Anthony N.S. Lane while Osvaldo Padilla engages “postconservative theologians,” especially Stanley Grenz and John R. Franke. A chapter by R. Scott Smith also takes up “non-foundational epistemology” and the truthfulness of Scripture. Karl Barth’s view of Scripture is the subject of the chapter by David Gibson. Numerous authors engage Bart Ehrman in one way or

another; the essay by Peter Williams is specifically aimed at Ehrman.

Several essays deal with the relationship of the Old Testament to the New (Craig Blomberg, Stephen Dempster, Douglas Moo, and Andrew David Naselli). Bruce Waltke contrasts ancient mythologies, i.e., Mesopotamian myths, with the biblical record in his discussion of “myth and history” after noting a most positive evaluation of mythology in contemporary anthropological studies. He concludes that, “The human spirit in its hunger for truth, for reality, requires the philosopher’s reasoning and the poet’s intuition” (575). Kristen Birkett addresses the relationship of science to Scripture, arguing that without the foundation of the Christian Scripture, science “makes very little sense,” for it is only the Scripture that reveals “the purpose of the universe that scientists study so avidly” (986). A related essay by Rodney Stiling narrates the rise of natural philosophy and its challenge to biblical authority in the seventeenth century.

Those involved in mission work among adherents of other world religions will find four essays that deal with truth claims competing with the Holy Scriptures in Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism.

Two chapters have a special appeal for confessional Lutherans. Mark Thompson’s “The Generous Gift of a Gracious Father: Toward a Theological Account of the Clarity of Scripture” is a fine exposition of the christological character of the Scriptures as he takes up Luther’s question, “[I]f scripture is obscure or ambiguous, what point is there in God giving it to us?” (617). Drawing on the recent work of John Webster, Thompson challenges contemporary denials of the clarity of Scripture, concluding, “The clarity of Scripture remains an element of the Christian doctrine of *Scripture* but its contours are deeply theological and its center of gravity is found in the example and teaching of Jesus Christ” (643).

Finally, there is the essay by the sole Lutheran contributor to this collection, Robert Kolb, who writes on “The Bible in the Reformation and Protestant Orthodoxy.” While this is an exceedingly broad topic, Kolb masterfully surveys the continuity and discontinuity between Luther and other Protestant reformers and between the reformers and their heirs in the age of orthodoxy. Kolb’s essay whets the appetite for his book, *Martin Luther and the Enduring Word of God: The Wittenberg School and Its Significance for Scripture-Centered Proclamation* from Baker Academic Press.

All in all, this is an outstanding contribution demonstrating the depth and vigor of contemporary conservative and evangelical theology on biblical authority. It is well worth reading and careful study by Lutherans who receive the Scriptures as the word of God and are committed to proclaiming the one saving gospel of God’s justification of the ungodly according to these prophetic and apostolic writings.

BOOK REVIEW AND COMMENTARY

The Journal Articles of Hermann Sasse

edited by Matthew C. Harrison, Bror Erickson, and Joel A. Brondos (Irvine, CA: New Reformation Publications, 2016)

by John T. Pless

HERMANN SASSE (1895–1976) is remembered for his staunch confessionalism, which was largely out of step with twentieth-century theology. The journey of his life was a movement away from the Prussian Union and the teachers of his youth in Berlin, particularly Adolph von Harnack and Karl Holl, toward a carefully articulated case for the distinctiveness of the Lutheran church in the world. Postgraduate studies at Hartford Seminary in 1925–1926 would expose him to American Christianity. While in the States he admits to becoming a loyal Lutheran through the reading of Wilhelm Loehe's *Three Books about the Church*.

Returning to Germany, Sasse was active in ecumenical affairs. He collaborated with Bonhoeffer in writing the Bethel Confession but refused to sign the Barmen Declaration as he evaluated it as Barthian. Along with such notables as Werner Elert and Paul Althaus, Sasse served on the faculty at Erlangen during the Nazi era. It was during this period that he wrote *Here We Stand*, a book that would be translated into English in 1938 by his friend Theodore Tappert and widely used in American Lutheran seminaries of all stripes in the 1940s and 50s. Disappointed with the unionistic path taken by the Lutheran Church in Bavaria after World War II, Sasse immigrated to Australia for a teaching post at Immanuel Lutheran Seminary in Adelaide.

While he was geographically isolated in Australia, Sasse kept abreast of theology in Europe and North America. His engagement was often through circular letters, mimeographed and mailed to Lutheran pastors and professors the world over. The letters have been collected and published in a three-volume set by

Concordia Publishing House. Other significant essays have been translated and edited by Matthew Harrison in the two-volume set *The Lonely Way* (CPH). Sasse's wartime sermons, translated by Bror Erickson, are available in *Witness* (Magdeburg Press). His major book on the Lord's Supper, *This is My Body*, was published by Augsburg Publishing House in 1959. *The Journal Articles of Hermann Sasse* now rounds out the corpus of Sasse's collected works in English.

Given the current situation of global Lutheranism, it is not an overstatement to say that Hermann Sasse spoke prophetically.

The materials in this most recent anthology are from the Australian years. The majority of the articles and book reviews in this volume were published in the *Reformed Theological Review*, an Australian journal. It was no accident that Sasse, who was highly critical of Reformed intrusions into Lutheran theology and church life, would be a welcomed contributor to this

journal. Sasse was respected as a conservative Lutheran theologian who was willing to engage with those outside of his tradition. In fact, Sasse served for a while as president of Intervarsity Christian Fellowship in Australia.

Sasse's confessionalism was by no means a narrow parochialism. He was a friend and regular correspondent with Cardinal Augustin Bea, a highly influential figure in the years of the Second Vatican Council. Several of the entries in *The Journal Articles* are commentary on decisions of the Council. A significant number of articles deal with aspects of the ecumenical movement with which Sasse was intimately acquainted. He narrates the history of the ecumenical movement from its origins in pietism and the great missionary movements of the nineteenth century. In a 1953 essay, Sasse worries that the ecumenical movement is so eager for reunion that it neglects truth.

He writes,

Ecumenical discussions can be fruitful but only if carried on between those who have a common doctrinal basis, be it the Nicene Creed or the “sola scriptura” of the Reformation. Without such expression of common convictions and a common faith, the ecumenical discussions will lead not to a new Pentecost, but a Babel-like confusion of tongues. That is the tragedy of modern ecumenical organizations. What is meant to be a means of overcoming the divisions of Christendom has practically destroyed the unity that already existed. (7)

To be sure, Sasse is critical but there is no hint of mean spiritedness or cynicism. His polemic is intended to serve the truth of the one gospel which alone creates the unity of the church.

Along with essays on matters ecumenical, there are numerous essays on the nature of Holy Scripture and its authority. Shortly after his arrival in Australia, Sasse became entangled in debates on scriptural inerrancy to the frustration and dismay of some of his friends in the Wisconsin and Missouri Synods. Critical of both the skepticism embodied in Rudolph Bultmann and the ahistorical approach of fundamentalism, Sasse sought a path forward that would avoid both extremes. His essays examine the emergence of the dogma of Holy Scripture and are suggestive of ways to confess that the Bible, like Christ, has both a divine and human nature. Although misunderstood on this point, Sasse asserted that to speak of the Bible’s human nature does not imply a capacity for error.

Also included are forty-two book reviews published in *The Reformed Theological Review*. These reviews demonstrate the wide-range of Sasse’s theological interest and give insight into his evaluation of his contemporaries such as Wingren, Schlink, Tillich, Cullmann, Elert, and Pelikan.

Given the current situation of global Lutheranism, it is not an overstatement to say that Hermann Sasse spoke prophetically. We have a record of his prophetic voice in this volume. No sectarian, Sasse was both confessional and ecumenical. He knew that the Lutheran Confessions stand in service to the whole church of Jesus Christ. These articles and reviews demonstrate the depth of his knowledge and the wide range of his ecclesiastical connections.