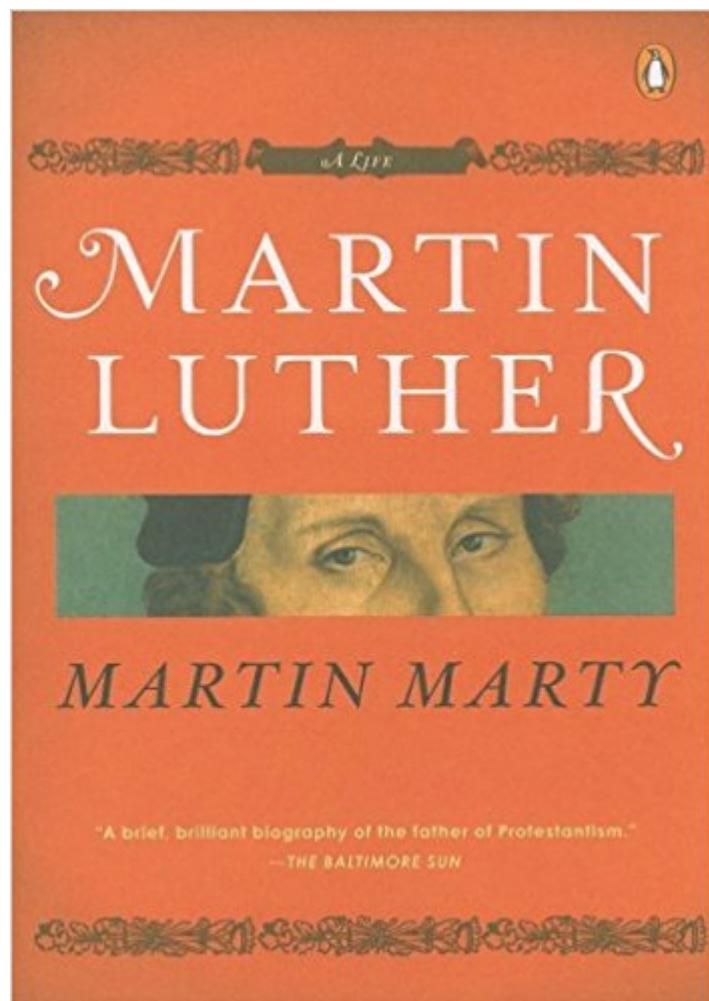


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Martin Luther: A Life (Penguin Lives)



Synopsis

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.

Book Information

Series: Penguin Lives

Paperback: 224 pages

Publisher: Penguin Books; Reprint edition (August 26, 2008)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0143114301

ISBN-13: 978-0143114307

Product Dimensions: 5.1 x 0.6 x 7.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 10.4 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.1 out of 5 stars 41 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #35,710 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #24 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Historical > Europe > Germany #141 in Books > History > World > Religious > Christianity #154 in Books > Christian Books & Bibles > Churches & Church Leadership > Church History

Customer Reviews

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. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

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 Melanchthon. Warts and all, however, Luther remains intrinsically admirable, a bulwark of conscience as well as faith. Ray OlsonCopyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

This short biography and commentary on Martin Luther satisfied my need to understand the basics of his life, ideas and influence. Author Martin Marty does a good job of establishing the context of Luther's time and place and the position of the Catholic Church in the hierarchy of power relations in 16th century Europe. He outlines the corrupt practices that fueled criticism of the church and then reviews many of the specific arguments that Luther made in his writing and speeches. The book captures the danger and intrigues Luther had to negotiate to survive and spread his beliefs. Critical to the proliferation of Luther's ideas was his translation of the Bible into the

vernacular and the new technology of the printing press, which made the word of God more accessible to people. Marty does a good job of summarizing Luther's ideas regarding the sacraments, the priesthood of all believers, justification through faith alone, and the authority of the Bible above that of the papacy. He discusses the bitter doctrinal disputes Luther had with other emerging protestant thinkers. He also points out Luther's negative qualities: his rigidity, his contempt for peasants and his anti-Semitism. Yes, the man who launched a reformation was at heart a reactionary. I thought this was a fine introduction to Luther's life and legacy. And it's only 200 pages! Obviously, if you want to learn more, there are many other books that provide greater detail and perspective.

I thought this was a well balanced account of Martin Luther's life, theology and his imperfections. Although written by a Lutheran, I feel that he was willing to report on the different aspects of Luther; the good, the bad and the ugly. All in all, a pretty good read.

Not my usual read. I am reading it as part of the Lutheran 150 year reformation and am struggling to stay engaged. I know it is history - not a favorite subject - but it lacks something. I will continue to muddle along ...

I Liked it, but felt it was weighed in his favor. My understanding was that Martin Luther simply was no saint himself, particularly toward the end of his life where he became very difficult to everyone. He was certainly one of the most influential sources in our cultural society, almost all for the benefit of mankind. I would have liked to have seen more detail concerning the times in which he lived, 40 or so years after the ending of the hundred years wars, the war of the roses, danger of recurrences of the plague and the rudiments of his affect on European society, particularly the "normal" population. I felt the book had a religious agenda, I was looking for something more historical in nature. Here was a man who had a tremendous influence on societies the world over all the way to the present. I would have liked to see him get credit for that.

Marty's "Martin Luther: A Life" is a wonderful introduction to Luther's deep relationship with God. While not an exhaustive study (Marty makes this clear), the book does an excellent job of informing the reader that Luther, while attacked for his theology and personal, physical suffering, was a man of deep spirituality who only tried to follow God's will in his life. I recommend this book to anyone who loves: a) history; b) theology; or c) biography.

This brief biography of Luther, by Martin Marty, does capture the essence of the importance, for Christian Life, of this man and, it also captures beautifully the context (i.e. , the point in history and the setting)in which the whole thing unfolded. Luther was a man of Faith and learning who pulled no punches and took, bravely, on one of the most powerful systems in existance since recorded history began. Luther helped, unwittingly, to usher in a much needed reform within the Catholic Church (which became known as the Counter Reformation) and, at the same time,rekindled Christendom in general by spawning a whole new Christian outlook and many a new Christian denomination. He was a prolific author and shied away from no controversy. He castigated not only the Catholic Church, mainly by thrashing the institution of the Papacy, but also Islam and the Jews. Always controversial but never dull. A great book to read and hold on to as a quick reference.

This book offers a lot of insight into the times in which Martin Luther lived and cuts thru the romanticism of Reformation to see exactly how it evolved and persisted. The book was recommended for our church's college campus ministry group traveling to Germany this Spring to visit the Luther sites on a first-hand basis.

Excellent starter if you want a quick read into the life of Martin Luther. I would commend this to anyone.

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