

BOOK REVIEWS

Martin Luther and the Called Life. By Mark D. Tranvik. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016. 174 pp.

I wish I had had this book before I wrote an extensive entry for the forthcoming *Oxford Encyclopedia of Martin Luther* entitled “Luther’s Teaching on the Vocations of Christians.” It would have saved me the enormous time it took to track down Luther’s writings pertaining to vocation scattered through his many volumes. Tranvik and I had the same intent: to gather Luther’s writings on vocation and put them into a coherent whole.

Although there are many books on Luther’s teaching on vocation, very few take up that specific task. Even Wingren’s famous *Luther on Vocation* has surprisingly few direct quotes from Luther. One must trust Wingren’s interpretation. George Forell’s *Faith Active in Love* comes closest, but it was published in 1954. William Lazareth’s *Christians in Society: Luther, the Bible, and Social Ethics* is more recent—2001—and contains the needed citations, but they are scattered throughout discrete essays.

Tranvik, Professor of Religion at Augsburg College and Director of its Christensen Center, has superbly fulfilled the need for a direct and clear presentation of Luther’s teaching on vocation. It is obvious that he has honed this material into such fine shape by teaching the material to legions of undergraduates over many years. It is very usable not only for undergraduates but also for adult courses on Luther in church settings. I will be tempted to use it in the adult classes I often get to teach. (The last time I reviewed a book for this journal, Carl Trueman’s *Luther on the Christian Life*, I threatened to use it in adult classes. I did just that and found it very useful, but it neither has the same anchoring in Luther’s writings that Tranvik’s book does nor is it as easily accessible to adult laypersons.)

In his introduction Tranvik offers five compelling reasons why such a book is necessary. Two of them stood out for me: first, that

the 500th anniversary of the Reformation provides a good occasion to retrieve an important part of our Lutheran heritage that has been diminished over the years, and second, that such a book is needed to counter many of the “vocation lite” interpretations that are floating about Lutheran colleges. In those interpretations, one has vocation without Christ and without the cross and vocation has become “pursuing your passion,” or, even worse, “following your bliss.”

Tranvik then examines what the worldly tasks of work, citizenship, and family meant in the ancient and medieval worlds. He next traces the revolutionary insights Luther put forward that transformed the religious and moral meaning of such activities. He notes how Luther first experienced those “discoveries” in the rough and tumble of his own life even before he wrote about them. Anchoring (perhaps too much) vocation in baptism, the author proceeds to show that God’s call to both our eternal and temporal destinies is highly personal. Then he gets to the main fare, how our callings are lived out in the “arenas” that we have been given—marriage and family life, citizenship, the church community, and work. In each case the author gives much testimony by Luther about his own experience of and reflection on these matters. Many fresh and delightful writings of Luther come to the fore in these sections. After exploring Luther on each of these callings, Tranvik then answers the familiar question—what does this mean?—by bringing Luther’s teachings into the modern world with all its challenges for the serious Christian. His reflections add a fresh relevance to Luther’s teachings.

Although I found that Tranvik assembles and conveys Luther’s teachings on the called life extremely well, I would have appreciated a bit more reflection on some salient issues: What is the nature of the “arenas” (orders or mandates of creation) which we are given in life? How might we approach and assess them? What indeed does the Christian bring to those arenas—besides the motivation of love—that enables him or her to “critically participate” or “reshape” them? In a world where those arenas are being shaken from their Judeo-Christian moorings, Christians need more than love. But that might be asking for another book. This is a solid and informative

account of Luther on the called life. I recommend it highly for use in college and church.

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Anthropological Reformations—Anthropology in the Era of Reformation. Edited by Anne Eusterschulte and Hannah Wälzholz. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015. 575 pp.

This volume presents the thirty-nine lectures originally given by both professors and graduate students at a major 2013 conference in Berlin addressing the theme of anthropology in the Reformation era. The essays are clustered around nine themes: (1) dimension of anthropological reformations, (2) reformation of body and soul, (3) image of reformation and religious imaginations, (4) subjectivity, freedom of the will: ethical questions, (5) reformation of church and religious practices, (6) political theology and anthropological reforms of pedagogy, (7) exemplary studies: self-understanding of reformation, (8) reforms in the art of writing: literary approaches, and (9) ethnology in the light of reformation. This volume is tilted toward academics and less toward pastors and church workers. The organizers of the conference intentionally sought a comprehensive approach to Reformation anthropology which would include the perspectives of medicine, musicology, history, literature, art history, politics, ethics, and the history of religion. Hence, we encounter essays dealing not just with Luther or Calvin's anthropology, but with "body imagery" based on the story of Faust, the female as "other" in Luther's writings, "light" as a metaphor in Protestant prints, the singer Hans Sachs' appropriation of myths derived from antiquity, similarities between Luther's view of the self and the painter Caravaggio's, the developments of Protestant church cantatas, changes in the architecture of Protestant churches, and the effect that the expulsion of revered bones of saints and martyrs in England's churches had on spirituality. The overall result makes for a fairly eclectic work, leaving readers to beg for more focus. The