



Martin Luther: The Man Who Rediscovered God and Changed the World

Eric Metaxas

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NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER

“Metaxas is a scrupulous chronicler and has an eye for a good story . . . full, instructive, and pacy.”
—*The Washington Post*

From #1 *New York Times* bestselling author Eric Metaxas comes a brilliant and inspiring biography of the most influential man in modern history, Martin Luther, in time for the 500th anniversary of the Reformation

On All Hallow’s Eve in 1517, a young monk named Martin Luther posted a document he hoped would spark an academic debate, but that instead ignited a conflagration that would forever destroy the world he knew. Five hundred years after Luther’s now famous Ninety-five Theses appeared, Eric Metaxas, acclaimed biographer of the bestselling *Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy* and *Amazing Grace: William Wilberforce and the Heroic Campaign to End Slavery*, paints a startling portrait of the wild figure whose adamant faith cracked the edifice of Western Christendom and dragged medieval Europe into the future. Written in riveting prose and impeccably researched, *Martin Luther* tells the searing tale of a humble man who, by bringing ugly truths to the highest seats of power, caused the explosion whose sound is still ringing in our ears. Luther’s monumental faith and courage gave birth to the ideals of liberty, equality, and individualism that today lie at the heart of all modern life.

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From Reader Review Martin Luther: The Man Who Rediscovered God and Changed the World for online ebook

Barry says

This is one of my favorite books this year. Not only does Metaxis tell a lively and entertaining story of Luther's life, he explains how world-changing his stand for the truth really was. This is truly when the modern world began. For better and for worse. The ideas that we take for granted in our pluralistic society-- freedom of conscience, separation of church and state, and the notion that might doesn't make right-- were birthed in Wittenberg exactly 500 years ago.

Lori says

I rather like Martin Luther. Admittedly, there is more than I don't know about him than do. I think of him as a brave, irascible and earnest believer. Not, someone, I would wish to go camping with for a week. Sailing would be worse. You can't get away from someone else on a small boat. He had many flaws—feet of clay is the usual euphemism. But, he translated the Bible into German for people to read for themselves. I respect reading a book for yourself. He can't be all bad.

So, I am looking forward to his new biography. Critics and audiences give it rave reviews. But, I couldn't like it. I kept trying, but this just didn't work for me. It seemed more an admiring sermon than a biography. I realize that a lot of folks are enjoying this book. Some are reading it as a part of their Sunday school study. I wish them every happiness.

I enjoyed some of the hooks used to draw interest to a very long sermon:

- Luther's theological studies, the only book novices were allowed to read was the Bible, but only novices could read the Bible. Once you became a monk, your Bible was taken from you.
- Monks only read scholarly books, which is how Luther read the sermons of Jan Hus, a Czech theologian and a key predecessor to Protestantism who was condemned and burned at the stake in 1415, while at the Erfurt monastery.
- In 1510, the 27-year-old, Luther made a pilgrimage to Rome. He "seriously lamented that his parents were still alive" and did not qualify for reduced time in purgatory.
- Archaeological study of his childhood home determined that 60% of the Luther family diet was pork. There are, also plenty of bones from sheep, goats, cattle, chickens, and geese. Suggesting that they were quite well off financially.
- The 1517 posting of the Ninety-five Theses on the great wooden doors of the Wittenberg Castle Church never happened.
- The feather of an angel was one of the religious relics at the Castle Church in Wittenberg, along with one complete skeleton of one of the infants killed by Herod in Bethlehem.

But, once he dropped the hooks, I lost interest. Maybe, I just don't like Metaxas' writing. It felt like I was reading VeggieTales for adults. And, the ridicule of others was tiresome.

Regarding the bull, *Exurge Domine*, 1520, Aetatis 36, he begins, “And so it was in these halcyon environs, influenced by the imagery of the hunt, that Leo in his Latin preface to the bull now likened Luther to a “wild boar” that had invaded the Lord’s vineyard. Later in the short preface, Luther is magically transformed into a slithering serpent that has invaded the field of the Lord. Whether this shift in pejorative bestial imagery from porcine to serpentine was intentional, or whether everyone was simply disinclined to point it out to the profligate pontiff, can never be known.” This strikes me as mincing ridicule of Luther’s advisory. And Luther never needed anyone to speak up for him. He had self-advocacy down pat.

In the book's acknowledgments, Metaxas praises his editorial team by writing "Though I would never say so publicly, it is a fixed certainty that had Brian and his team been at Viking in the early seventies, Gravity's Rainbow might well be (readable and) still selling briskly." He wrote this to publish for the public to read. Well, technically, he didn't say it

There's a bit that I think of as the golden scheisse part. I included a couple of sections. It should give you an appreciation of the book's style. It is in Chapter Five, The “Cloaca” Experience and works to reconstruct Luther's path to the Ninety-five Theses. The chapter opens with a quote.

If our Lord God in his life-in das Sheisshaus*-has given us such noble gifts, what will happen in that eternal life, were everything will be perfect and delightful? —Martin Luther

Here are a couple of paragraphs, they address Aetatis 33

“Just a year before his death, Luther wrote a preface to his collected Latin works. In it he tells how on the path to his great breakthrough, he had actually come to despise God:

Though I lived as a monk without reproach, I felt that I was a sinner before God with an extremely disturbed conscience. I could not believe that he was placated by my satisfaction. I did not love...yes, I hated the righteous God who punishes sinners, and secretly, if not blasphemously, certainly murmuring greatly, I was angry with God...Thus I raged with a fierce and troubled conscience. Nevertheless I beat importunately upon St. Paul at that place [Romans 1:17] most ardently desiring to know what St. Paul wanted. 4

One of the iconic moments from Luther's life has come to be called “the tower experience.” As the story comes to us, it was during this world changing year of 1517 that Luther's struggles with that verse in the book of Romans came to fruition. But as with so much else with Luther's story, it is the Luther legend that obscures our view of the actual events of his life—and the legend almost always comes to us via Luther's later recollections of what took place decades earlier.

Nonetheless, the moment in which the Middle Ages buckled under their own weight and thus gave way to the Reformation and the future seems to have occurred when a single tremendous insight came to Luther, who was at that moment in the so-called Cloaca Tower at the Black Cloister in Wittenberg. In 1532 and then again in 1545, Luther mentioned what happened at that point, sometime in early 1517.

The 1532 comments mentioning this illuminating and life-changing moment are much briefer than his own commentary of it is. In fact, they are just a single sentence, recorded from his Table Talk by Johannes Schlaginhaufen. The German is simply “Diese Kunst hat mir der Spiritus Sanctus auf diss Cloaca eingeben.”

* The meaning of famous phrase is “The Holy Spirit gave me this art in [or upon] the cloaca.” But the word “cloaca” presents the difficulty. This is because Luther—who couldn't resist making a joke and who often made terribly serious points while joking—was implying that God had given him this insight while he was sitting on the toilet. Cloaca was the ancient Latin term for “sewer” and at the time of Luther had come to mean “outhouse”. Not only this, but whereas many English writers incorrectly translate “auf” a “in,” most Germans would take “auf” to mean “on” or “upon” — which in concert with “outhouse” or “toilet” makes perfect sense. But we now know that the heated room that was Luther's study for decades—and where he

therefore did his biblical exegesis—was in that part of the monastery located in the tower. It so happened, however, that in the base of this tower there was an outhouse. Thus this tower was always referred to as the Cloaca Tower, probably by the many monks who went there only when that that particular duty summoned them. So even if Luther got the tremendous insight not precisely while indisposed upon the commode but upstairs in his heated study, he nonetheless would have said the “cloaca,” as was the general habit. But in this 1532 comment, Luther was deliberately playing upon the ambiguity by using “auf”—which is to say “upon.” He clearly meant half in jest to convey something along the lines of “while on the john.”

And

“Luther saw in this the very essence of Christian theology. God reached down not halfway to meet us in our vileness but all the way down, to the foul dregs of our broken humanity. And this holy and loving God dared to touch our lifeless and rotting essence and in doing so underscored that this is the truth about us. In fact, we are not sick and in need of healing. We are dead and in need of resurrecting. We are not dusty and in need of a good dusting; we are fatally befouled with death and the hand of God, we remain in our sins and eternally dead. So because God respects us, he can reach us only if we are honest about our condition. So it fit well with Luther’s thinking that if God were to bestow upon him—the unworthy sinner Luther—such a divine blessing, it must needs be done as he sat grunting in the “cloaca.” This was the ultimate antithesis to the gold and bejeweled splendor of papal Rome. There all was gilt, but here in Wittenberg it was all Scheisse. But the shit in its honesty as shit was very golden when compared to the pretense and artifice of Roman gold, which itself was indeed as shit when compared to the infinite worth of God’s grace. That was cheap grace, which was to say it was a truly satanic counterfeit. True grace was concealed in the honesty—in the unadorned shit—of this broken world, and the devil’s own shit was concealed in the pope’s glittering gold.”

*Meaning “in this toilet,” but literally “in this shit house.”

4 Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works (LW)*, American Edition, 55 vols., ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehman (Philadelphia: Muehlenberg and Fortress, and St. Louis: Concordia, 1955-86), 34: 336-37

*Luther and those around him were usually fluent or at least conversant in Latin, and we can see from this sentence that Luther often spoke macaronically, which is to say in a language that combined two other languages, in this case German and Latin.

Alex says

“If ever there was a moment where it can be said the modern world was born, and where the future itself was born, surely it was in that room on April 18 at Worms.”

The teachings and actions of Martin Luther are arguably some of the most important in all of history. Whether you agree with his teachings or not, what Martin Luther did shaped so much of history. And much like Martin Luther's life, this biography is so important. It's an important read for those wanting to better grasp the Protestant faith or just to better grasp modern history. Eric Metaxas does a great job giving an unbiased recount of one of the world's most influential people, while backing it up with a ton of research. I learned so much from this book. Highly recommend!

Amanda says

Like his other biographies, Metaxas does a great job of bringing the character to life and teasing out all the relevant history to give context and richness. Again like other biographies, Metaxas translates the implications of his subjects life to ours today. But this book was heavier on theology and history and less narrative. Clearly he did an incredible amount of research on the times, given how much specificity provided despite how much further we are removed from Luther than many biographies. For me, a more difficult or "headier" read but still very worthwhile. Perfectly timed with the 500th anniversary of the Reformation.

Judy B says

One of the most difficult "seriously written" biographical books on a serious topic I've had the misfortune of plodding through. I read that some readers found the author's style engaging and witty. I only found his writing style simplistic, pompous, and cringe-worthy. In almost every other line, Metaxes writes with excessive superlatives and gross exaggerations. He butchers the beauty of simple writing by filling his sentences with needless hyperbole and "fillers," such as "truly," "very," "great," and "honestly." Take this sentence: "Luther honestly wanted to cause reform to happen." What other way is there but to want something in honesty? Amazingly, this man is a bestselling author of scholarly works. I'll need to find a more readable book on the life of Luther. Preferably, one that is written cleanly and simply. I gave two stars because the book has a credible outline (TOC) and does provide a decent biographical sketch of Luther's life.

Ellen Trautner says

This took me awhile to read because it was my bedtime reading book, and I can only read a chapter at most before my eyelids get heavy. But that's not a reflection of this book, because it's actually quite interesting and action-packed. However, because I read it over a long period of time, I started losing track of who was who. There are a lot of names. Some people start as Luther's friends and then becomes enemies (and some frenemies) and vice versa. The author's main thesis, about Luther basically being responsible for the modern world, isn't really hit on until the very end. Even though other people had the same ideas of a pure Gospel, a Bible written in people's own language, and denying the absolute authority of the pope, it was Luther who was able to get those ideas to spread thanks to the recent invention of the printing press, the protection of a powerful prince, and the Holy Roman Emperor being distracted by other wars.

I really loved that Metaxas didn't shy away from Luther's cranky nature. It made me chuckle.

Nick says

Eric Metaxas' biography is an immersive account of the great church reformer Martin Luther accessible to all readers. Written as a story vice an academic biography Metaxas brings Luther to life from childhood and formative years through the apex of his career until his later years of life. This full scope story includes the historical background and events that shaped Luther's struggle with the Roman Catholic Church and the secular leaders of the day. In reality this book is much more than just a biography, it is the story of the Reformation from Luther's perspective.

Eric Metaxas draws some very interesting conclusions in his biography regarding the use of the printing press and how it helped shape the Reformation. He discusses how the writings of Luther were in demand by the population at large and the use of the printing press helped distribute these writings in mass - one of the first examples in Western history of the use of "mass" media to promulgate information. Interesting to note Luther was unprepared for this result and as such lost control of the movement to reform the Church as much as the Church lost control of the methods to try and stop him. Metaxas asserts that Luther and the Church were unable to keep in check what information was distributed and how it was distributed to the public at large. As an example, Metaxas shows that Luther's 95 Theses were written by Luther in Latin to engage in academic debate. They were never intended to be published for mass consumption, instead wanting scholarly dialog to discuss and work through the issues internal to the Church. This intent was lost when the theses were republished in German and distributed broadly through Germany and beyond.

In a number of places throughout the narrative Eric Metaxas identifies untrue stories about Luther, dispelling them or putting them in the proper context. Such falsities as Luther being of peasant stock, or the nuns and the herring barrels, etc. are addressed and put right. The picture painted of Luther by Metaxas is of a renaissance man; while being highly educated is able to freely move, relate, converse and stand up for to the common folk. At the same time I believe Metaxas goes overboard attributing to Luther the introduction of pluralism into society - creating himself a bit of a hagiographic story about Luther. A religiously pluralistic society is result of the Reformation and other political events of the times, but I don't believe this rests solely on Luther's shoulders. In reality, there were a number of things happening during the 16th Century including individuals, inventions such as the printing press, and events such as the Holy Roman Empire's war with the Turks and France, and the corrupt leadership of the Roman Catholic Church that precipitated Reformation and allowed it to take root instead of being stomped out.

It is obvious this is a biography written by a fellow Lutheran who views the subject of Luther's life in a favorable light. It is a great story for those that don't mind a biography that is written from such an admiring perspective. For those looking for an unbiased academic biography, or perhaps the perspective of the Roman Catholic Church you will not find a sympathetic read.

Shiloah says

Eric Metaxes wrote quite a beautiful book on Luther. I've read other biographies on him and I'm very grateful for the respectful and yet open, honest view on his life and teachings. It feels as if Metaxes got to know Luther personally.

Ccrino says

This is not a good book. It is entertaining, but horribly biased (I can deal with that) and stupidly inaccurate. For example, "Salve Regina...." does NOT mean "Save us, Mary" in Latin. So, using that as moment to riff on how medieval Christians depended on saints to save them - wrong, wrong and wrong.

I could go on, but as I shared these little tidbits with a friend who is a respected Reformation historian at a Lutheran college, he said, "Why are you reading something that stupid" and suggested Luther by Lyndal Roper. So, I switched to something respectable.

Marks54 says

I have always found it interesting that you can profitably read a lot about some people in context without reading a biography while for others it seems important to read through their life story. The trouble, of course, is knowing which is which. I was hesitant to start the new Metaxas biography of Luther. How does one go about writing a one volume biography of one of the most commented upon lives ever? I feared it would prove grossly oversimplified and not do justice to Luther.

How silly of me to be worried! This is a terrific book that was masterful in getting out the basic plot of Luther's life while allowing me to fit the story into a broader context. More than this, Metaxas makes a strong argument for the importance of Luther in modern history and then follows through effectively in the details of his case. He is especially effective in delineating the terms of the conflict that Luther had with the Church on the selling of indulgences and other abuses of temporal authority. The discussion of "conscience" would be a good example. This was really helpful.

Metaxas was also effective in bringing out the importance for Luther and the Reformation of the new printing press and importance of involving the common people and a vernacular language in the disputes over Church doctrine and politics. This is another key aspect of how Luther helped usher in the modern age and it is consistent with other treatments, such as Pettegree's "The Book in the Renaissance".

Metaxas also makes the point which should be obvious but is not that by denying the discretion open to the Church as the filter for doctrine and rules, Luther effectively separated truth from power and introduced a central conflict of the modern age - one that brought both good and bad to the world. The transition from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance and to Modernity is difficult to understand on a good day. Metaxas does a service to readers by helping to clarify Luther's role in it.

The style of the book is wonderful and the author takes the volume of accounts available about Luther and turns it to great advantage in telling the story of such an important life so well. There is of course much more to read about Luther and interested readers can follow up well,.

Socraticgadfly says

Meh at best as a pop bio from a conservative evangelical POV; worse than that otherwise

Per the first half of my header, that's the only reason I rated this book with two stars rather than one. Even though Metaxas discusses Luther's differences with the Reformed on the Eucharist, and a lesser degree on other things, and even tries to take a look at both the philosophy and theology behind this (while failing as much as succeeding), Metaxas still tries to paint Luther as a modern American conservative Evangelical rather than as a German Evangelical, ie, Lutheran.

The epilogue, trying to pretend Luther was some sort of forerunner of modern Western democracy, only made this worse — and more laughable at the same time. Again, though, the fact that it's being tried, and will probably be tried by others from now through maybe 2030, with the 500th anniversary events, gets it that second star rather than 1.

That said, there's other errors, mainly errors of fact, though a few others of interpretation, like those above.

I actually was originally going to rate it three stars, despite the above, but two errors late in the book got it

knocked down to two stars, and almost to one, in spite of me wanting to hold it up as an example.

OK, let's dive into those errors.

First, after debunking several Luther myths in the introduction, Metaxas perpetuates two BIGGIES himself.

In reality, the consensus of good historians is that Luther did NOT nail, paste, or otherwise affix a sheet or two of 95 Theses to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg on Oct. 31, 1517.

A similar consensus says that Luther did NOT say "Here I stand" at the Diet of Worms.

OK, next. Erasmus did NOT restore first-century Greek to his edition of the New Testament. Instead, his "textus receptus" was similar to that in the Orthodox world of this time. Erasmus didn't have Sinaiticus, Vaticanus or other older codices, nor did he have the treasure of modern papyri finds. Also, Erasmus had no detailed methodology of textual criticism.

Tonsuring? It's Christian martyrological legend that emperors inflicted it upon apostles or later generations of Christians. That said, per the likes of Candida Moss, the severity and broadness of Roman Imperial persecution of Christians has itself been mythologized. Finally, although in these cases it involves shaving the head entirely, not just in spots, tonsuring-like practices are known to other world religions.

The idea that Luther didn't have a "modern" idea of consciousness? Well, Metaxas sets up a straw man by claiming that what he calls the "modern" idea of consciousness is modern. Less than a century after Luther, Shakespeare has Polonius in Hamlet say "To thine own self be true." And, a full 2,000 years earlier, the oracle at Delphi said "Know thyself." And, from that, Socrates said, "The unexamined life is not worth living." Of course, Metaxas is here ultimately setting up a bank shot for how Luther was different from today, but yet, was a lead-in to Merika or something.

After Erasmus, Metaxas trips on his Greek New Testament again. While the verb *synago* is in the New Testament in various forms, including as a participle for gathering together for worship, including gathering for the Eucharist, the noun *synaxis* is not. It is used in post-NT writings, I believe beginning as early as the Didache, but the noun is not in the NT.

Now, the two biggies, which give the game up.

On page 391, Metaxas claims that Suleiman the Magnificent, as part of expanding the Ottoman Empire, was trying to expand sharia law.

Tosh and rot. The Turks, and their Central Asian Turkic cousins, have been known for their generally moderate interpretation of Islam. And the Ottoman Empire was known for its millet system, which gave a relatively high degree of freedom to its Christian — and Jewish — residents.

Given that Metaxas, if not a full blown right-winger, hangs out with a lot of conservative politicians and is a talking head for a major right-wing radio network, I can only consider this to be rank pandering.

Page 417 follows in its train.

Metaxas claims that Luther, in his anti-Jewish diatribes, was influenced by "Victory over the Godless Hebrews," which he claims contain things "which we now know to be untrue." Among this, he lists Jewish blasphemies against Jesus and Mary, and claims by Jews that Jesus did his miracles by kabbalistic magic.

Deleting the "kabbalistic," as it didn't exist 2,000 years ago, and actually, these things ARE true.

Metaxas is either ignorant of some things written in the Talmud, and even more in the Toledoth Yeshu, or he's heard about such things and refuses to investigate, or thirdly, he fully knows about them and covers them up.

In any case, I suspect political leanings not just of general conservatism, but specifically neoconservatism, are now in play.

And, with that, I decided that this book could be held up as an example of wrongness AND get one star instead of two as well.

Abigail says

Good read overall. Not to be controversial, but I thought the prologue and epilogue alone were enough to get a good feel for the impact of Luther's life (If you don't have time to read the whole book). Overall, this was a good picture of how God used a deeply flawed man who was willing to stand up to systematic oppression, and changed the course of history in the process.

Becky says

First sentence: There is no beginning to the story of Martin Luther.

I have read a good many biographies of Martin Luther in recent years. Some have been short. Some have been long. Some have focused on the historical. Some have focused solely on the theological. Some have been compelling. Some have been boring.

I'll be honest. Concise isn't always better. There is such a thing as keeping Luther's life story so basic, so simple, so compact that it becomes dull, dry, BORING. The problem isn't that Luther led a dull life with hardly anything ever happening. Far from it! The problem is that putting Martin Luther into context--historically, spiritually, theologically--takes a lot of words and details. Rob a biography of good, substantive, meaty details, and it becomes dull. Metaxas' biography thrives on details. Readers need details--not just about Martin Luther himself--but about everything. Luther cannot be understood apart from his times, apart from his contemporaries, apart from his writings. Can Luther be understood fully? Can any man--or woman--be understood fully?! Any biographer who thinks they have grasped everything there is to grasp and know everything there is to know, and can explain the inner workings of Luther's heart and mind from birth to death aren't to be trusted. Luther is not simple. His biography shouldn't be simple either.

I would definitely recommend this one. I found it a compelling read, though not a quick one. The bad news: Metaxas' chapters are super-long. This almost forces you to slow down your reading--to take time with the text. That's also the good news. There is something to be said for going slow and steady through a book. Martin Luther is worth spending time with, worth engaging. And you just don't get that when you rush through a book.

In a world in which we nearly always associate the Bible with churches--and churches with the Bible--it is difficult to imagine a time when the two had almost no connection. That this changed so dramatically is yet another measure of Luther's immense impact on history. (52)

By the time Luther entered the monastic life, the one book that novices were allowed to read was in fact the Bible. We know that immediately upon entering the monastery, Luther was lent one that was bound in red

leather, for he recollected this often in his later years. It seems that Luther did not receive the book lightly, for he not only read it but almost devoured it. (53)

Strangely enough, once a novice became a monk, he was no longer allowed to keep his Bible. At that point, he must limit himself to only reading scholarly books, and those while in his cell. It seems that only in Luther's private time in the library of the monastery did he have access to the Bible after his novitiate. Staupitz saw that for Luther the Bible was not a book like Aristotle's Ethics or like a volume of Livy or Cicero. It was the living Word of God and therefore could not be read like any other book. It was inspired by God, and when one read it, one must do so in such a way--with such closeness and intimacy--that one fully intended to feel and smell the breezes of heaven. If one missed this aspect, one missed the whole point. For Staupitz, to read any other book like this was to be a fool, but to read the Bible in any other way than this was to be twice the fool. (68)

Therefore, one must not merely see what the devil could see, which is to say the words on a page, but see what only God could see and would reveal to those who desired it, which was in the words and around them too. (77)

The difference between Luther and many other Christians in this is that he is not afraid to make explicit what is clearly implicitly understood. The idea that all Bible verses are technically equal by dint of being part of the "Word of God" should not prohibit us from saying that some verses are more important than others. Some would say that we can somehow find the Gospel in every jot and tittle of Scripture, because it is alive and should not be read the way we read other books, but even if this is the case, we will look much harder in some verses than in others, where it is on the very surface for everyone to see. (293)

Matt says

It obviously wasn't an accident that this biography of Martin Luther was published in 2017 which marked the 500th anniversary of The Reformation on October 31, 2017. I learned so much about Martin Luther, his life, and the legacy that he left.

During Luther's time, the Catholic Church was in bad need of reform. The main issue that Luther took umbrage to was the sale of indulgences which were what his 95 theses were based upon. "Indulgences" were sold by the church which allowed someone to purchase "Butter Letters" to eat freely during Lent all the way to buying documents signed by priests which gave the buyer less time in purgatory, or to bypass purgatory altogether and go straight to heaven. After the 95 theses were posted at the College Church in Wittenberg, he went on to point out many other things that the Catholic Church should take a look at. Ultimately, many years after he died, Vatican II finally adopted many of his reforms. His contribution to the history of the world is perhaps the most important of all because of the ripple effect of his standing for his beliefs and morals (always peacefully), come what may.

Luther's theology wasn't perfect, some of his beliefs don't seem to reconcile, and his late in life writings about Jews we found out during WWII were extremely hurtful, but his lasting legacy was to bring the church to the people - communion given to the laity, congregational hymns, and he translated the Bible into German so regular people could read it. It is interesting to note that he and his reforms may not have even happened had the printing press, which was new at that time, not been available to broadly and quickly disseminate his various works.

I highly recommend this biography of Martin Luther if you are interested in a very readable history of this extremely fascinating figure.

Matt

Elsa K says

Maybe 4.25? Metaxas is excellent as a biographer. He makes the story come to life and turns it into a page-turner. His witty, joking style is enjoyable, but you can also see what an intelligent man he is. I have loved every biography he has written.

I grew up Lutheran and heard much about Martin Luther and his 95 theses. Reformation day was like a holiday in our school and I even remember having a cake made in the shape of the Luther's coat of arms one year. I was surprised to hear many of the things we learned about Luther were incorrect! Metaxas clears up most of what is legend and presents what the actual facts about Luther are. I enjoyed how much he quoted personal letters and documents from Luther's life.

What I found most interesting was seeing more what the church was like at the time of the Reformation. No one read the Bible or even knew what it said (even the church leaders!), church services were in a language most people could not understand. It seems like God's Word was veiled for hundreds of years- how did God allow it to be like that for so long?

Although Luther definitely had his flaws, he mostly is a likable character who reminds me of many of my blunt German-Lutheran extended family members. He unknowingly started something that changed the trajectory of the church and religious freedom forever. What he accomplished in short years is unbelievable. He definitely is one of the most impactful people of history.

A few questions I had-when he is hiding out in Wartburg, afraid for his life, he comes back to Wittenberg and all is fine. Why were there no attempts on his life then? I could not handle what the weddings were like of his day. What the heck? How was that considered okay? I also thought Frederick's dream in the appendix was interesting. I wanted to know more about where it came from or if it was reliable at all. But all in all, a great and interesting read published right in time for the 500th anniversary of the Reformation.
